

**Mediating Identity Through Orality in West African
Films Adapted from Literature.**

by
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**Thesis Presented for the Degree of
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY in Film Studies
in the Centre for Film and Media Studies**

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Signed by candidate

Kenechukwu Kingsley Chibogu

December 2022

Dedication

I dedicate this thesis to the Blessed Virgin Mary, the Queen of knowledge and beautiful cities.

Declaration

I, **Kenechukwu Kingsley Chibogu**, declare this thesis as my own, unaided work. It is being submitted for the Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) Degree in Film Studies at the Centre for Film and Media Studies, Faculty of Humanities, University of Cape Town, South Africa. It has not been submitted before for any degree or examination at any university.

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23 December 2022

Key Terms

Identity

Film

Literature

Mediation

Orality

Textual Analysis

Secondary Orality

Visual Analysis

West African Oral Tradition

Figures and Table

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Abstract

This work critically examines the complexity of the ways by which filmmakers are mediating oral tradition forms as secondary orality in West African Films. The study aims to show that filmmakers mediate orality as an aesthetic source. The goal is to examine the value of the oral narrative on the screen. To study the oral qualities of the literature in the audio-visual primarily because of its aesthetic and stylistic feature in the narrative by interrogating the oral aesthetics in African films. To analyze the mediation of oral tradition in films, I combine orality theory, adaptation theory, and postcolonial theory to develop a model that treats film theoretically as ‘secondary orality adaptation (SOA)’, which is interpreted using textual analysis in films such as *Xala* (1975), *Karmen Gei* (2001) and *Invasion 1897* (2014). In the process, the study has explicitly engaged the aesthetic value of ‘orality’ within the ambit of film studies that recognizes its wide reach and filmmakers’ mediation and agency in the construction of identity using the audio-visual method. The study finds that each mediation process involving oral tradition forms in West African films adapted from literature adds to the understanding of how film functions as a secondary orality adaptation. Whereas some filmmakers endorse cultural practices, others promote protest and contestation metaphorically using filmic codes (aural narratives) that are understandable to audiences and employ language as orality to construct identity in contemporary African postcolonial societies.

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Chapter One

1.0 Background of Study

In November 2019, The Academy of Motion Pictures Arts and Science rejected the nomination of 'Lion Heart' from one of the biggest film award ceremonies in the international film circuit. The Academy disqualified Nigeria's 'Lion Heart' from the Oscar race in the Best International Feature Film category. The film's nomination was rejected based on it having a predominantly non-English dialogue track. How do we understand such a decision and what models of dialogue might they have implied? Alternatively, does it mean that the ratio of non-English forms of expression is lower in the narratives? This situation becomes further vexed when we consider the fact that recently, 'Lion Heart' emerged as Nigeria's first-ever Oscar submission for best international feature film (BBC, 2019). In terms of the submission, what are we to make of the idea that 'Lion Heart' symbolizes how Nigerians, and to a larger extent, African films communicate? Does it mean that the term dialogue track or language is simply the orality of African films? Even if the kinds of issues which emerge from such categorization and lists are on one level product of the terms and conditions which govern the award-making process itself, they do throw up several important questions and concerns which bear upon the study of orality.

1.1 Aim

In this study, I examine film as a secondary orality. This means that the study focuses on orality in film as a creative means that the filmmaker adopts, the content that it represents, and how it relates to that form.

1.2 Research Objectives

1. To examine the value of the oral narrative in the films under study.
2. To study the oral qualities of the literature in the audio-visual.
3. To interrogate the oral aesthetics in African films.
4. To establish how orality can travel from spoken word, written form to film in addressing questions of identity.

1.3 Research Questions

1. When is oral narrative also orality?
2. What stake does orality hold in the questions of identity in film?
3. Is there any possibility that the idea of orality means the same thing across different historical moments and production contexts?
4. Is there any difference between orality and oral tradition?
5. Why are films' orality so fascinating to us and what are the pleasures we get from them?

To be able to address these questions, the study draws inspiration from another scholarly interest that raises several issues about production values with expanded perspectives for reading films. For instance, Haile Gerima (1993) argues for a critical analysis that deals with both content and form¹ (in this case film and orality). Ideally, this critical analysis creates intellectual linkages and specificities of African languages that prompt untapped approaches to understanding film. For instance, Gerima's work uses a critical analysis framework to argue for what is called 'the central nervous system of African cinema language'. By this, Gerima advocates for critical theory that shows itself as a mediator that exists between the African filmmaker and the African audience (Gerima, 1993).

1.4 Hypothesis

West African films mediate questions of identity through orality.

1.5 Research Problem

In pre-colonial West Africa, there were social functions for all oral traditions. In most West African cultures, oral forms such as poems and songs have specific functions that are deeply rooted in the ways of life of the societies concerned. These mostly deal with events such as deeds of rulers and wars, societies' politics, and social values among others that promote the study of migrations and demography. The media of communication are many and varied in Africa. How does orality infer the media of

¹ Gerima, Haile. Notes. "Appropriations: New Directions for African Cultural Studies: Conference Programme." University of Cape Town, 1993.

interest in film? The medium of film is primarily visual which encompasses orality – a unique form of visual art that largely relies on dialogue and sometimes voice over–occurring in the form of imageries, soundscapes, storylines, and characters. Film has a lot of properties that have made it different from literature and speech.

Here, the preference for the term ‘film’ is not to ignore the diversity and plurality of the cinematic apparatus but is based on its usage. It simply denotes cinema and video-finished products. Therefore, this thesis considers orality as not merely an aesthetic that relies on a shared legacy of episteme underpinned by communal sharing of knowledge, which when analyzed closely bears the hallmark of oral expression, structure, and execution in films.

Orality involves textual objectivity which is open to translation in the dynamic exchange of communication in film. Filmmakers can therefore deploy orality as a ‘voice’ in ways that accentuate the disparity of rural and urban voices and cultures to capture contemporary realities in West Africa.

In *Africa’s Modern Cinematic Griots: Oral Tradition and West African Cinema*, Eva Johorlt (2001, p.95) concentrates on the cinema of the Francophone countries, claiming that the cinema of West Africa is dominated by fictional films produced in sub-Saharan Africa.² In addition to that, this study focuses on certain similarities in the display of oral tradition forms of Francophone and Anglophone West Africa which allow me to approach them in somewhat general terms.

1.6 Justification of Study

The challenges in the study of orality can usually be found in shifts involving modern technologization of oral forms, breaking new ground on thoroughly established social and cultural phenomena. In addressing these challenges, some questions must be answered: Which practices in form of mediation, methodology, and analysis have to be observed? Which new theoretical methods must be devised and taught to handle the great number of oral forms that are now available to whoever has access to video,

² Jorholt, E. (2001). *Africa’s Modern Cinematic Griots Oral Tradition and West African Cinema. Same and other: Negotiating African identity in cultural production*, 95-117. Here, I relate the films of Francophone West Africa to popular cinema.

television, cinema, and other audio-visual devices? These are, without doubt, only some of the nagging questions that need to be addressed by contemporary researchers that are attempting to research oral forms in film studies.

Two things are observed in the approach of studying these films. First, examining orality enables us to overcome the challenges of interpreting form in films using visual perspectives. Some of the challenges relate to the deeply rooted nature of various languages, traditional cultures, and the long history of oral antecedents in Africa.³ The dominant scholarship on written or literary forms influenced by colonialism has also led to reduced attention to the multicultural differences in African literature. We can address the assumptions that film functions as secondary orality by focusing solely on the visual. It makes it easier to interpret to an extent in indigenous languages such as Wolof, Benin, and French –that have thrived in different forms of oral literature (proverbs, tales, riddles, epics, and poetry) – at the level of personal, religious, ceremonial, political and most importantly an approach which situates the study within African scholarship. Second, this study involves and identifies traces of different oral traditions in the films, hence classifying them, explaining, and relating them to the practice of filmmaking in cinema of West Africa, while using them to connect to ideas, beliefs, thoughts, and reception. This approach is also important in understanding African filmmaking and helps in relating to the past in the cultural and political life of the continent.

1.7 Definition of Key Terms

1.7.1 West African Films

Conversely, the term or concept of ‘West African films’ as used in this study refers to only the cinemas of Senegal, Guinea, and Nigerian commercial video productions of the Benin and Igbo genres. The films express oral tradition forms in French, Portuguese and Benin languages respectively. The recent development of video films as a media of popular culture avails us an opportunity to examine what happens in the mediation process through oral tradition in contemporary times and to learn something. As Porter

³ Haley (1976:719) observes that most ancient African societies rely on legacies, culture and traditions passed from one generation to other by means of oral tradition.

(2008) suggests stories are renewed and adapted to the popular culture to be more relevant to the contemporary consumer. Straitharn (2017, p.1) hints that stories and the telling of stories play a vital role in any culture especially when told through a medium such as popular film. By this, it means that such stories help us “to learn something about ourselves”. The main ideas of oral tradition in this study are translated into English language.

In addition, a film uses a complex soundscape with background music (either imported or location sounds) to create a complex and integrated soundscape. Oral forms move across various forms and eventually into film. Engaging the involvement of African filmmakers as it relates to the deployment of orality, provides a perspective that is reflexive of their changing role and form. Due to its diversity in mode of communication such as speech, writing, and visual codes, the film has become an important site to investigate the adaptation of orality.

Without question, the largest part of this scholarship has concentrated on the West African cinema and Nollywood industry; in particular, French and English languages based in the region. The broader examination of both films of West Africa (the growing industries of Southern Nigeria⁴, such as the Yoruba, Benin, Efik, and Igbo-language industry) and the cinemas in Senegal and Mali have continued to gain attention in academic literature and critical analysis. As a practice, West African films are sometimes referred to broadly as African films and sometimes, the reference is reduced to a particular country due to their language, such as ‘Wolof’ as a Senegalese film, and ‘Igbo’ as a Nigerian film, because they have a widely known derivation. At times, there appears to be rivalry over ownership or custodianship of forms of orality in film. This rivalry has motivated producers and screenwriters to develop creative concepts that blend local and foreign languages. In this state, structural forms of code-mixing, and code meshing become applicable with consequences for film, as the purposes of traditionally based films become defeated.

⁴ Haynes (1995; 1997), Okome (2000), and Agina (2015) among other film scholars have discussed the video films of Southern Nigeria and to a large extent demonstrated the inherent differences between video films and the cinema of West Africa. The comparisons are outside the scope of this study.

In Nigeria, a lot of films are produced in the three major ethnic languages of Igbo, Hausa and Yoruba, although production of other films may be in indigenous languages such as Benin and Efik. The challenge in differentiating these films becomes even more complex as individual films lay various claims to oral traditions at various times and in diverse ways. Like these ethnic concerns, I see a major conflict between Anglophone and Francophone films in West Africa where understanding the sources of orality is complicated in the 'diverse deployment of common tale structures, allegory and satire, narrative layering, circularity, repetition, musical leitmotif among several thematic influences which draws parallels between themes and archetypal characters found in tales and films' (Thackway 2003; Gugler 2003).

Research on West African films (especially Nollywood video films as a leading producer of films) is still growing within and outside the continent, leaving room for more research to be undertaken. As such, I feel there is a need for this study because it focuses on major aspects of West African traditional storytelling, culture, and oral aesthetics in West African films.

As an African researcher, I have encountered several oral forms and the desire to deal with orality stems from the interest in explicating its transition from speech to electronic, and how far it can travel through time and space in a medium such as film. For one thing, I am attracted to West African oral traditions because of their form and assumptions that it is mediated as secondary orality adaptation in West African films. It is this interest that enables us to examine how film's orality is configured in specific ways, that is, mediated.

This study argues that there is constructive collaboration between oral forms and literature in film. It equally highlights the processes that are involved in the adaptation of oral tradition into African films. By focusing on orality to prove filmmakers' deployment of oral forms and translation in West African films, we will be able to understand the mediation of oral forms in identity construction using the films *Invasion 1897*, *Karmen Gei*, and *Xala* as their navigators. This study is in the domain of Western Africa: the home of Francophone cinema and Nollywood video films. Before examining selected films in detail, I shall briefly sketch how I view the notions of 'orality' in the context of the study.

1.7.2 Orality

The importance of orality in films begins with a well-established discourse on oral aesthetics. Gunner (2011) defines orality in the context of Africa as not to be seen simply as “the absence of literacy” but as something self-constitutive. In other words, orality is not ‘the quality of being oral or orally communicated,’ or a ‘preference for or tendency to use spoken forms of language.’ A basic premise of Gunner’s definition is that our overall identification with the oral unites a community and society. In the popular imagination, orality is associated with verbal expression, preliterate, language used for storage in the memory⁵, rather than tradition, communality, and change. As a concept in academic writing, the term presents divergent meanings. Anthropologists and historians conceptualize orality as the medium of expression and of non-literate cultures and have shown interest in the concept mainly as a ‘sounding board for calibrating the privileges of modernity.’⁶ Finnegan (1985) refers orality to all the artistic works that passed from one generation through spoken word such as oral tradition (cultures, customs, or beliefs) which are verbally transmitted from one generation to another.

A good amount of research on orality in film has been undertaken. These include the following themes: orality and acoustics (Naficy, 2001); orality and cultural identity (Tomasseli and Eke, 1995); orality and notion of African-ness (Papaioannou, 2009); orality in North America’s community identity (Hearne, 2006); indigenous cinema of Canada (Burnett, 2004); orality in television documentary on stand-up talks (Lo Kwai Cheung, 2001); orality and intersubjective experience focusing on ‘talking head’ testimony (Lee, 2016); filmic embodiment of orality-literacy dynamics (Scheunemann, 1996); oral sensibility of popular cinema with focus on films that are related to cyberspace (Lippert, 1996); orality and ‘vernacular’ cinema, that is, Italian genre film relating to crime fictions (Koven, 2006). However, there are few film analyses of orality in adapted literature such as subtitles and images of newspapers with an emphasis on writing phenomena in film’s *mise-en-scene* (Jackson, 2008).⁷

⁵ Eric Havelock, 1986 ‘The Oral-Literate Equation’ (p. 24-29).

⁶ Bandia, P. (2011). Orality and translation. *Handbook of translation studies*, 2, 108-112.

⁷ Tony Jackson’s (2008) work analyzes words on screen, particularly on images of newspaper or subtitles, etc. These can be understood as both speech and visual display in Writing, Orality, Cinema: The ‘Story’ of “Citizen Kane”. *Narrative*, 16(1), 29-45.

The concept of 'orality' is rooted in African oral forms conveyed in film on approaches often subsumed under oral tradition (Cham,1982; Diawara, 1989, 1996; Ukadike,1994; Tcheyuap, 2011; Pfaff, 1984; Armes, 2006); or orature: (Thackway, 2003).

For Ukadike (2003, p.29), orality is the entire oral tradition of African people, not limited to the whole oral discourse on every subject initiated by people of African descent. Goody (1987) and Watt (1991) studies on orature as a form of expression including song, dance, folklore, rites, and ceremonies stored in humans (memory) and transmitted orally. Through films, cultures are being expressed, societies are being mirrored, and information is being exchanged and transmitted. Adesokan (2006, p.7) adds that in the visual:

“Film communicates through imagery, metaphor, and symbolism. The integration of oral features, such as music, and dance, oral performance, folktales, proverbs, myth, legend, fable, folklore, call-and-response into other media like the screen, transforms the usually solitary act experience into a more responsive and interactive act of listening and seeing. This helps to incorporate aural-oral texts within the visual texts that consciously use oral features as film techniques.”

Devantine (1992, p.12) agrees that:

“Orality has boundless domains that it reaches through speech and hearing while initiating change. Each interlocutor must connect to his or her sensibilities while entering a resonating, accepting, and conciliatory relationship with orality.”

The spread of community radio, television, and mobile screens among other mediated technologies in rural parts of Africa has influenced the prospects of orality in the future. Mahir (2010, p.22) asserts that such a new global phenomenon provides society with the capacity to record their thoughts, ideas, and beliefs without being able to read and write.

In other words, 'orality' refers to the pivotal position of oral tradition forms and narrative characteristics in contemporary African fiction films and to how African filmmakers have imagined African societies and the deployment of oral practices continue to play a significant role in West African films.

West African films allow us to reflect on the dynamism of oral forms as a primary material for narration. Firstly, orality refers to the totality of oral tradition and engagements in the film across time and space, it is not merely sound but adaptation of narrative. Secondly, films are visual planes incorporating the oral (or oral elements); the film is diegetic and extra-diegetic. Even though these works provide different ideas on film's relationship with orality in specific contexts, they are different from the present inquiry which is to examine African film as secondary orality. I chose to study video films partly because they enable the examination of African postcolonial identities through their orality in films. Apart from showing orality in traditional or translated languages and recognizable themes in the films, understanding the translation that takes place from oral to written and into film requires attention.

1.7.3 Oral Tradition

The constitutive nature of oral forms is a key characteristic of orality in African films. Barber (2006, p.497) posits that:

“Research on verbal arts, or an instance of a genre, can be understood in terms of the way it is constituted as text. Research on oral verbal art usually proceeds by collecting several examples of a recognized, named genre (a particular kind of poem, song, dirge, chant, and tale) and then examining them for ‘characteristics features’ they share.”

Similarly, Delphine's (2007) research on traditional African culture in Tanzanian films finds that indigenous oral narratives constitute the artistic canons and inform the form and contents of Tanzanian films. Urther's (2015) study on African oral traditions and national heritage through film in South Africa, presents oral tradition on screen as a means of revitalizing traditions.

“Oral narratives carry a freight of cultural meanings infused in different modes of expression while articulating the philosophies and beliefs of African people. It is important to recognize and (re)discover the critical role played by oral narratives to understand the epistemologies and ontologies that inform the construction of African films” (Urther 2015, p.1)

Manthia Diawara (1989, 1992) evaluates the role of the oral narrator within the visual discourse of African films. Diawara's work considered how films recall the narrative forms of traditional oral tales. Similarly, Sheila Petty defines oral tradition as ‘an

interactive art form in which the audience often comments on or directs griot's performance' (quoted in Ukadike, 2014, p.195).

Tomaselli and Eke (1995, p.112) observe African filmmakers serve as "cultural intermediaries" between the two forms of expression, namely literature and orature. Focusing on the new way in which aspects of oral culture find expression in film language, they observe:

"Africa participates in ontologies that suggest the generation of new and alternate visual grammars, different from those found in more industrialized societies. These draw on linguistic structures that have no grammar for dealing with things that exist quite without relation to other things. African languages, unlike languages that have emerged from industrial economies, describe a world consisting of more than objects. Importantly, their grammar (especially when it has not been subjected to the attentions of European educational specialists), has a place for qualifying something in terms of its relatedness to the other things, persons, and animals around it." (1995, p. 115-6)

Dovey (2009, p.13) elaborates further on this:

"African filmmakers are able, first, to reach non-literate African audiences, and second, to encourage audiences to react to the cinematic experience in the same way that they would to a griot's performance of an oral tale... As modern-day griots, African filmmakers play two roles; as the preservers and transmitters of African culture for future generations in the wake of the demise of oral storytelling; and as critical mediators of social realities, encouraging audience response and (re)action."

Ukadike (1994) argues that any critical evaluation of African film practice in comparison to other film conventions such as Hollywood, Russian Socialist dialects, Italian neorealism, and *Avantgarde* must consider how syncretic 'master codes' inherent in non-African film practice have been disarticulated by cultural codes embedded in oral tradition (quoted in Françoise Pfaff, p. 162).

These scholarly works hint at the fundamental magnitude of oral tradition as constitutive in most African films, therefore, we can extend our understanding by examining the use of orality as cultural practice, protest, and language in fiction film. Representations of oral tradition may often seem to reiterate dominant cultural ideas, values, and pastimes, the expectation that its texts assume, and on the other, the contingent nature of audience expectation and knowledge as well as its materiality demand some scrutiny. There is a need for distinction between oral tradition and the

concept of orality because scholars use generic terms such as ‘aesthetics’, ‘tradition’, ‘orature’, or ‘performance’ to refer to orality. Scholars systematically use terms like ‘traditional oral tales’ versus ‘narrative forms’ to mark the conceptual differences; and others draw binary comparisons such as tradition and modernity, informal versus formal, or unplanned versus planned to denote aspects of the relationship. To overcome the terminological differences, for my purpose, orality is used as an umbrella term to refer to all oral tradition (orature, oral aesthetics, oral genres) forms in West African films. Consequently, this study assumes that orality can be political to advance certain cultural ideologies by filmmakers.

1.7.4 Literature

Before discussing orality and films further, it is important to discuss the relationship between literature and film in brief. Before the 19th century, Charles Baudelaire, the French poet, had expressed his anger and fear about how photographic images would ‘corrupt’ traditionally made art. As he foreshadowed, literary spectacles would increasingly become the material for the movies by 1915 in an attempt to distinguish the cinema from its vaudevillian heritage and to offer a new social respectability to a mechanical art.⁸ However, in the second half of the 19th century, the sense of reality and everyday life was destabilized through the spread of oral cultures. Their narratives and how other forms of art come to relate with them are observed in Devantine (1992), Haynes (1995), Russell (1988), Orr (2003), and Ukadike (2003), in the representation of the orality in film and the interpretative situation of watching a film.

The primary films that the current study focuses on— *Invasion 1897*, *Karmen Gei*, and *Xala* – thus bear traces of adaptation in film theory. The interest of this study does not only lie in discussing how oral tradition forms can only be transformed in the medium of film or whether narrative techniques such as those in literature such as books, novels anticipate cinematic techniques; rather, the study negotiates the degree to which film function as secondary orality adaptation.

⁸ Most notably with the 1913 Italian filmed version of the polished novel *Quo Vadis* and D.W. Griffith’s 1916 epic *Intolerance*, which used a visual refrain from the poet Walt Whitman to link the New Testament, two historical tales and a modern melodrama.

1.7.5 Identity

Orality-based films as an expression of postcolonial identity mirror the historic construction of tradition in West Africa. The exploration of identity in this study reflects what Stuart Hall (1996) defines as playing a constitutive and not merely a reflexive role. Identity is seen here as a wider objective of the sub-Saharan filmmakers (especially in French-speaking early wave post-independence) overtly politically or socially committed to African film culture. As such, it is used throughout this study to suggest how West African filmmakers mediate orality in the construction of identities in challenging certain misrepresentations of the continent. The language relies deeply on the polyvalent nature of common cultural daily lives and focuses on dominant conceptions of culture, ethnicity, nation, and shared commonalities.

Most indigenous cultures in West Africa can be categorized as a particular society or group or clan; a practice which has been customary for an extended period. However, the elucidation of indigenous cultures has been the subject of certain criticism because it “implies that these indigenous bodies exist with each country as largely territorialized replicas of original national culture” (Willems 2006, p.31). Therefore, this understanding of indigenous culture concerning understanding identity in the context of the study is particularly problematic where there is a strong involvement of ethnic and religious divide across Francophone and Anglophone-speaking countries of West Africa, which was motivated by the early pre-colonial and postcolonial experiences. It is not the purpose of this study to engage the problematic nature of indigenous cultures; that will be outside the scope of the present study. However, a common definition is adopted as Hall clarifies thus:

‘(Indigenous) Culture is used to refer to whatever is distinctive about the way of life of a people, community, nation, or social group. Culture is not a set of things, it is a set of practices, people belonging to the same culture interpret the world in roughly the same way and can express their feelings, themselves, and thoughts about the world in a way that can be understood by each other (1997, p. 2)

Like oral tradition, these cultures seem to exist for ages because they are handed down from one generation to another through many traditional means. West Africa is recognized as a region of sub-Sahara Africa where a great diversity of cultures exists.

Given its diversity, the term “indigenous cultures” is rather difficult to define mostly because it’s a slippery term, and it’s growing and expansive. It involves an “evolving and dynamic relationship between people and territory” (Grings, 1992, p. 2). If one relates this concept to the above discussions on cultures, these ‘indigenous cultures’ could be approached as culturally derived communities, whose background is sustained by their oral tradition practices. It is on this ground that identity needs to be approached cautiously in West Africa.

However, the present study limits its inquiry to assessing the implications of these lines of thought to explicate how film functions as secondary orality. This way, aspects or issues such as the spoken word, the status of human tradition, and the processes of identity construction highlighted by Cham, (1982), Diawara (1989, 1996), Ukadike, (1994), Tcheyuap, (2011), Pfaff, (1984), Armes, (2006), and Thackway (2003) – form an important theoretical background that informs the choice of secondary orality adaptation to explain mediation of orality in African films. I am examining film through secondary orality therefore as a way of thinking about the representation of stereotypes related to minorities, poor and class relations, literate and illiterates, and disadvantaged among other subaltern experiences represented in West African films, since these cannot be separated from orality. It is outside of the scope of the study to focus in-depth on the filmmakers themselves instead of the aspect of production and reception through which the mediation can be examined.

1.7.6 Mediation

One of the most significant, if not the most critical questions, in contemporary African films relates to form in mediation of orality. In most of the existing research, findings reveal that oral forms hold information on larger social phenomena.⁹ In this study, I present a conceptual framework that assumes oral tradition as a creative source in film

⁹ See Jenny Williams (1992) “A new act of mediation”: The screenplays of Mtutuzeli Matshoba, *Current Writing: Text and Reception in Southern Africa*, 4:1, 25-39, DOI: 10.1080/1013929X.1992.9677889. Urther Rwafa (2011) Song and the Zimbabwean film, *Flame* (1996), *Muziki*, 8:1, 47- 58, DOI: [10.1080/18125980.2011.570076](https://doi.org/10.1080/18125980.2011.570076) Pepenene, L., & Radebe, N. (2018). Retelling the history of Lesotho: an interplay between orality, painting, and film in Kalosi Ramakhula’s works. *Journal of African Films and Diaspora Studies*, 1(1), 75.

and how film functions as a secondary orality adaptation. The framework stresses the need to provide explanations for this mediation process in the analysis and interpretation of orality traced in film. Some social phenomena, such as the flexibilities of fictionalized narrative to storytelling or even aspects of cinematic discourse, modes of representation, and cinema language likely to be found in the film, might be highly likely to be influenced by oral tradition.

The argument put forward is in similarity to the long and ongoing discussion which involves discourse and reality mediation through oral forms that feature in traditional media such as film. Stam and others (1992, p.8) argue that “the transmission of oral texts requires its fundamental features like dance, gesture, rhythmic movements, facial expression, voice’ pitch; to convey meaning and function in emphatic ways that might not be transmitted by words.”

Just as it is in oral tradition, various art forms interact with films to mirror reality. Kolawole (2002) suggests that

“Incantations, invocations, or aphorisms that are sung by a soloist during performances or initiations are complemented by musical instruments like the xylophones, drums, rattles, and zithers. Music is not only meant to sustain the rhythm of the words and the dances that go along with it, but it also intersperses the drum bit with performance that receives the praises for the excellence of the singers or dancers.”

Gradually, researchers have realized that all media forms, in this case, cinema and film, are principal reality mediators that process by systematic emphasis or eschew certain aspects in concordance with different mediating factors, be they connected with the features like pedagogy, political, aesthetic, film technique, film style of directors and producers – such as their political dispositions or personal connections. I present the argument here to serve as a trigger to critical thinking about orality as a product of an equivalent mediation process.

1.8 Theoretical Frameworks

The importance of this section is to discuss the theoretical frameworks. The aim is to consider how these discussions inform my study and how my theoretical frameworks and analysis contribute to the research on West African films.

1.8.1 Adaptation

Here the literature on adaptation in films includes works by African scholars such as Alexie Tcheuyap (2005) and Lindiwe Dovey (2009). Alexie Tcheuyap's (2005) work focuses on adapting literature to film, and Lindiwe Dovey's (2009) adaptation work on literature to African screen media, the practice and reception of film adaptation in Africa are highly regarded. While Tcheuyap and Dovey are concerned with aesthetics in films, this study follows the same tradition by focusing on the mediation of orality by filmmakers through their aesthetics and configuration in African films that are adaptations.

Alexie Tcheuyap's (2005) work on adaptation in film rejects the notion of fidelity, and instead, supports *re-écriture* or a 'poetics of repetition'. By this Tcheuyap argues:

“The concern is not the subjugation of a medium or text, but that of the various creative, poetic and ideological processes implied in the repetition that brings change to any rewriting” (Tcheuyap, 2001, p. 3 quoted in Dovey, 2009, p. 11).

Dovey raises an important question of 'whether African film adaptation as a medium can achieve a critique of violence in a way that is not available to verbal, concept-bound rational critique' (Dovey, 2005c p. 3). Along the same lines, she asks whether African film adaptation – as a form of performative literary criticism and cultural critique presented through an audio-visual medium and in a fictional form – can avoid what she calls 'the uneven power relations in conventional critique' (2005c, p.45). According to Dovey, the films in her work 'gesture towards alternate forms of knowledge, which are embodied rather than abstract and conceptual, and do not repress the identity of the object or other' (Dovey, 2005c p. 68). Furthermore, Dovey discusses the films' critique of violence in terms of their re-historicization of violence and engagement of the viewers:

‘I discuss the kinds of meanings that are made from the source texts and their historical moments in the new contexts. I closely examine the way that these adaptations can re-historicize violence and thereby engage viewers’ capacity for rational analysis of the multifaceted socio-historical forces of contemporary violence (Dovey, 2009 p.10).

Film adaptations have played a key role in the film industry recently. This can be seen as the outcome of important trends which have contributed to “convergence culture” (Corrigan, 2014)¹⁰. This convergence involves the circulation and re-mediation of texts, images, media, and the concomitant communicated messages.

The theory of ‘adaptation’ in Film Studies and Adaptation Studies involves translation such as film and orality. However, how film functions as a secondary orality, or the creative and social intricacies involved in the process are relatively under-researched.

1.8.2 Theory and Postcolonial Films

In part, because of its generous size, West Africa was colonized by Britain and France for more than a century. Even decades after the colonial era, filmmaking has been largely influenced by these conditions¹¹. Various scholarly debates on the postcolonial conditions of West Africa have highlighted the implication of colonization and the subject in the postcolonial era. The period of colonization changed the cultural practices of most societies. Orality thus came into being in various eras and for varied reasons, marking them with a distinctive character. Oral forms had a variety of linguistic, religious, and national roots, and as migration from rural settings to urban settings evolved, these oral forms came to play various roles in the postcolonial era. The term ‘postcolonial’ refers to the end of colonial rule or the time referring to the establishment of independence of a colony. Here, it reflects the practice of filmmaking in West Africa and a rupture of tradition which

¹⁰ Corrigan (2014) identifies adaptations of classical texts from Shakespeare to Austen and others, which have inspired many distinct socio-political and ideological reinterpretations across eras and cultures. Other contemporary trends involve works on Blockbuster adaptations, such as Harry Potter and Lord of the Rings series, which have commercially influenced the film industry as well as related areas, such as computer-game production; and growing works on adaptations of graphic novels and comic books, which is concerned with graphic *mise-en-scène* and moving image. Most recently, the focus has shifted to multimedia adaptation and participatory culture (see Doloughan, 2011; Jenkins, 2006).

¹¹ Thackway (2003), Dovey (2009), Garritano (2013) and Genova (2013) have extensively studied filmmaking practices of postcolonial era in sub-Saharan Africa. Colonial languages such as French and English still dominate filmmaking practices in the region.

merely links the term to experiences of colonization and decolonization. What then are the implications of these concerns for the present study and theoretical framings in questions of identity? Films are produced with a specific and conscious focus on Africa thereby localizing the framings of identity to relate to the experiences of the colonized through oral traditions that characterize many West African societies.

1.8.3 The Concept of Secondary Orality

The term secondary orality is a common approach in literary theory. It is also associated most strongly with the seminal work of Walter Ong (1982). Ong¹² developed a theory of orality that assumes the primacy of the spoken word, in a ‘culture which has never known writing.’ Ong (1982, p. 6) defines what he calls primary orality as follows:

“I style the orality of a culture untouched by any knowledge or writing or print, ‘primary orality.’ It is ‘primary’ by contrast with the ‘secondary orality’ of present-day high-technology culture, in which a new orality is sustained by telephone, radio, television, and other electronic devices that depend for their existence and functioning on writing and print. Today primary oral culture in the strict sense hardly exists since every culture knows of writing and has some experience of its effects. Still, to varying degrees many cultures and subcultures, even in a high technology ambiance, preserve much of the mind-set of primary orality.”

According to Ong (1982, p. 29):

“Words acquire their meanings only from their always insistent actual habitat, which is not, as in a dictionary, simply other words, but also includes gestures, vocal inflections, facial expression, and the entire human, existential setting in which the real, spoken word always occurs.”

Ong goes as far as to suggest that orality is typically different from oral tradition in terms of ‘thought and its verbal expression in societies where the technologies of literacy are unfamiliar to the population’ (Ong, 1982, p. 12). His hypothesis assumes that primary orality is original to the human life world, surfacing within bodily expressions and interpersonal communications, nurturing oral cultures and human consciousness. In his view, such orality bears a form of knowledge production that merges ‘the known’ with ‘the knower’, while contemporary literacy tends towards

¹² Walter Ong, *The Interfaces of the Word: Studies in the Evolution of Consciousness and Culture* (1977)

subjectivity and objectivity. Ong's study suggests that we speak of 'primary orality' and of our electronic technologized culture as 'secondary orality'.

Secondary orality departs from 'the individualized introversion of the age of writing, print, and rationalism which intervened between it and primary orality which remains as part of us'¹³ (Ong, 1982, p.284). Ong conceived the notion of 'Secondary Orality' as dependent on literate culture and the existence of writing. While it exists in sound, it does not have the characteristics of primary orality because it presumes and rests upon literate thought and expression. This type of orality relies on textual objectivity derived from knowledge conveyers such as language, linguistic language, book pages, and even live performances on a stage over bodily expression (involving gesture, tone, speech, and so on). Indeed, so influential is Ong's work that the critical vocabulary it proposes for discussing orality has laid the basis for critically discussing the oral-literacy dynamics for more than three decades because it is virtually impossible to discuss orality without referencing his work.

Given this explanation, can we then consider film – as a medium in which orality can be mediated, and how does it function as secondary orality? The secondary orality discussed was primarily plotted for exploring the performatives of 'psychodynamics of textuality'¹⁴ in literary texts and electronics. The psychodynamics of textuality specifies the spoken gesture of the written word, situating the subject of voicing in a living context, e.g., the author-reader relationship, within sensory perceptions evoked by the text's mimetic representation. The interdependence of oral and technological cultures is found in the film, where forms of communication co-exist and interact. Some film studies argue the dynamic convergence of orality and textuality in the audio-visual representations which contradicts Ong's primary critique of film as a medium of visuality lacking the 'oral coefficient' (1982, p. 293), and his denial of the possibility of 'secondary orality' in film.

¹³ Ibid

¹⁴ Ong (1982) considers this an impulse of enlivening social dialogue (p. 102–103). For example, the textually inscribed reader-character is a performative expression that signifies the living act of spoken utterance.

Ong's concept of primary orality becomes a concern to the growing understanding of the applicability of the term to refer to oral aesthetics since the emergence of communicative media and how it shapes the message conveyed. With the technology of film, old questions are being revisited with the need to improve on modern concepts and challenges. The aesthetic value of oral tradition forms of West Africa using orality in this study, in terms that assume an 'Ongian sense', might seem unrelated. To the extent that postcolonial West Africa is different from the Greek and Romantic eras, the '*technologization*' of orality as it occurs in African films as compared to Europe is different. In West Africa orality, various forms of imaginative expression continue to exist side by side, influencing, engaging each other dialogically and in mutually transformative ways in terms of form, subject matter, theme, style, and significance.

For Scheunemann, 'secondary orality', based on new media reinforcement and transformation of the old media, misses the media interaction which takes place between each in a specific period of cultural history. Scheunemann (1996) contests that secondary orality might not be a suitable approach to discuss the filmic embodiment of orality-literacy dynamics. Particularly, she disagrees with the Ongian idea of 'secondary orality' because of its ignorance that film is genuinely different from both purely oral and purely literate cultures. She also suggests we should go beyond Ong's notion of secondary orality. The challenge of extending the debate of orality and literacy into the field of modern media, however, lies in the need to discover and develop new patterns of thought and categories appropriate for the description of the new phenomena and our experience with them (p. 81). It is stressed that for new categories of analysis on orality to emerge, we need to pay attention to the interrelations of 'major and minor events', and 'recognize a fruitful constellation between the present and a moment of the past' (p. 91), replacing the linear historiography of the three-stage sequence of communication forms to discover the cultural history of film media. For example, Scheunemann (1996) argues that 'the emergence of the media of film and radio challenged the earlier constellation of the arts and the dominance of the printed letters' (p. 81). The early film, as a new medium, intersected with many other technologies, such as lithography, mass-produced images, newspapers, magazines, photographs, etc. Such intersections of word and image, challenge conventional understanding and forms of writing and print, which reinforced and transformed patterns of orality.

Nayar (2010) considers the implication of literature in evaluating the ‘isolationist tendency of literacy that promotes analysis and abstraction—which induces history,’ even though this is key in discussing the relationship between orality and film. Other media come to fulfil the needs and desires of both the less literate audience and the so-called aural audience. This is because many of orality’s characteristics are relatively visible, although in subtler forms, in much popular films worldwide, as well as in other forms of visual media, such as television.¹⁵

Tomasselli and Eke (1995) propose African ‘grammars’ whose characteristics in orality rearticulate and localize Western-invented technologies in the service of African themes, stories, forms of oral storytelling, and cultural expression. Their work asserts African ontologies that suggest the generation of new and alternate visual grammars different from those found in more industrialized societies (Tomasselli & Eke, 1995, p.116). This position contradicts to a large extent Western theories first generated from within academies of the ‘developed’ world, which is often exported for use in explaining, debasing, and re-inscribing subordinate positions for the subjects and creators of literature from the so-called ‘underdeveloped’ World.¹⁶ As a consequence, the so-called ‘underdeveloped’ Third World provides the raw materials for the careers and profits of more technologically advanced master consumers who import the raw material (literature) and convert it to their ends (theory).¹⁷

In their anthology, *Theorizing Orality in African Cinema*, Keyan Tomaselli, Arnold Shepperson, and Maureen Eke (1995) have argued that ‘oral cultures’, as one example of cultural divergence, ‘speak a different word than those of written cultures’. Their study offers an ontologically based critique of Western methodologies in the study of African films. It is important to recognize that other local and/or imported forms also complement these traditional oral influences. Thus, coining a new orature-influenced

¹⁵ For a schematic consideration of orality’s bearing on television, see Fiske and Hartley (1978). Though brief and casual, the authors’ sub-section, “Oral and Literate Traditions in Television Discourse”, astutely recommends that television be perceived as a subordinate medium in large part because of its more oral “modes”.

¹⁶ See Barbara Christian’s essay “The Race for Theory,” in *Cultural Critique* 6 (Spring 1987): 51-63.

¹⁷ This problematic is treated throughout the special issue of Kunapipini (1989). See also Wole Soyinka, “The Critic and Society: Barthes, Leftocracy and other Mythologies.” *Black Literature and Literary Theory*. Ed. Henry Louis Gates, Jr. (New York and London: Methuen, 1984) 27-57.

form as 'secondary orality' insists that whilst filmmaking may be an articulation of oral form, it cannot be confused with orality itself. Associating these approaches with the works of Fiske and Hartley (1978), Walter Ong (1982), and Keyan G. Tomaselli, et al. (1995) respectively, Nayar (2010) points out that the concept of secondary orality has consequences for orality and need no limitation to one's ties to common forms of oral communication (personal and interpersonal exchanges). The author argues that they may as well hold sway over one's connection to modern concepts such as nationalism, for instance.

The aesthetic value of oral tradition as secondary orality supplies a wide range of rhetorical connections which are implicit and explicit in the film. Sugnet (2006, p.1232) examines *La Petite Vendéuse* (The Girl Who Sold the Sun) as a fairy tale told through the secondary orality of technological mediation. The study effectively proves the imperative of cinema as secondary orality and clear distinction between the debates about orality and literacy that often dominate the study of African materials. For audiences who may not be familiar with contemporary Senegalese culture, the film presents itself as an innocent fable. Sugnet argues:

“Several African filmmakers of the "return to the source" school, such as Mansour Sora Wade (*in Le Prix du Pardon and Fary L'Anesse*) or Dani Kouyate (*in Keita, L'Heritage du Griot*) have tried to film oral tales straightforwardly, without taking account of the change to another medium, as though "tradition" could pass unchanged through twentieth-century technologies of representation. By acknowledging his contemporary sources and by self-consciously framing both oral tales and written texts in the secondary orality of a cinematic fable, Mambety Diop creates a film that seems much more open-ended and adequate to its historical moment than those direct efforts.” (1234)

Sugnet is of the view that when filmmakers adapt oral tales and written text, references should be made to contemporary sources because of changes brought by technologies of representation.

Another work by Rwafa (2011, p.48) examines the importance of secondary orality in African film by examining the role of songs in *Flame* (1996). Rwafa testifies that:

“Primary orality (rendered by mouth) is different from technology, mediated orality – (for example, songs on TV and film. In their lived contexts, the rapid

transitions that mark the *oralness* of different genres of orality are often difficult to frame as individual or discrete moments existing outside each other.”¹⁸

The concept of secondary orality suggests that oral tradition undergoes several mediated processes and is utilized to generate fresh ideas, thus revealing oral tradition as adding aesthetic value to the film. As can be seen in *Technologizing Orality: A Reflection on ‘Sango’*, Niyi Adebajo (2017) assesses the deployment of oral and film aesthetics in reconstructing the story of the legendary hero-god, ‘Sango’. Specifically, the study examines the narratology of the text, ‘Sango’ in its adaptation of oral materials in a technologized art. Adebajo uses concepts such as adaptation and translation, to establish that the film has combined technology with orality to present ‘Sango’¹⁹ as a tragic hero whose misfortune arises from the bitter politics of his time and whose moral lapses or character traits leave a pattern for the modern society to learn from. By adopting character and thematic analytical approaches, the author claims that the filmmaker uses technology to highlight the adaptability and continuous relevance of oral materials, (drum, songs, chant, gong, flute, and myth) to achieve harmony between the past and the present. Because of this, this study significantly draws attention to the nature of oral materials in a technologized state. However, the focus in the current study is: Niyi Adebajo’s study is restricted to contemporary Yoruba film drama, while this study focuses on West African films.

The present study follows similar contributions by Ong (1982), Tomaselli and Eke (1995), Rwafa (2011), and Sugnet (2006). The prominence of oral tradition forms and the way the themes are structured and heralded in West African film culture are exemplified in *Invasion 1897*, *Karmen Gei* and *Xala*, which according to Teshome Gabriel (1989, p. 195) relies, ‘more on an appeal to social and political conflicts as the prime rhetorical strategy’. But the effects of orality need not be limited to the formulaic expression and rhetoric in film only.

Although Ong’s remarks about secondary orality have been discussed and criticized repeatedly from multiple theoretical vistas, they remain enigmatic and in need of fuller theoretical exploration. On the one hand, orality is embodied in human beings and is,

¹⁸ Rwafa, U. (2011). Song and the Zimbabwean film, *Flame* (1996). *Muziki*, 8(1), 47-58.

¹⁹ *Sango* is a mystic Yoruba figure.

to a significant extent, therefore anchored by the character, oral address by a speaker, voice quality, and specific performance skills. On the other hand, the electronic age is an age of 'secondary orality': the orality of telephones, radio, and film, that depends on writing and print for its existence.

The second, and related point, is that orality manifests not only in the films in which oral form appears but also across all kinds of other 'official' and 'unofficial' media texts in which orality may or may not appear in human form. The texts include novels, books, primary and secondary sources, academic materials, newspapers, magazines, television, websites, and so forth. Indeed, within various webs of adaptations, 'orality' itself becomes understandable as a specific form of text just as far as oral forms are only available to us through texts. The shift from oral to text and electronic processing engages the movement of sound across different planes. This transition is another major concern of the present study, which examines the mediation of orality in West African films. This study is concerned with the shared commonalities between orality and their aesthetic value. This makes the concept applicable to contexts other than spoken word, textual form and especially film. On this account, the aim of film studies is not to do away with the layers of textuality to disclose the true forms of orality but to examine the external and internal meanings of precisely that mediated 'oral' and to read it in wider ideological and social discourses context in *Invasion 1897*, *Karmen Gei* and *Xala*.

In what follows in next section of this chapter, I seek to integrate insights from adaptation studies and postcolonial perspectives on oral forms and literary adaptation. Through this integration of theoretical approaches from different fields, this study moves the discussion beyond the conventional boundaries of film and cinema scholarship. By linking films and orality, and analyzing how both are related in the adaptation process, this study offers a distinctive perspective or thesis on contemporary African film – to clarify how African oral forms contribute to our understanding of orality and to our efforts in articulating how filmmakers' mediation of orality in the postcolonial era.

1.8.4 Secondary Orality Adaptation (SOA)

Drawing upon the above-mentioned viewpoints and the affinities between Orality Studies and Adaptation Studies and Postcolonial Studies, this thesis conceptualizes film as secondary orality adaptation (SOA) and thus, as a multimodal process. It is argued that the relationship between the source text and film adaptation is influenced by production (involving gestural expression of oral tradition) – a palpable representation of which is to be found in their secondary orality. Secondly with the embodiment of sound and hearing in the textual exchange, film is not merely occupied as literary adaptations, but their composition and strategies also share a common ancestor in oral forms.

Secondary Orality Adaptation, or the multi-level tendency to conceal and reveal information at the time constitutes the most profound of all indigenous, pre-colonial African cultural processes and products (in terms of sculpture, music, poetry, painting, masks, dance, or storytelling.) These art forms provide the creative raw materials for understanding and interpreting society's social phenomena by African filmmakers. Here we can examine how *Secondary Orality Adaptation (SOA)*, as a theoretical construct, replicates itself in some of the leading works of film in the African continent. When I use the word '*Secondary Orality Adaptation*' as a cinematographic construct, I imply the connotative, resonant, and amplificatory power of spoken words that are inscribed, as well as the density of translated oral text. In other words, a deeper understanding of an African oral tradition as a form that transcends mere cognitive communication of information. This means that words can structure the mood of a film in resolving questions of identity. It can also bring the participants and audience into shared communion. Certain meanings can be made through the interface between aesthetics, poetry, and audience participation in the adaptation of some of the finest African works of literary fiction into the world of film. *Invasion 1897*, *Xala* and *Karmen Gei* are read intimately and are understood through symbols, music, images, and landscapes encoded in the visual and aural language of the film. My *secondary orality adaptation* theory of film is based on this "metalevel identity" that permeates a substantial portion of contemporary practice and scholarship concerning African film. From a textual analytical perspective, it is worth seeing that very few African filmmakers on the continent, where indigenous African oral tradition originated, have

dared to capture the kind of creativity in literary works shown in films such as *Invasion 1897*, *Xala*, and *Karmen Gei*.

1.9 Methodology

Considering this, the present study, supported by a textual and visual analytical framework, finds the filmmaker's preference for mediation and how it is negotiated and given to the audiences. As the analysis would show, the focus is on aesthetics and configuration. The fascination of film rests, above all, on the fact that it concerns media of moving images: the visual. Individual images are configured in a specific way and assembled in a structured way. The stories arising in the audiences' heads also rest on what people know about the ways films represent things and configure images, something closely linked to what people know about narratives or the discourse of films (Chatman, 1993 p.146–61; Tolson, 1996 p. 41–3) or about style (Belton, 2009, p. 41; Bordwell and Thompson, 2010 p.143–4). How mediation is configured and structured can also become central to analyzing contents and representation, narration, and dramaturgy, as well as figures and actors.

Chapter three elaborates on the methodological aspect of the research.

1.10 Primary Films

The films analyzed in this study were selected based on their adaptation of oral tradition derived from the literature (as a source or canonical text, historical relevance, and distinctions about oral performance). They all encompass institutional and individual filmmaking practices which also become a comparative basis for observing the filmmaker's mediation of orality in popular cinema of West Africa. The films were made at various key periods in the postcolonial era of West Africa.

Xala (1975) satirizes the corruption in post-independence African governments in Senegal. It is an adaptation of Ousmane Sembène's 1973 novel of the same name. *Karmen Gei* (2002) – an adaptation of the well-known opera Carmen which has over twenty versions – is influenced by oral tradition elements. Although not an adaptation of a novel, *Invasion 1897* (2014) uses secondary materials, based on the historical invasion of the great Benin Kingdom by the British in 1897, which saw the deposition

of Oba Ovonramwen Nogbaisi. *Invasion 1897* (2014) was framed to underscore the tension between colonialism and indigenous communities. Oral traditions such as praise poetry, proverbs, and songs which are popular oral forms in West Africa are represented in *Xala* (1975), *Karmen Gei* (2001), and *Invasion 1897* (2014). These are discussed with what I describe as two main structuring concerns that facilitate the representation of identities in West African films. This raises the question of the critical value of film's 'secondary orality' as a conceptual framework to explain the 'orality' –the configuration and filmmaker's interest; and the notion of the aesthetic –how, to what extent, and meaning.

These African films incorporate aesthetics, oral tradition modes such as myths, village square gatherings, the role of historians, and gender exclusion practices in various contexts. The differences in the production periods and deliberate combination of cinema and video films brings about a wide range of discussion about orality in West African films. The films analyzed in this study may be broadly categorized as 'realist' but within that range, they display some different responses to the problems of rejuvenation of oral forms (in its rendering, reproduction, and dialogue) and interpretation. They showcase important disparities in length and modes of narration.

The central discourse of *Xala* (1975) is the effect of neocolonialism in post-independence Senegal. It suggests an uncertainty about life in the postcolonial Senegal. Through this film, we can forge theoretical reflections on the role of orality in a particular genre; and can also serve to test how film functions as secondary orality theoretically and analytical assumptions that filmmakers are mediating oral tradition forms as secondary orality in West African films through concrete case study. Among the other filmmakers, Sembène is the only author who is a novelist and filmmaker. It also highlights the author's social statement and how African film is ascribed agency.

Invasion 1897 (2014) is a work conscious of Benin's cultural heritage. The film depicts the punitive expedition of the Benin Kingdom by Britain more than a century ago and indeed, the argument. In this film, we can examine the value of the oral narrative on the screen. The use of idioms, proverbs, panegyrics, and folklore is considered because of their aesthetic and stylistic features in the narrative. Through *Invasion 1897*, we interrogate the oral aesthetics with similar social functions in different cultures. In

addition, the publicity covering the film's production stresses respect for its source. The film has reached its cultural status and has been critically praised as a high point in Nollywood video filmmaking. In recent times, it has been seen as a potent tale of the 18th-century Benin kingdom, as well as a key film in director Lancelot Imasuen's growing global profile.

Joseph Gaye Ramaka's *Karmen Gei* (2002) adapts a well-known opera 'Carmen' with various versions. Like *Carmen*, *Karmen Gei* explains the conflict between the infinite desire for freedom and the laws, conventions, languages, the human limitations that constrain that desire. Set in an African jail, the film features a lesbian prison warden who later dies and at her burial, the soundtrack features a series of songs, which are poems by Amadou Bamba, the founder of Mouridism, an immensely powerful religious group in Senegal. *Karmen Gei* explores the link between sexual identity and orality in film and thus enables the examination of the possibilities of film translation in the face of cultural in-sensitivities. The film enables us to explore orality through the subjectivity of the figure of Karmen.

1.11 Thesis Outline

This study comprises eight chapters. It begins with an introductory chapter with various sections that give a general statement of the problem, significance of the study, research questions, and definition of key terms which helps the reader to understand why the study is important. Chapter two is a follow-up to the introduction with more details on the existing literature related to the research. The importance of chapter three is for the contextualization and understanding of the fundamental issues that the study intends to address. The chapter also focuses on the provision of a cinematic context for the analyzed films and a clearer comprehension of the way filmmakers mediate orality in West African films. Chapter three introduces the method of analysis. Chapter four provides a critical assessment of the orality and gender in *Karmen Gei* (2001). Chapter five takes on Ousmane Sembène's use of language in *Xala* (1975). Chapter six deals with the issues of protest in *Invasion 1897* (2004). I analyze these films separately because of the unique approach adopted by the filmmakers in mediating orality in the West African cinematic context.

The last chapter concludes the thesis by focusing on the main question, 'How is identity mediated through orality in African films adapted from literature? Here the findings are discussed and linked to the research questions in this introductory chapter. Specifically, this concluding chapter will reflect on the analysis and the general arguments put forward by the films under study. Chapter seven is important as it is here that the thesis will summarize the main points that emerge from the analysis and suggest how the study contributes to the body of knowledge in African films. Novel approaches in discussing the theory and influence of orality in African films are also recommended. This chapter proposes future research directions that could be developed from this study.

Chapter Two

Literature Review

2.0 Introduction

The objective of this section is to give some suitable background and context for a proper understanding of the central argument of the work. The section examines some critical literature relevant in the African context.

2.1 Research on African Film Adaptation and Orality

Previous studies on film adaptation of orality have focused on literary works. Pierre Haffner's (1978) and Manthia Diawara's (1987) works focus on documenting the histories of oral literature in film or comparing film to oral literature.

Ukadike (1994) claims that West African films, much like African novels, have antecedents in African oral tradition. He argues that the most important element in orality (as in the novel and the cinema) is the story which builds the structure, the climax, and the resolution (p. 203). By ways of translation, adaptation, as well as exploitation, oral texts, both in their content and form have come alive in written literature and much more vigorously in contemporary texts (Okpewho, 2007).

Mbye Cham (2005) suggests that within African film theory, most work on adaptation has focused on the transformation of African oral narratives to the screen (see Shehu 1995; Diawara 1996; Thackway 2003, p.49–92) and not on the adaptation of literature. Cham argues that in African cultural studies 'the focus has been predominantly on the relationship between the oral and the written' and that 'only scant attention' has been given to the imbrication of oral narratives, literature, and film (2005, p. 295).

Nevertheless, recent studies have attempted to show that literature and the written word do have tremendous value to Africans (Barber 2006). The existing studies primarily consider the importance of adaptation and how African film narratives often mimic

structures of orality. Notwithstanding, various aspects of this dynamic of exchange in the mediation of oral tradition are receiving scanty attention in studies.

2.2 Adaptation of Literature in Film Scholarship

Across the African continent, there have been various films based on literature. In 1962, Moustapha Alassane produced *Aoure* and *La Barge du roi Koda* based on the oral literature of Niger. Efua Sutherland used the same kind of poetic devices and mime derived from Ghanaian oral literature as seen in the adaptation of her children's plays in the film *Araba -The Village Story* (year). DuroLadipo's Yoruba plays were also made into films. 'Sarzan' a short story by Birago Diop, and *Karim* (year), a novel by Ousmane Socé Diop have been made into films by Senegalese filmmaker Momar Thiam, and Wole Soyinka's stage play *The Swamp Dwellers* was filmed on stage in London. Despite this trajectory, several discussions of African cinema have either ignored the relationship with orality or marginalized its focus on literature. Film adaptation of literature is growing but in significantly different ways.

In Francophone West Africa, films are adapted from canonical texts such as the *Bible* or *Bizet Carmen* in what appears as 'postcolonial appropriation' (Dovey, 2009 p. 5)²⁰. On the other hand, in Nollywood video films, Jonathan Haynes sees that the processes of intercultural appropriation and adaptation are complex in terms of 'popular melodrama' modelled around Indian and Latin American soaps (2000 p. 29). The adaptation of oral literature in various forms, styles, adaptation, narrative, strategies, aesthetics, and themes are clear in the films considered foundational in the cinematic corpus of African cinema. Oumarou Ganda's *Saitane* (Satan; Niger, 1973) uses humour and comic acidity to criticize the redundancy of local marabouts, haunting visionary images are suggested within the politics of culture and tradition with a style that resonates with powerful and ancient oral traditions. Sebastien Kamba's first feature-length film, *La rancond'une Alliance* (The disadvantages of an alliance, Congo, 1973) is an adaptation of Jean Malonga's novel 'The Legend of Mofoumou Ma Mazono'

²⁰ Bizet's *Carmen* is one of the literary works examined in this study, Dovey shows that Ramaka's adaptation of *Karmen Gei* showcases a high level of fidelity to the tensions and self-reflexiveness of the *Carmen*'s novella. However, this is not the preoccupation of the present study.

produced with the aid of the French Ministry of Cooperation and shot in French, makes available the understanding of the pre-colonial disagreement of two African societies. This film delves into a variety of issues such as the kinship structures of different societies and the position of women in a traditional setting. Djibril Diop Mambety's *Touki-Bouki* (The Hyena's journey; Senegal, 1973), describes the mentality of African youths who wish leaving their home countries to seek haven in different European cities. The film in question is also preoccupied with how creative and innovative use of oral tradition in the construction of cinematic narrative structure can bring about authenticity and enhancement of the aesthetics of Black African cinema.

Sail Faye's feature-length film *Kaddu Beykat* (*Peasant Letter*, Senegal, 1974) created an impression in international film festivals. It was recognised as an authentic African ethnographic film which was structured in the form of a letter to a friend about Senegalese village life. The film is laden with themes of village life, temporality, and work from dawn to dusk. Ababacar Samb-Makharam's *Jom*, co-produced with Germany's *ZweitesDeutschenFernsehen* (ZDF television) is an exceptionally good example of African cinematic strategy with total reliance on oral tradition. The film, a griot tells the story of Dieri Dior (Oumar Seck) who murders a French colonial administrator. The griot is characterized with multiple functions. He plays the role of a musician, a dancer, and a storyteller. He is regarded as the embodiment of oral tradition. Gaston Kaboré's *Wend Kuuni* (God's Gift, Burkina Faso, 1982) delivers a nerve-racking display of a family-oriented film designed to tell the African oral tale of a young boy's traumatic experience of losing a family and finding another.

What is evident in the above sketch of films by African filmmakers is not simply their preoccupation with exploring oral tradition and its deployment in traditional settings, but how they rely on oral literature as primary material upon which the adaptation of orality can be based in film. This is to make available a more realistic image of Africa in contrast to the one 'created by a colonial past and cemented by a neo-colonial present' (Ukadike, 1994, p. 1).

Storytelling, ritual, performance, re-enactment, and event in Africa itself are the concerns of many of the early films made by Africans. This form of movement in video films concerns itself more with fortune, emotion, and moral character. This kind of

cinematic movement does not ignore the difficulties of be-devilling Africa, the complications of the colonial past, or achievement of a unique autochthonous society in the post colony, since this past allows us to confront the contemporary in a way that Frank Ukadike described as ‘defiant process of signification, a demystification of occurrences, and expressions likely to assume allegorical posture.’ (1994, p. 25).

Filmmakers are aware of the past and are focused on seeking solutions to Africa’s problems. Film critic, Olivier Barlet, offers an Afrocentric perspective on oral tradition in Africa by the fastidious use of the spoken word. In this light, cinema is now ‘the prime means for magnifying speech, and it thereby acquires new legitimacy as a prime vehicle perpetuating and modernizing African speech’ (2000, p. 155). The films analysed in this study would seem to endorse African oral literature in contemporary representations of orality, and their makers in source texts as literature are examples of the possibilities of mediation practices by filmmakers and directors.

2.3 Oral Tradition and Common Uses in African Films

2.3.1 A Gestural Input of Ideology

There are prevailing and enduring images of oral tradition in African films. These images include those of idol worship, depicting the use of human beings in the form of priests who communicate with the living dead and other unseen powers such as deities, to seek power, protection and fame, including special belief systems in the exchange of communication between spirits and humans. Sacrifices are a common feature of rituals in African films, and they occur in the form of blood offering to pay homage and appease certain supernatural powers.

Dioulde Laya sees oral tradition as type of communication that is verbally transmitted by a particular people in their historic past. Some questions have been raised on the relationship between film and oral tradition. For instance, Ukadike (1994) asked whether film and oral tradition are becoming ‘a medium of expression and communication and to what extent African films are indebted to oral traditions (p.12)’. Some responses have been provided to this important question as few studies show. Mbye Cham (1982), Manthia Diawara (1989, 1996), Nwachukwu Frank Ukadike

(1994), and Alexie Tcheyuap (2011), all observe that African oral traditions (an aspect of orality), have richly spelled the aesthetic language of cinema in Sub-Saharan Africa. It is this perspective that precisely began to influence African fictional films, films that played a vital role in the diversification of culture into a multiplicity of storytelling techniques, oral narration, and imagery. In *Black African Cinema*, Nwachukwu Ukadike (1994, p. 205) notes that African filmmakers produce oral tradition mythic components and poetic resonances that are aesthetic such as imagery, language, music, dance, metaphor, and proverbs, with various techniques of film production. The aesthetic identification (with iconic features of oral tradition) can be examined in how filmmakers mediate oral tradition to revive orality in the cultural production and cinematic practice of African films as ideological tools for representation. This interest is also driven by the need for indigenous African scholars to sustain the tradition and cultural history of the continent.

2.3.2 A New Visual Grammar in Identity Construction?

The question of identity is highly implicated in the strategies deployed in films that seek to represent the African continent. The use of orality modes is also the vessel for producing knowledge at the same time as they throw into sharp relief, how they make claims and contest received pearls of wisdom about Africa. In the world of African filmmaking, orality queries their uses and abuses, with effect on thematic and aesthetic directions that such films may take. Many West African filmmakers claim to adapt (oral) tale formats and narrative codes to the film; others use griot characters to narrate the filmic diegesis in the form of a tale. Some other works weave narrated (oral) tales into the main diegesis of a tale, and some adapt actual (oral) tales in the cinema using animal masks and puppets (Gugler, 1993, p.59). In some instances, there is a claim to 'return to the source'. This means oral narrative traditions for stories as well as styles and techniques to tell their stories, while some look towards stories written in European languages. Reflections on the so-called adaptation of orality in films as mentioned might be more productive if we can provide scholarly evidence to demonstrate the importance of production and reception in the media system of representation in addressing the question of identity. This study, therefore, aims to provide a deeper understanding of orality in West African films to suggest a distinct interpretation of

filmmakers' mediation of identity. To this end, a different model is proposed in this study which can overcome the limitations of existing studies by drawing attention to orality based on West African oral tradition. By focusing on orality in films, the peculiar West African ways of communicating their oral aesthetics, traditional belief systems, and discursive context become distinct. This thesis shows how orality derived from literature is structured in film to convey identity.

2.3.3 Indigenous Filmmaking: Identity in Crisis

Julie Papaioannou (2010) in her essay debates the theory, position, and ethnocentrism of African films.²¹ Papaioannou's work summarizes discussions by directors and film theorists about the issue of orality and the framing of the concept of griots in examining the idea of African film aesthetics. Starting from the assumption that the African cinema embodies African-ness through the mimetic representation of African oral traditions (Tomaselli, 1997; Tomaselli, 2006; Tomaselli and Eke, 1995; Tomaselli et al. 1995), Papaioannou contests that the idea of African-ness in representation is ontologically stable. She questions the universal 'discourse of African originality and authenticity' (p. 147). She contends that the comprehension of orality and African-ness, considering it from a global context, has impacts on the definition and the meaning of both, especially as orality and African-ness, are symbolized and abstracted in textual representation.

In contrast, Papaioannou considers that African cinema and African-ness are not all-embracing entities; that they are dependent on more spectatorship than on authorship. Papaioannou opines that the spectator gives meanings with their individual references of cognition. The spectatorial embodied experience created is the contextualization of orality that makes meaning of the cultural representation of alternative histories. Based on that, Papaioannou contends that orality has not only the filmmaker who masters the 'oral economy of writing', but also the audience, as well as the visual properties of the

²¹ Commentators have observed some limitations about Papaioannou (2010) work on spectatorship. For instance, Tomaselli and Shepperson's argument is that Western psychoanalytic film theory is underpinned by semiological/structuralist text-based British Screen Theory. In their view, screen theory is inadequate to the task of explaining ethnographies of reception and textual interpretation amongst African-based viewers whose primary encounter with language is via orality, and whose experience of family is rarely reflective of the supposed Western nuclear form. See Tomaselli, K.G. and Shepperson, A. (2011). 'Mirror Communities and Straw Individualisms: Essentialism, Cinema and Semiotic Analysis'.

medium that intensify the cinematic ‘writing’ of oral traditions. Relying on Homi Bhabha’s notion of ‘the interstitial space of conflicting relationships’ that produces meanings (p. 151), Papaioannou argues that the competing discursive defining of orality in African cinema make up ‘the interstitial space,’ shaping the interdependent relationship between the African cinema and other cinemas. Her study has several implications: first, orality is relatable to African cultures and there are several empirical tools to set up them. Second, is her questioning of African film criticism based on the poetics of orality as ‘perpetuating the schism between tradition and modernity’ (2010, p. 155). Her work seems to have positioned Africa within the binary opposition of tradition and modernity. The issues raised by Papaioannou can be examined in how film functions as secondary orality. The critical analyst might examine questions of structures of the film, narrative, and subjectivity, and questions of identity within a framework that incorporates adaptation and orality theories across a broad spectrum of ideas. The work also completely evades the importance of adaptation of oral-based literature in engaging the subject of orality in films.

2.3.4 New Technique of Expression: Oral Tradition as Backbone

African film theory work on adaptation of oral narratives to the screen (Diawara, 1996; Thackway, 2003, p. 49-92); Azzedine Mabrouki puts it, this adaptation process involves ‘a mediation between the written books and the African audiences’ (quoted in Diawara, 1996, p. 133). Whatever one may think about Mabrouki’s judgment, it is argued that critical paradigms based on oral traditions are appropriate for analyzing films made by African directors, because Western film theory focused too much on individual subjects (Pfaff, 1984; Diawara, 1988; Ukadike, 1994; Armes, 2006).

These competing voices have challenged the dominant Eurocentric hegemonic discourse on film culture and contributed to a growing discussion about the relationship between film and orality. In its style, African films adopt an intense sense of orality as inherent to the definition of African culture. This sense of orality was mostly through aesthetics of spoken words - proverbs, dance, songs, praise poetry as well as the performance associated with them. Ukadike (1994) documents it thus:

‘Cinema came to Africa as a potent organ of colonialism. Films proved to be a powerful tool for indoctrinating Africans into foreign cultures, including their ideals and aesthetics’ (p.8).

No doubt, this form of colonialism supported Western cinematic representations of Africa's dominant Hegelian vision as a continent with no history and no culture. Buttressing this fact, Mgbejume (1989) contends that:

“The early films that were shown to the African audiences before the locally made films were produced overseas and sent by the colonial government ‘as a benevolent gesture of tutelage to the colonial people’” (quoted in Foluke Ogunleye, *African Film: Looking Back and Looking Forward*, 2014, p.15)

Colonial cinema nevertheless served as a means through which colonialism stressed the need for the actual disruption of the system and cultural values inheritances of Africa.²² Filmmakers tend to retrace their roots, that is orality, to construct a cinema of Africa. Such practice offers evidence of the historical context and discourse informing their production, whether in rural or urban setting. It also supplies information about cultural and social identities over time. Niyi Adebajo (2017) describes the orientation of orality toward African cinema as serving a psychotherapeutic purpose. In African films, orality is privileged as an abiding way of visualizing the historical past and a tool for revitalizing and rejuvenating African cultural heritage that is fast receding into the abyss of Western prejudice.

2.3.5 Storytelling Continuity

Recent African cinema research has linked oral tradition to storytelling techniques employed by griot. For instance, Mbye Cham (1982) compares filmmaker Ousmane Sembène's capability to tell a story to that of the *gewel* (storyteller) and the *lekbat* (also storyteller).

In The Cinema of Sembène Ousmane, Françoise Pfaff investigates oral tradition to show the influence of the griot. The work asserts that Sembène is a replacement for the griot because he chronicles his people's history, but his films can also be compared in some respect to the traditional Yoruba theatre and *Ikaki* masquerade.

²² Mgbejume's comment relates to the development of colonial film unit in West Africa quoted in Cinema, G. (2014). Chapter 1 Ghanaian Cinema: A Historical Appraisal. Kwaw Ansah. *African Film: Looking Back and Looking Forward*, 5.

In addition to examining the adaptation elements of both films, Akinyemi also explores the work of the screenwriter, Akinwunmi Isola, who relies heavily on Yoruba oral history and legend in his writing of the film scripts for *Saworo Ide/ Brass Bells* and *Agogo Èèwò/Gong of Taboo*. Not only did *Saworo Ide/ Brass Bells* and *Agogo Èèwò/Gong of Taboo* rely on Yoruba history, Akinyemi argues that the screenwriter devised a means through which he incorporated many different Yoruba oral genres into his modern literary texts to articulate political and ideological positions. For Isola, oral literature such as songs serve primarily as vehicles for constructing coherent modes to articulate a vision. Songs in the films are vital to aid in recognizing the place of allegory in many African narrative forms and appreciation of the multi-layered and often highly political nature of filmmaking. Folksongs as thus employed by Isola, connote the castigation of corruption and for raising social consciousness.

The films harbor certain subversive elements: for instance, in *Agogo Èèwo*, Isola transforms Yoruba folksong to criticize the ruling class for administrative incompetence, corruption, embezzlement of public funds, favoritism, and insensitivity to the plight of the masses. The narration of Yoruba folktales is often accentuated with music, singing, drumming, and dancing. The scene of continual songs, which are usually poetical and proverbial is a remarkable example of the activation of the adaptation of text through film. As an improvised verbal art, this has been used to illuminate the expression of the characters of the story, elevate individual performance to communal performance, and be accessible to audiences within and outside West Africa. Such a belief in performance, coupled with a profound consideration of knowledge and worldviews through orality, seems to have surfaced in many video films, and most powerfully in the films under focus in this study. Abodyade (2013, p.2) indicates that:

“In pre-literate Nigeria as well as most pre-literate societies, people used narratives, myths, songs, and performances as forms of recording momentous events and thus transforming them into memorable experiences or history for future generation. Myths, legends and epic narratives, songs and praise poems and heroic citations were created to communicate people’s historical consciousness, especially events and memorable deeds in the lives of the people.”

With the disruptions driven by modernity because of colonialism, the indigenous oral tradition is still revered. However, there is a necessity to continuously improve this oral tradition by making it relevant as a valuable aesthetic tool in contemporary society. Some other works have examined oral tradition's focus on identity.

As Adesokàn (2005) argues Yorùbá films are majorly identified by social struggles. Àlà mú (1990) and Adélékè (1995) consider genre as a means of identifying the films. Àlà mú's genre classification is broken into the following themes: "folkloric, historical, crime, and comic" and Odejebi classifies Yorùbá films genres into "crime, myth, sex or love, political, nonfiction, religious, comic, tragic, hooligan" (quoted in Odejebi, 2004, p.9-10).

Ukadike (1994) describes how folktale in African film enhances the language as indigenous, intimate, and personal, as such folktale maximizes interaction among the receivers—the collective. In the same manner, Omoera (2014) situates *Ebuwa* (2009) and *Adesuwa* (2012) as Benin language video films because they draw from the rich repertoire of Benin history, imagery, music, dance, language, and so on, especially as they pertain to the Benin Oba (King) who embodies the customs and traditions of the Benin culture. This form of popular culture genre is important in understanding the relationship between the Benin people, their language, and oral forms in the films concerning the film, *Invasion 1897*.

The epic series *Things Fall Apart* (1987) has origins in the Igbo tradition of southeastern Nigeria. They have occupied present-day Nigeria, and although there are no official records, their oral tradition contains varied sources of origins in parables, oral history, and folktales. The Igbos speak Igbo as their traditional language although the dialects differ in accent, speed, gesture, and meaning. Pre-colonial southern Nigeria culture has historical antecedents with sub-regional as well as trans-Saharan relationships with European missionaries. As such, this external affiliation is synthesized into a form of culture. In regions such as Igbo, Yoruba, and Benin Kingdom, the popular culture of orality (proverb, folk songs, and praise poetry) provides the narrative template for articulating these cultures.

2.4 African literature

2.4.1 Literature of Revival

African literary scholars such as Chinweizu, Jemie, and Madubuike (1983) have defended African culture against what they perceive to be the imperialist thrust of contemporary literary theory and critical methodologies. These scholars rightly argue about the ‘*Africanness*’ of African works of literature thus:

African literature has its traditions, models, and norms And its historical and cultural imperatives impose upon it concerns and constraints quite different, sometimes altogether antithetical to the European²⁴

Most African playwrights, such as Soyinka, Osofisan, Sowande, Ngugi, Obafemi, Yerima and a host of others, have deployed African oral modes in manners that reveal not only their latent meanings but much more their artistic possibilities, especially in ‘capturing the oppressiveness of our contemporary society’ (Adebanjo, 2017 p.48). It is for this reason that Craig Tapping’s work relates the above position of literary scholars to the structures and attendant ideologies of oral traditions in African culture — as shown through the way orality informs what is written by Africans.²⁵ Understandably, Tapping argues that ‘we do not have to read Western theorists to learn about African orality in the first place.’ (1990 p.74). By this, Tapping asserts that ‘the distinctive parent of African literature, orality, is both reservoir and repertoire of traditions, models, and norms to which the critics allude, and which define the literature as African.’ (p.74). Interestingly, this model of orality in African literature is instrumental to this study as it reinforces the importance of African literature as source text in film. These efforts attest to the fact that the consciousness of our oral literature forms a strong perception of linking aspects of modern texts (films) with indigenous knowledge systems.

²⁴ For this production-consumption image I am indebted to Julianne Burton, ‘Marginal Cinemas and Mainstream Critical Theory.’

²⁵ See Craig Tapping, “Voices Off: Models of Orality in African Literature and Literary Criticism,” *ARIEL: A Review of International English literature* 213 (1990): 73-86

2.4.2 Weapon of Contestation

In *Postcolonial African Cinema*, Kenneth Harrow asks, who has the innate right or correct upbringing that enables that person to understand or speak about African texts? (Harrow 2002, p. xi). Harrow's position is that theory is a crucial weapon in contesting essentialist arguments about culture, examined through a highly sophisticated application and development of psychoanalytic film theory. Interestingly, his argument is a sign that the study of African cinema has not only come of age, but that it is also now a branch of general cinema studies which deserves its form of theoretical explanations.

2.4.3 Ontologically Unstable: An Encounter within the Cinematic Space

Emphasizing the cinematic embodiment of orality in film, Tomaselli (1997) shares a similar recognition of such embodied experiences in nonfiction; for him, videotape, or video technology, is mimetic and able to make meaningful representations of life about a context (p. 100). Driven by this adaptation capability, it is important to have it in mind that Tomaselli is writing in the vein of 'encounter', so he is consciously seeking to discover the nebulous terrain of various film modes. And this in-betweenness is precisely what is significant for this study. Tomaselli (1997) relates the concept of 'encounter' to characterize oral forms of life, thereby rejecting the solipsistic privileging of the individual to the community. In the embodied encounter between the filmmaker and oral literature, both are operating in a mutual world interacting experientially. The dynamic experience embodied in the film is closer to the essence of orality, as 'orality creates an ontology based on interacting forces rather than on concrete objects.' (p. 93). Put, orality is not a set of fixed or symbolized objects and is thus subjected to visualized signs, that can be mediated in film.

The filmmaking apparatus is an interesting tool for understanding this form of encounter because of its ability to magnetize literature and other art forms. So, we now have several interrelated points to contend with the delineation of issues in film's interaction with oral forms as secondary orality: the implausibility of separating non-fiction and reality, the difficulty of separating theory and practice, questions of identity,

and debates of oral and its technologized state, and how ideology is constructed in film. Essentially the examination of orality in cinema and film is not easy to make.

2.5 Popular Verbal Arts

The intersection of popular verbal art such as West African oral tradition in film constitutes an important case for investigating film as a secondary orality. In the context of this study, oral tradition is used to refer to specific forms (such as songs, praise poetry, and proverbs) that privilege certain literary heritage, thereby making the version of literature as source for aiding specific ideologies in film. The growth of research in film as an academic practice suggests its privilege as performative to produce knowledge. The incorporation of cinematic technologies promoted such performative acts and mimicry, from sound recording devices, to filmic devices such as cinema and video tapes. African filmmakers generally either identify a location, town, or city by its oral forms or reference it through distinctive features of forms, signifiers, and so on.

They are known to be shared and handed down; because they have been constituted precisely and are transmittable in time and disseminated in space (Barber, 2003, p. 266). Various African art forms are still profoundly marked by the predominantly (but by no means exclusively) oral nature of culture in sub-Saharan Africa, otherwise known as 'Orature'. The term refers to 'the moral character of the literature' (Okpewho, 1991, p. 4). The transmission of learning via a system of proverbs, praise poetry, and folksongs helps to account for the predominant role that 'orature' continues to play in West Africa. Orature is treated both as a source—the origin and precursor of 'modern' literature—and as a resource—a rich heritage of themes, motifs, images, and techniques upon which the 'modern' author can draw.

According to Abiola Irele, the 'distinctive mark' of written African literature in European languages is 'the striving to attain the condition of oral expression, even within the boundaries established by Western literary conventions' (Irele, 1990, p. 63). African audiences can thus recognize, or at least imagine, that they understand the character and voice depicted in the film. African filmmakers in turn offer an engagement with oral forms that are personal and idiosyncratic, and ultimately more

revealing of a locale's peculiar character, as motivated by filmmakers' choice. This means that the experience conveyed in the film can be different from other voices of that space and time.

This thesis builds on the assumption that the oral forms under discussion have appeared in literature at a crucial point in time - the emergence of cinematography²⁶ in Africa in the 1960s. It sets out to examine film as a medium for thinking about the mediation of orality in identity construction by way of showing *Invasion 1897*, *Karmen Gei*, and *Xala* as figureheads for this endeavor and by assessing their potential to reflect film's secondary orality. Examples to be used in the study include the use of King Ovanramwen's praise poetry in *Invasion 1897*, drumbeats in *Karmen Gei*, and celebratory chants in *Xala*.

Praise Poetry

Karin Barber has extensively studied the Yoruba praise poetry – *Oriki*. This form of praise poetry incorporates divination verses and riddles, in each case, displaying them as recognizable genres; whereas singing tends to resound to the honor of the person being praised. Strongly marked, immediately recognizable genre characteristics are retained. For example, the characteristic question and answer format of riddles, the chain structure of poems where a small incident leads inexorably to huge consequences in a tightly controlled sequence, or the unvarying narrative pivot of Ifa verses in which a string of named legendary diviners “did ‘divination’” or a named client (Barber 1991a; 1999a).

Christopher Waterman defines *oriki* in Yoruba musicals as a “mode of linguistic self-actualization which activates the subject's potentials” (1994, p. 7). The *oriki* praise poetry or appellations of traditional rulers are beautiful, full of lessons, and sweet to the ears, and they show the heroic character of their subjects. Through ‘*oriki*’, we can discover almost everything that happened in their time.

²⁶ This aspect is outlined in various FEPACI interventions and is devoted to cultural and political programmatic statements, which feature manifestoes, declarations, and other proclamations and pronouncements by black and Third World filmmakers, as well as the counter-hegemonic organizing activities of institutional entities concerned with filmmaking in the African diaspora.

Finnegan (2017, p. 111) attributes ‘praise names’ as basis of formal praise poetry. ‘Most praise poetry, above all the official types, seems to adopt an obscure and allusivestyle. The language may be archaic and lofty; there are often references to historical events or people who may need interpretation even to local listeners, and figurative forms of expression are common, especially frequent are comparisons of the person praised to an animal or series of animals.’ (Finnegan, 2017, p. 117).

Praise poetry is notable for its evocative, second-person address and its simultaneous evocation of the past and the present, bringing the powers and potentials of dead predecessors to the center of the living community. A central characteristic feature of praise poetry in Africa is the ‘nominalized’ statement – a sentence converted into an epithet. In conversion, the statement becomes compacted; it loses its temporal markers and becomes an allusion to a timeless state of being explained. In this study, I extend this understanding by examining how praise poetry as an oral tradition evokes cultural memory in African films.

Folk Songs

Folk songs are the unconscious expression in the melody of feelings, characters, and interests of people. Lloyd (1968) notes that folksong has become so much a part of the heritage of a group or nation that there is a feeling of common ownership whether the composer is known. In the view of Ofori (1989), folksong is any traditional song that is of obscure and indeterminate antiquity but has passed into general currency and acceptance. From the above definitions, it is seen that folksongs are always tightly bound to a culture within which they fulfill positive functional purposes. At the same time, folksongs show a degree of continuity and link the present to the past, even though they are created by anonymous individuals and transmitted orally by singers. Because the preservers of these traditions are mainly a pre-literate class of people, they have developed a peculiar musical craftsmanship in choices of text, and high powers of memory and handed down their traditions in a form made suitable for oral transmission.

As Karin Barber rightly observed, the Yoruba theatrical productions share commonalities with the Yoruba language – its idioms, archaisms, slang and dialectical peculiarities, and its sacred and secret registers (Barber, 2000, p. 2). These complexities could be said to underpin the diverse meaning of orality as drum language.

These are the various kinds of oral traditions in film. Whenever the medium of literature has negotiated its own potential and new avenues, *Invasion 1897*, *Karmen Gei*, and *Xala* were not far. Through the effects of orality, they have anticipated the transformative powers of the medium of film. Two of the literary works have been identified as melodramas: firstly, the unexpected exile of King Ovanremen in Benin Massacre; the curse of 'Xala' that created impotency on the hero (anti-hero) El Hadji Abdou Kader Beye on the night of his wedding to his third wife. 'Xala' uses a technique of a third-person omniscient narrator. The reader has access to each character's private thoughts and emotions but is not limited to one character's point of view. Conventionally narrated in first person account, 'Benin Massacre' features a problematically ambiguous narrator. At many points, a personal account seems to rely on the testament of others as a sort of cultural wholesomeness. The access to the massacre thus is mediated through multiple voices that appear willing to remain silent. 'Xala' is notable for the use of pidgin, proverbs, African languages, and tales within novels.

2.6 Conclusion

In this chapter, I examined the relevant literature to complement the empirical study of film. Based on its interdisciplinary nature, I relied on various resources from different fields; nonetheless, they were relevant for contextualization. Besides the literature in the film and orality fields in this chapter, I reviewed some works on the sociocultural context with a particular focus on the studies of adaptation in African cinema, a useful source for my exploration of adaptation of literature were literary scholars and writers whose work represents a vivid example of adaptation studies within scholarship. Among the literature surveyed, I found a lack of systematic focus on the issue of adaptation of orality in literature which certainly deserves more attention. I undertake this study to partially fill this gap and propose further investigation on the adaptation of orality and the mediation of orality in West African film using textual analysis as a methodology. In this sense, I used this study to contribute to the theoretical and empirical aspects of film studies especially African cinema and video films. In the subsequent chapter, I expatiate the methodology deployed in the study in detail.

Chapter Three

Methodology

3.0 Introduction

This section explores the method, choice of films, and procedure for analysis of films adapted from literature about language, protest, and storytelling. This study examines film mainly in relation to orality in West Africa. The method includes an analytical approach to the films; their oral tradition and other oral forms and acknowledges the strengths and weaknesses of the available sources. It also describes the central concepts that are of film in the study, adaptation, and text, and how they inform the study's aim and objectives.

The methodological approach of this study is extensive as it addresses wider issues. The analysis of films should employ a systematic approach in investigating the narrative structures of film texts, their conditions of production and reception, and the societal contexts involving a combination of multiple levels of textual analysis. That means recognizing how every filmic representation is a subjective construction, which is selected from a myriad of possible representations, and which is also decided by interests. With respect to films, the processes of mediation have to be thoroughly examined in three ways: first, about the intentions, on the part of producers or institutions (individual filmmakers or Nollywood), which bolster the media products; second, referring to the structure of films – about the functions that the individual components have in relation to the whole film; and third, about the audience reception. These processes are set in the analytical framework chapter. The aim is to understand the mediation process such as the use of content, acting, dramaturgy, narrative, and aesthetics which plays just as much a role as the contexts that the filmic structures and audiences are bound up in. The film structures can be examined in three distinctive ways: as regards the unity of a film in terms of content and narrative; second as regards the creative means directed for viewers' attention and perception; and third as regards the communicative process and its contexts, to facilitate the meaning and interpretation of a film. As an audio-visual material, film is made meaningful in the framework of discourse, reception, and appropriation.

The major aim is to engage in the analysis of the filmic mediation of questions of identity through orality adapted from literature. The underlying idea behind the emphasis on film's analysis is to unveil certain sorts of signs, indexical, symbolic, and connotative, especially with reference to wider systems of meaning embedded in a filmic text. The text is a complex and structured arrangement of signs, rather than an empty vehicle for the transmission of information (Moore, 1993, p. 6). Originally, rooted in the Latin verb *textō*, which means to weave or tie things together, or fabricate something, it refers to the 'construction made of words and visuals and presented for consumers on the screen' (Jensen, 2002, p.117).

To be able to understand the ideologies behind every film, I propose a deconstruction process. Deconstruction is an interpretive practice in terms of that text in every text it deals with. It is a system of thought in which the difference and the heterogeneous are emphasized, and the difference is always sought within the same (Derrida, 2014, p.38-39). Derrida's use of the term refers to a way of reading with the intention of unmasking a text or more pointedly, can produce multiple types of meaning. It is also about understanding the idea that it is through editing, dubbing, using oral forms such as oral tradition or music or certain sound effects, and combining audio-visual scenes that filmmakers have a preferred targeted meaning embedded in the texts, while at the same time positioning individuals to distinguish between a text's preferred meaning and the ones audiences bring to the reading of such a text.

To be able to grasp the ideological presuppositions behind filmic text, most film scholars have adopted textual and visual analyses. Stuart Hall's (1977) theory of reading media texts has constantly been applied to media analysis (Morley, 1981; Ang, 1996; Livingstone, 1990; Lull, 1990) this has proven effective in analysing texts by deconstructing them critically. Michael Real (1996) identifies three main steps to be taken in the analysis of media texts (whether violent, pornographic, or non-controversial (orality), 'we read, we comprehend, and we interpret. My choice of selected films is based on the need to overcome the challenges of analysis such as the volatility of moving images, the general infinity of analysis, and the lack of a universal method of analysis. To this end, I operationalize the methods of analysis in a way that takes account of the conditions of the research and objectives.

Similarly, the research is guided by 14 steps developed by Mikos (2008, p. 82–95) namely; development of a general cognitive purpose; watching the visual material; theoretical and historical reflection; development of a concrete cognitive purpose; development of questioning and sampling of the material for analysis. These initial steps are important to reduce the general infinity and define more precisely the scope of the film analysis, a prerequisite for fixing the volatility of moving images and pivotal in resolving the mediation of orality.

The choice of video films accessible online and DVD players as analytic tools is important for the collection of data and preparatory work for the analysis. I have selected films that over time have attracted a lot of criticism about which much has been written and researched; films that have been largely ‘canonized’ as significant in African film scholarship. Apart from *Invasion 1897*, each film has already attracted significant secondary literature. Such literature is purposeful at various points in the research as evidence of the secondary text of the respective film and importantly treated as inventory of the film component. At the same time, key texts traced within that literature act as secondary texts of film scholarship on which I draw, both conceptually and as sources of information for the interpretation and contextualization of analyzed data.

My methodological approach is to focus on films that have been adapted from literature means that the emphasis of the study is not on the oral tradition per se, and the use of hitherto unknown oral forms, but on the application of a fresh analytical approach to film studies. Before the analysis, there should be a description of our data material: a brief description of the content of the films, and a brief description of the characters and of the aesthetic tools. Now the concrete analysis begins. We look intensely at the films' orality and relate them to each other. For each film we can analyze the adaptation of orality, how it is staged by camera position and movement, and how the cutting and music support the emotional elements of this in visual. The next step is the interpretation and contextualization of the analyzed data. Here, I enrich our results with theoretical and historical insights. This thesis deploys the qualitative research technique, which investigates issues by analyzing primary data through concepts, terminologies, and textual articulations. This study adopts textual analysis, in particular *mise-en-scene*. The secondary sources are in the form of existing literature in the field

of humanities such as books, magazines, e- journals, articles, and a host of others, which provide valuable resource information about the oral aesthetic tradition, African identity, and the adaptation of novels into films. Libraries and the internet were also consulted for germane information for this thesis.

The author examines literature and finds traces of orality, analyzes the text, and draws parallels with the adapted film. I have watched and studied the films for their relevance to the research questions. These texts have attracted a lot of attention in various forms including reviews at premiere, commentaries on internet-based blogs, and criticism, and most of them are adapted from books, novels, and research in scholarly works. In West Africa, where many ethnic sub-cultures exist, filmic representation is replete with many African oral literatures. The application of an ethnographic reading and poststructuralist approach would be less productive in understanding the mediation of orality in West African films instead this study chooses a textual analysis perspective which looks to examine the interplay between orality and literature, literary, cinematic texts, and ideology.

In other to get to the meaning of such text, the approach must be intertextual. Of importance to this study is the adaptation of canonical text especially traditional arts – songs, praise poetry, and proverbs in films. Until now only a few studies have examined how adaptation of canonical text is influenced by oral literature. From the perspective of creating narratives imbued with originality films *Invasion 1897*, *Xala*, and *Karmen Gei* are appreciated for combining cinematic conventions with oral literature.

I approach the study of films modeled around African traditional culture. I also consult secondary materials on specific oral forms of West Africa especially Wolof, Benin and Igbo, and their meanings. This includes works from historians, poets, singers, and anthropologists, among other cultural mediators which provide a rich source of information regarding the meanings, origins, and significance of oral forms. I use the scholarly engagements relevant to the thesis as source text. And I examine the relationship between film and other source texts (such as novels) using discursive context as a tool.

3.1 Discursive Context

By context, I mean the interaction of film text which happens in historical, economic, juridical, technical, cultural, and social-societal contexts. Film texts only acquire meaning through interacting with their audience. This study adopts various insights from analyzing film at three operational levels: configuration, representation, and reception aesthetics. Their engagement shows the degree of complexity of the film's orality. By analyzing the textual structure of films, it is possible to explain its orality as language, protest, and storytelling.

3.1.1 Configuration as Narration

West African films are configured in a specific way. By configuration, I mean the ways by which films are presented and configured to inculcate certain ideology in the audience. Yet even if the media reduce the complexity of the real world, film images are in themselves still notably complex. This suggests the 'visual richness' of the images (Chatman, 1990 p.39) The narratives arising in the audiences' mind also rest on what people know about the ways films represent things and are configured in the visual, something closely linked to what people know about narratives also known as the discourse of films (see Chatman, 1993, p. 146–61; Tolson, 1996 p. 41–3) or about style (Belton, 2009 p. 41; Bordwell and Thompson, 2010 p.143–4).

Analyzing the configuration of the films is of particular significance. This is because they guide the viewers' attention. In addition, they support the plot thereby showing the narrative function they serve. They serve the viewers with indications that contribute to the understanding of a film's narrative, and also, they can also create suspense about what happens next. The aforementioned, are the reasons why they are important for the story in the viewers' minds. In analyzing the formal, stylistic means, we must look at images both individually and in their mutual interactions. The latter then becomes clear when the individual elements are presented in their narrative function.

In the framework of analysis, that then means precisely proving these aspects and relating them through filmic ways of depiction to what the audience knows, to contribute to making this process recognizable. How a film's orality is configured can be achieved through camera positioning, production design, lighting, sound, music,

special effects, montage, and editing, respectively. Apart from editing, all elements belong to what film studies also call *mise-en-scène*. In this way, we can, for example, use analysis to investigate film's orality as filmic code or as a specific form of language.

Like other recent works, this study engages in an analysis of the mediation of West African orality in films through recognizable signs. This means the deployment of textual analysis which accounts for how meaning is produced. In this sense, filmmakers were seen to transmit certain ideological imprints to promote propaganda, stereotypes, interests, and stories through (oral forms), signs, and symbols that can be understood and related to reality. Therefore, the purpose of film analysis is to deconstruct and interpret the ideology behind the production and mediation of texts. As Jensen (2002) notes.

“a film is not only a sequence of moving images but also an organized mixture of images, words, texts, music and noises that are characterized by a constant displacement and circulation of meaning” (p.134)

The study also investigates meanings in films by decoding film symbols (texts). West African films adapted from literature embody much of the narrative that could be read to illustrate that filmic text conveys a diverse range of meanings of societies and their cultures like other mainstream cinemas in the West.

“Reading” implies there is a text made up of visual or aural symbols from which meanings can be constructed; we comprehend by positioning the text in some kind of “frame”, and then; we interpret them by relating the sense of what is going on to what the author seems to intend and to the extra textual points of reference (p.103). We focus on the framing to guide our examination of the mediation and implications of West African films' representation of orality.

The readings of the video films contained in subsequent chapters purposefully carry oral forms from that which the textual analyses present West African cinematic adaptation more like a layering than an unfolding. The close readings of texts are intended to suggest variations in aesthetics, narrative form, and modes of spectator

engagement reiterated across video film texts. Stam and Spence (1999) would argue in the case of ‘Third Cinema’,

“Marginalized audiences tend to read mainstream films as racially coded, but such an aberrant reading can also proceed in itself in a racist fashion whereby the ethnocentric prejudices of a particular critic or an interpretative community can influence the textual readings” (p. 249).

The idea that textual analysis may lead to aberrant reading and ethnocentric prejudices may be problematized when using visual analysis to enrich the discussion on the films. Besides, it will enable the study to overcome dominant readings of the text as most existing study on West African films reveal (for instance Adedeji, 1971; Akudinobi, 2001; Diawara, 1988, 1992, 1996, 1999; Nwachukwu, 1994; Bakari and Cham, 1996; Larkin, 1997; Okome, 2007; Zacks, 1995; Schmidt, 1985; Pfaff, 1992; Petty, 1992; Murphy, 2000; Tomaselli, Shepperson, and Eke, 1995; Haynes, 1995) in which they analyzed representations of genocide, ideology, memory, feminism, and identity in African and non-African films to reveal the differences in film texts and their reception among audiences.

3.1.2 Representation as Mediation

The study proceeds that the second level of analyzing films is closely related to establishing meaning in terms of representation. Every oral tradition in the visual constitutes form, a specific area of concern in the analysis of film is how the form is represented and, by that, how it contributes to the production of meaning and the social construction of societal reality. Hall (1997) defines representation as ‘the production of meaning through language’ (p.28). It is a collective process by which individuals are active in producing meaning. That is, representation is more accurately ‘the process by which members of a culture use language to produce meaning’ (Hall, 1997 p.61). In this case, every sort of sign system counts as language, and that includes films that are ‘organized into languages of various kinds to communicate meaningfully with others (Hall, 1997 p.28). The signs can stand for objects in the real world, but they can also stand for abstract ideas and fictional worlds. Hall suggests two systems of representation: ‘the system of signs, in which articulation happens; and the system of mental concepts, which ‘classify and organize the world into meaningful categories’

(1997 p. 28). As systems of signs, they relate to ‘historical, cultural, and social change. Representations are, therefore, a site of struggle about meaning’ (Taylor and Willis, 1999: 40).

Analyzing representation in films has a particular status. It is important to understand the processes governing the meaningful construction of the social world because subjects position themselves in society that way. As representations, film texts correspond to societal structures, through which relations of dominance and power also become manifest in texts. This is where film texts' ideological components lie. At the same time, they relate to what individuals in society know, which is what decides their positions in it (cf. Berger and Luckmann, 1971). As the texts are, however, simultaneously open to viewers' activities, they play a significant role in identity and subjectivity. On this basis, people reflect on ‘their experiences and their place in the world’ (Grossberg et al., 1998: 227). In the framework of understanding films as media of communication, the reception and appropriation of film texts become a societal praxis, in which the texts are produced based on social experience, by viewers dealing meaningfully with them in their daily routines and everyday world (Teays, 2012).

What ‘mediation’ means is approaching a film product to investigate how it is constituted as a meaningful text bound up in the cultural circulation of production and reception. This kind of analysis is strongly related to the concept of reception aesthetics (Storey, 1999 p. 64–7). The main task of the analysis is to also investigate systematically how the film works as text, that is how the audience is sutured into its meanings through its orality.

3.1.3 Reception Aesthetics as Meaning Making

To reveal the mediation processes, the study is guided by a de-constructivist approach which treats texts and audiences as different elements to be analysed. On one hand, texts are descriptors of West African oral cultures, on the other, audiences make certain meanings of the narratives in their consumption and analysis, because of this, Hall (1997) posits that ‘it is not the material world that conveys meaning to us the way it is, but the language system that we use to represent our concepts’ (p. 25). Film language

is a highly non-verbal means of communication. Turner states the site of film narratives is at the simplest level to be analyzed within a context that is both 'textual' and 'social'. Therefore, reading film to make meaning requires the audience to be conscious of 'the myths, beliefs, and practices preferred by a culture or group of cultures that produce it will find their way into those cultures' narratives where they can be reinforced, criticized, or simply reproduced (Turner, 2006 p.109).

That is, oral tradition is a useful resource of discourse for analyzing these West African films which constitute values and beliefs in the filmic texts in which O'Sullivan argues 'may serve to inform, reinforce, or challenge stereotypes' (1994, p.128). Filmic representation may categorize and reinforce stereotypes related to minorities, poor and class relations, literate and illiterates, and disadvantaged among other subaltern experiences. By this, we can explore the ways in which films are represented in codes.

Reception aesthetics means to be engaged with films. In it, the structures of film texts integrate with the allocation of meaning as well as the experience of them by the audience. Through reception, the active recipient creates the so-called received text, which, to a certain extent, denotes the concrete meaning of the 'original text'. The received text is the film that the audience has seen, and it is enriched by the meanings given to it and by the way it structures the experience. The audience uses films to shape their own identities as well as their social relations. This takes the concept of secondary orality into the realm of how film production and reception meet in a particular way. From the perspective of reception aesthetics, the analysis provides an understanding of the entire symbolic material of films – that is, of adaptation and storytelling, as well as of the creative means for attracting the audiences' attention.

Film texts contain pointers to what audiences are supposed to do, and that is how they pre-structure those activities. Seen in this light, film can therefore be regarded as social practice (Turner, 2006). Film texts can only make offers, and stage possible ways of reading themselves, to pre-structure what viewers then do. The importance of this is precisely the fact the film text is one which is 'mediated'. Film texts function as agents in the social circulation of meanings and pleasures, and they can only deploy their potential for meaning when they are integrated into social and cultural relations.

The kind of meanings generated is understood from the perspective of Fiske (1990) on the fluidity of the concept of interpretations in media audiencehood (p.164).

‘Meanings are always in process, always being made and remade, and are never completed facts. While it is always interesting and important to discover which meanings are made or preferred by texts and their socially situated readers, these meanings are never fixed, and final, but are moments in the circulation of meaning within society; indeed, meanings exist only in their circulation’ (Fiske, 1990 p. 162).

Based on the perspective, meanings exist in circulation and require a negotiated reading, one that involves a give-and-take between our views and experiences and those presented in the film text by directors. Such meanings have become bedrock both in textual and audience analysis which is the rationale for adopting such a method in the study of orality in African films. Of importance are the thematic inferences African visual cultures can generate which are significant to their knowledge of orality in the context of West Africa and Africa at large.

However, the present study limits its inquiry to assessing the implications of these lines of thought for the implication of orality in film adapted from literature in the construction of identity. This way, aspects or issues such as the word, the status of human tradition, and the processes of identity construction highlighted by Cham, (1982), Diawara (1989, 1996), Ukadike, (1994), Tcheyuap, (2011), Pfaff, (1984), Armes (2006) and Thackway (2003) form an important methodological and analytical approach to help unravel the ideological frame and structures behind the mediation to read and analyze West African films and importantly film as secondary orality.

3.2 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have described the method of analysis. Combining textual and visual analysis contributes to the meaning of the communication and discourse structure of film. The broad trends in addressing oral tradition in West African films which I examine in subsequent chapters against the backdrop of the film’s ‘orality’ and ‘adaptation’ are as I have detailed, those mediated in *Invasion 1897*, *Xala* and *Karmen Gei*. I examine the complex mediation process of identity using orality in films adapted from literature. It is my viewpoint that it proposes a way forward for understanding

identity in West Africa, for it reflects the changing forms and fluidity rather than the fixed concrete engagement in understanding typical African life.

Chapter Four

Orality as Cinematic Language in *Karmen Gei*

4.0 Introduction

This chapter examines Joseph Gai Ramaka's Afro-Senegalese reinterpretation of Georges Bizet's French opera, *Carmen*. The chapter shows that Ramaka's *Karmen Gei* stands out because it draws on orality for cinematic effect and transforms the elements of the libretto and the *opéra comique* into oral forms and oral performances that resonate with African audiences. Opera is a distinctly European form and adapting it to become "African" not only requires artistic intuition and skill but comes with its own technical and narrative difficulties and complexities. I seek to demonstrate that Ramaka is successful in this work of complex adaptation, and that his success in weaving in the themes of gender and sexuality is largely because of the incorporation of orality into the opera form, or what I will call oralised adaptation and *oralised opera*. Ramaka's oralised adaptation of *Carmen* transforms it from Western opera to an African "musical" but, more importantly, one which is driven by the quest for *teraanga* ethic rather than mere fateful romance. *Teraanga* is the Senegambian variant of what in Southern Africa is called *Ubuntu*. Thus:

Teraanga is the Wolof ethic of hospitality and reciprocity which undergirds Senegambian culture, and prescribes a range of duties in everyday life, from public etiquette to mutual financial aid, to attention to one's tired husband at the end of the day. This ethic necessitates one's presence, performance and presentation at social events; it motivates the often-excessive sartorial display and exchange of gifts that take place at weddings, naming ceremonies and the like (Mustafa 2006, p.23).

Ramaka, in a discussion of the value of using one's native language, has said that "it is not just simply the language, it is the culture itself that is being conveyed in language."²⁷ If one substitutes film for language, and *teraanga* for culture, one can immediately see the utility of considering that is *teraanga* itself that is being conveyed in *Karmen Gei*. That is, it is the spirit of *teraanga* that constitutes the framing and scaffolding of *national culture* in Senegal, and *Karmen Gei* uses Bizet's *Carmen* as an entry point to

²⁷

<https://africanfilmny.org/articles/joseph-gai-ramaka/>

assert a re-cast *teraanga* as Ramaka the artist sees it. If *teraanga* animates the Senegambian being, then a film production like *Karmen Gei* which is about freedom must draw from it too and have it as its ground. Ramaka, who has a degree in visual anthropology, has referenced Frantz Fanon and Aimé Césaire in interviews, and is therefore familiar with the animating concept of national culture which seeks to represent and capture the “aspirations of the whole people”.

Bizet’s opera has been the subject of hundreds of adaptations across the world, and Ramaka has followed the lead of multiple other directors in film and theatre in remaking this famous 1875 dramatic work about a gypsy femme fatale and fated love. Dias (2006, p.82) states that “*Carmen*’s popularity as an opera has endured through time; its global success and popularity are testimony to the opera’s ability to remain relevant in different cultures and ages.” Ramaka also blazes the trail for another African adaptation, Mark Dornford-May’s *U-Carmen Khayelitsha* (2005), with lead actress Pauline Malefane as Carmen, which takes this Spanish story by a French opera composer into the township. The respective sections of the chapter regard the biography of the filmmaker, synopsis of the film, questions of adaptation, literature review, and thematic analysis of gender, sexuality, and other themes.

4.1 “I am not a *filmmaker engagé*. I am an ordinary *citizen engagé*.”

Joseph Gai Ramaka hails from Senegal but now lives in New Orleans, US – although he says that he is a transnational citizen who is at home in Dakar as in Paris or New Orleans.²⁸ He was born in 1952 in the town of St. Louis, known to locals as Ndar, in northwest Senegal. St. Louis is the capital of the Saint-Louis Region and is located near the mouth of the Senegal River. Saint-Louis was, from 1673 to 1902, the capital of Senegal when it was still a French colony. In 1902, the capital of Senegal, and of French West Africa since 1895, was moved to Dakar. From 1920 until 1957, Ramaka’s hometown also served as the capital of the neighboring French colony of Mauritania. Essentially, St. Louis bears strong cultural scars from hundreds of years of colonial occupation, including slavery, as well traditions of resistance, which in my view are evident in *Karmen Gei*. Ramaka studied film at the well-known international film

²⁸ <https://africanfilmny.org/articles/joseph-gai-ramaka/>

school. The L'Institut des hautes études cinématographiques (IDHEC), which has produced world famous directors such as Louis Malle and Alain Resnais. Ramaka also did visual anthropology at the Paris School of Social Sciences. Ramaka's French tertiary education would have played a role in his familiarity with operatic traditions and adaptations and performances of Bizet's opera. At the same time, St. Louis, Senegal, and Africa exerted a strong influence. In an interview, Ramaka cites the St Louis context and familiarity with Prosper Mérimée's original text as some of the important reasons he chose to adapt Carmen:

Carmen is a subject that has been treated in every language, and I asked why not in my culture and language. But the real reason [for choosing Carmen] was that I grew up in St. Louis [a city in Senegal] surrounded by women: my grandmothers, my aunts, my cousins, who had a bearing that I found again in Mérimée's text. This Spanish woman [Carmen], so strong and free, with a sense of freedom pushed to the extreme, I often found again in those women who surrounded me, and who continue to surround me. Thus, I had no desire to search elsewhere. When I saw the different versions of Carmen, such as Godard's film [*Prénom Carmen*] or *Carmen Jones*, I found incarnations of Carmen that I already knew. (Barlet 2000:118).

Essentially, Ramaka's version of Carmen is Senegalese and African, with international influences. In 1990, he founded the French production and distribution company, Les Ateliers de l'Arche, and the Orleans Afrikan Film Festival in 2007, and Goree Island Cinema in 2013. Asked about his approach to storytelling, Ramaka states that:

First, I work a lot on the text which takes most of my time. What nourishes me, though, is a vision of life that has its source in Africa. The mental disposition from which I write is a "surrealist" understanding of the world. This way of seeing the world pre-dates the more recent concept in Europe. It's a way of thinking about the world that, for example, is illustrated in the text *Leuk the Rabbit* [*Leuk et le lièvre* by Abdoulaye Sadjou and Léopold Sédar Senghor] or in Emmanuel Dongala's *Jazz and Palm Wine*. I believe that in Africa surrealism is a way not only of thinking about the world but projecting oneself onto it. This way of thinking completely liberates you. Everything is possible when you start from this point of view. So, it's not only a vision of the world as it is but opens up a possible way of transforming it. The weakness of those who are leading Africa is that they don't think of this way of transforming the continent. This replaces ideology. The link between this way of thinking and cinema is quite natural because cinema

is a place where everything is possible. Cinema is a place where one can stop the sun from setting, if one wishes.²⁸

Ramaka's vision of and philosophy of filmmaking is thus rooted in Africa and in a complex mix of tradition, modernity, and experimentation. Above all, he is fiercely committed to the search for a viable future for Africa that is not tied to colonial and neo-colonial posturing. Rather, he is involved in a search for the "new". Ramaka's films include *Baaw-Naan* (1985), *Nitt...N'doxx* (1988), *Ainsi soit-il* (1997), *Karmen Gei* (2001), *And What If Latif Was Right* (2005), *It's My Man* (2009) and *Mba mi* (2020). *And What If Latif Was Right* won the Best Documentary Film Award at the Vues d'Afrique Festival in 2006. Joseph Gai Ramaka is the first African filmmaker to adapt and "Africanise" Carmen. Indeed, he may even be the only African filmmaker to adapt Carmen for the screen if one considers that Dornford-May, although now based in South Africa, is a British theatre and film director). Ramaka describes his filmmaking philosophy and practice as *cinema engagé*, "a concept and practice of filmmaking that engages with social issues, politics, and the real-life conditions of people and their efforts to mobilize for change".²⁹ Furthermore, Ramaka says that "My concerns are not as a filmmaker, but rather as a citizen who happens to be a filmmaker and who believes that he has the means to act as a citizen with what he knows best. Things are not right in my country. What can I do as a citizen? If I were a writer, I would write. Cinema is the site from where I can act as a citizen."³⁰ That is, Ramaka's conception of his work as a filmmaker is that he puts himself in the firing line along with other ordinary citizens. Filmmaking is, for him, not an elite business. More importantly, by saying "I am not a *filmmaker engagé*. I am an ordinary *citizen engagé*," he frames how he can more directly draw on the people's experiences and everyday culture as the sources of his filmmaking ideas. His stories come from experience rather than the disengaged researcher's gaze. At any rate, the ethic of *teraanga*, central to being Senegalese, is lived and engaged.

²⁹ <https://africanfilmny.org/articles/joseph-gai-ramaka/>
³⁰ [ibid](#)

4.2 Synopsis

Karmen Gei is a film about the protagonist, Karmen (Djeinaba Diop Gai), a tall beautiful dark-skinned outlaw and descendant of freedom fighters (“Karmen, granddaughter of Kumba Kastel”) who lives and loves dangerously. She also loves to sing, flirt, and dance. Karmen is involved constantly in run-ins with the law due in part to her involvement with a band of smugglers who have their base and hideout at the Cape Manuel lighthouse. The leader and mentor of the smugglers is Samba (Thierno Ndiaye Dos), a sprightly and flirty old man who is given to boisterous laughter. The film starts with Karmen in a women’s prison at the infamous old slave fort of Goree Island, wearing the *boubou*³¹ and participating in the *sabar* dance which allows her to seduce the female prison warden, Angelique (Stephanie Biddle), as part of a jailbreak plot. Bellinger (2013, p.65-66) states that the *sabar* dance refers to a “the family of drums that play the traditional rhythms (and) the dances that are performed in conjunction with those rhythms... the events in which ‘the drums played, and the dances performed.’” It appears that the plan is for Karmen to return later and free the rest of the jailed women. These early scenes appear to depict nudity and lesbianism as the prisoner, Karmen, goes to bed with her jailer. Karmen appears to be performing *mokk pucc*, an elaborate practice of seduction and sensuality common to Senegalese women when they present themselves, beautify their bodies, prepare a room with incense and clean sheets for a man, and massage the husband sensually. After escaping from jail, Karmen seduces an officer, Corporal Lamine Diop (Magaye Niang), at his wedding. Mustafa (2006, p.21) describes this scene thus:

(Karmen) gatecrashes the wedding of an elite family and seduces the groom, Lamine, a police officer. First, she throws the groom her long scarf, which he eagerly sniffs – drawing attention to the power of fabric and fragrance in the erotic repertoire of the Senegalese woman. Next, she provokes his bride into a dance contest which stretches the limits of propriety, as they both hike up their wrappers and dance the fan dance of the hips. Almost exposing her loins as she dances, Karmen’s antagonism becomes anger and she outperforms the bourgeois bride, finally throwing her on the ground with contempt

³¹

An embroidered tunic.

Karmen does not love Diop but wants to involve him in a robbery and smuggling plot. When she is arrested at the wedding, Karmen escapes before she can be imprisoned by, once again, playing the seductress. Lamine Diop is arrested for dereliction of duty in letting Karmen escape, but Karmen breaks him out of jail and takes him to her Ma Penda's (Djeynaba Niang) party den where her return is eagerly awaited by the patrons and by another apparent lover, Massigi (El Hadji Ndiaye). When the police raid the place, they are driven away by Ma Penda. The relationship between Karmen and Diop, who are now both on the run, continues to be tempestuous, with Karmen telling Diop that he is "a coward like all men" and that he will die like a rat.

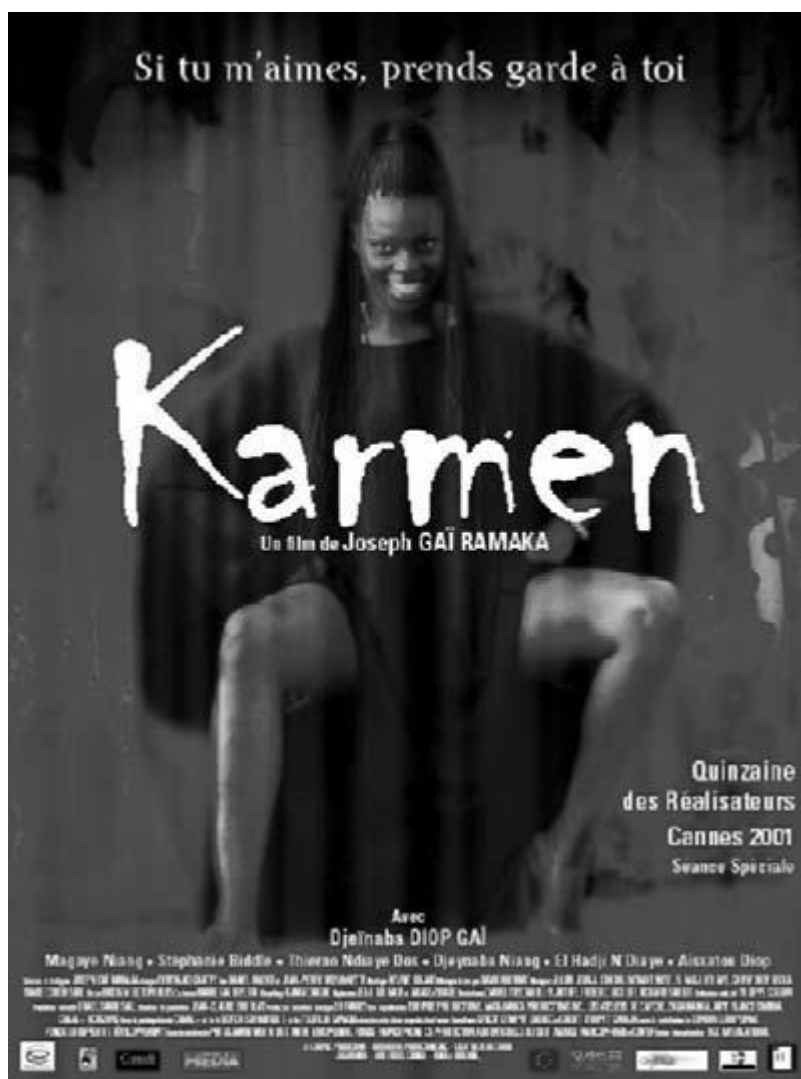


Figure 4.1. *Karmen* (2001) poster.

Meanwhile, the heartbroken prison warden Angelique goes to see Ma Penda to confess her undying love for Karmen. Ma Penda tells her that Karmen is stubborn and free. At

the Cape Manuel lighthouse, the smugglers are planning a major heist, and there are tensions about the recruitment of a cop, Corporal Diop. Karmen has a nightmare, in which she sees white-faced apparitions and foretelling death. Back at the women's prison, the women are dejected that "Karmen has forgotten" them. They try to seduce the warden again through a raunchy dance routine, but, after she seems momentarily interested, Angelique ultimately loses interest because in her heart she only wants Karmen. After lying in bed crying, tossing and turning, and masturbating, Angelique later takes a walk to the shore, walks into the sea, and drowns herself. The heist planned by the smugglers goes ahead, but things do not go exactly as planned and there is a shooting by the coastguard, and Karmen is injured, although she escapes. A funeral is held for Angelique. The police attack Samba at his lighthouse and arrest him. However, he is released because they could not pin the heist on him. Karmen goes to see Samba and dances before him. They laugh at the authorities, who cannot seem to catch them in the game of cat and mouse.

Another heist involving Corporal Lamine Diop against his old compatriots in the police takes place. This time, the smugglers succeed and can share the loot. Karmen tells Lamine Diop that she is done with him, and he must go back to where he came from, to Majiguene his bride. Diop is distraught as a result. When, a day or so later, Massigi comes to see Karmen at Samba's Island and he sings for her, and they hug and kiss, Lamine Diop looks on from the balcony, filled with jealousy. In the evening, Karmen opens up to Samba that she really loved Angelique, the warden who took her own life. Karmen and Samba sing together in what seems like a farewell performance. Sometime later, during the day, while Karmen is at the market walking by herself and checking out some merchandise, she suddenly loses her cool as if she has seen a ghost. She looks wildly about her and seeks escape, looking cornered. It turns out that Lamine Diop is stalking her. She lashes out at him for stalking her. Meanwhile, police infiltrate the lighthouse and murder Samba. One of the last scenes of the film is a concert where Karmen appears wearing red, watching the performance. Again, she starts to look wildly at her and to seek escape. She is eventually cornered by Lamine Diop, who flashes a knife. She starts to sing, "Love is a rebellious bird, and no one can tame it. If it doesn't feel right to him. It's no use to call him. There is no use trying. You can't buy it." She throws off her shawl and says, "Lamine, love isn't a business deal. If you want to kill me, do it quickly and do it well". She sings this as she walks to him, daring him.

“Tomorrow is another day”, she says. Lamine Diop stabs her, and she dies. We see the white-faced apparitions from Karmen’s earlier dream again. The film then cuts to a cemetery where a lone figure pushes a corpse on a cart. The figure carries the body off-screen, presumably to bury it.

The casting of women in leading roles by male African filmmakers, a device raised to an art by Ousmane Sembene, is central to the narrative of *Karmen Gei* and Ramaka’s conception of *cinema engagé*. Having Karmen in a leading role in the film functions as a discursive strategy not only to reposition, redefine, and mainstream women’s marginalized role in contemporary African society but also to underscore their agency. Karmen’s character – and even that of her mother Ma Penda – is so far removed from the stereotypical casting of women as child-bearers, child-rearers, and caregivers that even this is part of the aesthetics of outrage that the film draws on. In this regard, M’Baye (2011, p. 123) insists that “Karmen’s open sexuality is a political act of defiance against the limited space that both the neo-colonial and patriarchal order give to African women by confining them primarily to the cult of domesticity and giving them fewer rights than men have.” Ramaka lets Karmen explore her eroticism to the extent that it empowers her. Audre Lorde (1983) comments about women to explore their inner “erotic urge” rather than suppress it:

Women have been taught to suspect the erotic urge, the uniquely female place. So, just as we tend to reject our blackness because it has been termed inferior, as women we tend to reject our capacity for feeling, our ability to love, to touch the erotic, because it has been devalued. But it is within this that so much lies in our power, our ability to posit, our vision. Because once we know how deeply we can feel, we begin to demand from all of our life pursuits that they follow these feelings. (Cited in Mustafa 2006, p.20)

The complete absence of subservience, supplanted by confident womanhood, is critical to the overall *cinema engagé* message of *Karmen Gei* about an assertive woman who lives and loves dangerously, and one who lives and loves who she wants as she wants. Mustafa (2006, p. 21) argues that “Karmen is a woman who not only arouses but incites; she subverts and disrupts politics”. Woolfalk (2003) argues that Karmen is a “sexual icon” who basically “uses her sexual power to achieve not just personal delight, but to excite cultural subversion and incite political dissent” Furthermore, the “dynamics of

seduction as rehearsed and performed by women among women” allow women to “negotiate the ‘gaze’ of other women and their own reflected needs and desires” (Mustafa 2006, p. 22).

While the news of the Senegalese adaptation of *Carmen* was initially welcomed by the local film fraternity, scandal surrounding the nude scenes and depictions of lesbianism marred the publicity of the film. The nudity was considered classifiable, while some considered the nude scenes and portrayal of lesbianism to be unnecessary and “un-African”. In a sense, Ramaka was being critiqued for having taken his artistic license and artistic liberties too far in his re-interpretation of *Carmen* to include nudity and lesbianism. Nabacar M’Baye opines that “in African culture, sexuality is usually expressed subtly through humor, aesthetics and natural ways of being, dressing and representing oneself”. That is, depictions of sexual acts can be in a public forum, but one which is symbolic and subtle. As Tcheuyap Alexie asserts, “Sex is more often mentioned than seen in African films... sex is represented in films, but implicitly rather than openly. It is present in the story but absent from the plot”. *Karmen Gei*, however, disrupts all these assumed conventions. Further, Ndiaye (2001) states that “This film troubles us in another way by using a sufi text [i. e. *khassaide*] of Sheikh Ahmadu Bamba as the funeral music for the suicide lesbian woman.” This is a reference to the scene where the Islamic song *khassaide* is heard in memory of the late Angelique. The inclusion of the *khassaide* may have contributed to the censorship on the grounds of religious blasphemy

On 8 September 2001, shortly after its release, *Karmen Gei* was censored in Senegal. Some young men from a Senegalese Islamic civic group known as the Mourides even invaded a cinema in Dakar where Ramaka was to give a speech. Like his protagonist, *Karmen*, who pushes the boundaries of sexuality, Ramaka pushes the boundaries of what is cinematically acceptable in a conservative, Muslim-majority Senegal. Not only does the plain notoriety of *Karmen Gei* extend from the *mise en scene* of the film itself to the domains of reception and regulation, but Ramaka also imbues his film with what Larkin (2008) calls the “aesthetics of outrage”. Outrage is both useful for marketing and publicizing the film while it “pushes the envelope” in terms of what is considered socially acceptable. That is, Ramaka knew that nudity and lesbianism would provoke outrage and debate in Senegal but chose to go ahead with the depictions anyway

because the aesthetics of outrage call for just such a position. The politics of spectacle work best when they shock and unsettle. Interestingly, nudity and lesbianism are only a minuscule part of the film. In fact, they occur only in the opening scenes of the film – yet these have dominated some of the most animated discussions of the film. This is in keeping with the aesthetics of outrage which amplify fragments of a larger body of work, often taking these fragments in isolation. In this study, I consider the scenes in the context of the whole, not in isolation. Looking at the scenes in their context will allow us to see that Ramaka’s larger point is about the universal themes of freedom, love, and resistance which transcends both narrow interpretation and outrage itself.

4.3 “Love is like a bird which cannot be tamed”: Contexts of Adaptation

To adapt a work is to recast it into a new form. *Karmen Gei*, as already noted, is a cinematographic adaptation of Georges Bizet’s *Carmen*, which is itself an adaptation of Merimee’s 1845 novella of the same name. This makes *Karmen Gei* an adaptation of an adaptation. The musicality of *Karmen Gei*, for instance, is not drawn from the original novella but from the tradition of Bizet’s operatic adaptation. There are also numerous versions of film adaptations of *Carmen*, such as those directed by Carlos Saura, Francesco Rosi, Charlie Chaplin, Peter Brook, Jean-Luc Godard, Gerolamo Lo Savio, Raoul Walsh, Cecil B. DeMille, Charles Vidor, Otto Preminger, and Robert Townsend, among many others. Indeed, *Carmen* is one of the most widely adapted operas ever, rendered into theatre, ballet, musicals, and cinema. A study by the University of Newcastle upon Tyne’s Centre for Research into Film and Media (CRIFAM) to identify all the films inspired by *Carmen* showed that *Carmen* has inspired up to seventy films. Lewsen (2012: 235) notes that, in the twentieth century alone, “*Carmen* has received 81 theatrical and 31 non-theatrical film adaptations, as well as countless operatic stagings”. The existence of all these adaptations, including Broadway musicals, and versions such as Dornford-May’s *U-Carmen eKhayelitsha*, and Dada Masilo’s 2020 ballet rendering, means that Ramaka’s remake belongs within a tradition of adaptation which constrains how “new” he can make it look while at the same time affording him enough artistic license to shape his version in his image. The destabilizing figure of *Carmen* is kept in all the remakes, as is the centrality of music (an element introduced in Bizet’s opera) and the theme of love, and the plot which sees a jealous lover destroy

Carmen in the end. The famous refrain from Bizet's opera, saying that "Love is like a bird which cannot be tamed/ If you cage it, it will fly away" is also retained by Ramaka as the golden thread linking the adaptation to the thematic splay of the original source texts. Beyond these, however, artists have adapted Carmen in ways that are shaped by context and their own artistic "sense" and vision. Carmen in Africa, while keeping the name "Karmen" in Wolof-ised form, and keeping the love triangle(s), will have to reflect its context and environment. Certainly, there is no question of Ramaka keeping "faithfully" to the source texts in the service of creating a one-to-one correspondence. This is not the point of adaptation.

Dovey (2009, p. 13) argues that African filmmaker's approach literary source texts with "a critical, modifying eye". If Dovey is correct, then Ramaka is involved in "re-versioning" and "re-reading" Carmen, highlighting the fluidity and plurality involved in adaptation. Certainly, there is no one-to-one translation between Carmen of Bizet and the Karmen of Ramaka. *Karmen Gei* is not a "faithful" page-to-screen or stage-to-screen translation, but, rather, one which draws on several significant transformations. Ultimately, *Karmen Gei* is just one of many infinitely possible versions and renderings of Carmen. Ramaka himself says "The story of Carmen is intellectually rich and consistent. However, as many times as the story is told, you never get to the bottom of it."³² Ramaka's is apparently the fifty-third film adaptation of Carmen. Remarkably, it is the first of its kind to have come from Africa.

Ramaka's remake, as I will argue, is unique in its incorporation of orality as *the* instrument of adaptation. The translocation and setting of *Karmen Gei* in contemporary Senegal, and casting of an all-African, all-black cast, is a major departure from the literature and historical drama and epics associated with the novella and Bizet's opera. A juxtaposition of the synopsis of *Karmen Gei* above against the Bizet opera indicates how much Ramaka has recast Carmen. Thus, Bizet's libretto:

tells the now-familiar story of Carmen, a seductive Andalusian gypsy who works in a Seville cigarette factory, and Don Jose', a rural soldier who is stationed in the city. Don Jose' and his superior officer, Zuniga, bear witness to a violent brawl among the factory workers, culminating

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with Carmen pulling a knife on her coworker. Zuniga instructs Don Jose´ to watch over Carmen while he files a warrant for her arrest, but she successfully seduces the young soldier into setting her free. This incident marks the beginning of a tumultuous love affair between the two main characters, during which Don Jose´ discovers that he has manyrivals for Carmen’s affection, including Zuniga and the famous bullfighter Escamillo. Moreover, Carmen makes it clear to Don Jose´ that her loyalty to him depends on his decision to abandon the army and join ranks with the gang of smugglers with which she is already involved. Although he acquiesces to her demands, she nevertheless loses interest in him and becomes infatuated with Escamillo instead. Don Jose´ responds by murdering Carmen outside a bullfighting arena where Escamillo performs. (Lewsen 2012, p. 234)

It is this secondary “source text” that Ramaka turns into *Karmen Gei*. Essentially, an Andalusian story popularised by a French opera composer in the late 1800s has travelled through dozens of iterations to Senegal where novella and opera meet orality. There are superficial changes at the textual level, such as making Lamine Diop a police officer, rather than a soldier, Carmen dying at a concert rather than outside a bullring (there is no bullfighting sport in Senegal), and so on.³³ This chapter focuses on the substantive reformulations, particularly by harnessing orality, that Ramaka has made.

Lewsen (2012, p.232) is of the firm view that Ramaka, unlike Dornford-May in *U-Carmen eKhayelitsha*, actually “offers a radical reconstitution of the Carmen story featuring a bisexual female protagonist living as an inmate in a Senegalese prison”. That is, Lewsen (2012) thinks that Ramaka did not bother with trying to make *Karmen Gei* closely mimic the source texts. While I agree with Lewsen (2012) about the radical reconstitution, I do so for varied reasons. I believe that the radical reconstitution exists precisely because of the contribution of orality in Ramaka’s film version, from the drumming by the griots to the call-and-response patterns of the singing, the *sabar* dance, *mokk pucc*, *teraanga*, the praise singing, and the use of proverbs, among others. My argument is that once Ramaka has kept Bizet’s “Love is like a bird which cannot be tamed/ If you cage it, it will fly away” in *Karmen Gei*, he has already stamped his film as being in a relation to adaptation with the original and can now reshape his version in his own way. Ramaka, while keeping the operatic musicality of Bizet’s original adaptation, strips away the operatic structure that extends from orchestral

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Interestingly, *U-Carmen eKhayelitsha* adopts these same superficial changes noted here.

prelude to chorus to finale, replacing orchestra with Wolof music, drums, and African jazz tracks and, above all, vibrant indigenous dance routines.

Karmen Gei has been regarded as a film that juxtaposes “Senegalese customs and traditions with a society in flux, and thus creates a modern version of Carmen who represents the promise but also the challenges of a new twenty-first-century Senegal” (Enz 2018, p. 431). At the same time, Ramaka sees it as a manifestation of *cinema engage* which speaks to the core social issues that matter to ordinary people in Senegal. *Cinema engage* would fit what Barber (1987) identifies popular identifies as “unofficial” art forms that infuse dynamism into cultural activity in ways that are neither expressly didactic nor utilitarian and which question established power relations. *Karmen Gei* is a film that fits this form. The band of smugglers in *Karmen Gei* stand outside the norms of society, including Karmen herself who, among other things, engages in non-normative sexuality, amplifying how voices from below challenge authority and rigid norms. The tension between authority and the “misfits” may be rooted in Brian Larkin’s (2008) description of African society – and by extension, its films – as producing an “aesthetics of outrage”. Essentially, an aesthetics of outrage is a form of spectacle based in moral transgressions and engendering shock, a “negation of morality”.

Dance, which plays a key role in socialisation, communication, expression, and communion, more so when it is culturally oriented dance, is part of the aesthetics of outrage in *Karmen Gei*. Culturally oriented dance is defined as “a dance practice within a community or group that serves one or more purposes related to traditional practices, cultural transmission, social acceptance, or connectedness” (Conner, Patterson-Price, and Faulkner 2021, p. 72). Karmen uses dance, particularly the *sabar* dance, *mokk pucc*, and the drumming, to seduce Angelique. Indeed, in the context of the *sabar*, “the more skilled a dancer, the more she will undress and expose in the dancing circle” (Castaldi 2006, p.82). Welsh (2004, p.20) opines that dance “expresses in movement and rhythm the aesthetic values of a society that are perceived to be beautiful and indicative of the best of that society”. The *sabar* dance is polyrhythmic whereby many rhythms occur at the same time incorporating musical accompaniment, drumming, handclapping, foot-stamping, and singing. She is not wearing shoes, thus connecting her to the earth and her ancestors. That is, most traditional African dance is performed barefoot for this very

reason (cf. Welsh 2004). In fact, “The *grounded* nature of African dance in the flexion of the knee joint and torso demonstrates the connection with the earth that houses ancestors and provides food that sustains life” (Ward 2013, p. 32). Furthermore, African dance is “*participatory* and *vocal*. Dance is communal and belongs to everybody. Young, old, male, female, varying body shapes and sizes, and even spectators – everybody dances” (Ward 2013, p. 34). Finally, the circle formation and dances within the circle “represent continuity of life, community connections, and protection (in a circle, someone may warn a person of danger not seen from behind, with the opportunity to have the welcome gesture reciprocated)” (Ward 2013, p. 34). The intensity with which Karmen dances in response to the drumming reflects her elevated level of skill and confidence, and her repetition of movements creates an infectious pattern of movement and mood. Ward (2013, p. 34) regards the speed of the dance and repetition as “tools to texturize the dance and facilitate transcendence or communion at a higher level.” As Karmen dances, she opens and closes her legs suggestively, and moves her belly and arms in rhythm to the drums in a way that is inviting a lover. Guillon (2001), in arguing that *Karmen Gei* “is a modern film playing with the taboos of the Senegalese society” states that “the dances of Ramaka do not hesitate to peek under clothes or to openly show female sexuality”.³⁴

Above all, Karmen has *dirriankhe*, described as “the corporal, sensory and visual spectacle of mature femininity – a woman in flowing robes that fall underfoot, a voluptuous body polished by lotions and fragrant with incense, linking waist beads, and a slow, seductive gait that is performed for public audiences on the streets, in the markets and at social ceremonies in Dakar” (Mustafa 2006, p.25). It is Karmen’s *dirriankhe* which sends Angelique, Massigi and Lamine Diop crazy as they find it simply irresistible. Indeed, Karmen’s *dirriankhe* causes Angelique to take her own life and Lamine Diop to kill Karmen. It is as if Karmen casts a spell on men and women with her sensuous voluptuousness. Essentially, it is *dirriankhe* – not gypsy sensuality – which is at play in the sexuality of *Karmen Gei*. Ramaka does not need to import a

³⁴ Guillon, Marianne «Film: Karmen Gei – La gitane de Mérimée vue par Ramaka.» Wal Fadjri, 23.7.2001.

quality that already exists in Senegambian cultural and corporeal life. He simply needs to tap into what exists.

Praise singing is central to how the film “sculpts” the character and identity of Karmen. Even Sidar’s complaint to Lamine Diop, while they are busy unloading contraband at Samba’s Island, when he says, “That Karmen, she does as she likes”, is an indirect form of praise. Lamine Diop also tells Karmen, as he is leading her to jail, that “You are really dangerous”. As a descendant of immortalized freedom fighters such as Kumba Kastel, Karmen is identified through praise singing not only linking her with past generations of heroes but turning her into a sort of apprentice ancestor who is already a legend in her own right. Thus, the patrons and Ma Penda’s place sing, “Tell us about Kumba Kastel, Mame Njare Njaw, Aline Siteo...Tell us about the women of Nder, the heroes of Walo...Dear Mother sing of our martyrs”. In this way, the praises link Karmen to a genealogy of women freedom fighters, seeing them as embodied in her, and invoking a “national culture” of resistance. Essentially, Karmen is a “spirit medium”, in whom the voices of Kumba Kastel, Mame Njare Njaw, Aline Siteo and the women of Nder appear and are embodied. In cultures such as the Senufo of West Africa, found in Mali, Burkina Faso and Cote de Ivoire, the role of women as spiritual mediators is well established (Glaze 1993). Thus, “A belief in the spiritual powers of women is reflected in numerous masquerade and figural sculpture traditions that incorporate the female icon as an active guardian or protective force in contexts of intense competition or danger” (Glaze 1993, p. 121). Furthermore, “the female form has aesthetic priority in that it is judged more beautiful than the male and therefore more effective as art” (Glazer 1993, p. 121), particularly as sculpted on Senufo drums.

Karmen thus represents a bridge between the past and the new, thus embodying not just memory but the memory of resistance. Hence, she sings, “Hei! Let Kumba Kastel’s spirit appear. Your rifles cannot bring me down. The eagle soars through the sky. Ramatou, the little bird, flies under his wing. You are evil. I say you are all evil. You have swallowed up the country. We’ll eat your guts.” Karmen is ungovernable and free and does what she wants and comes and goes when she wants. Karmen praise singing about Karmen raises her to the level of a goddess or, at least, a culture hero. She is a goddess of havoc and unrestrained sexuality about whom the women at the prison sing, “Hide your women, hide your men. Karmen has come. She who creates havoc”. As a

goddess of havoc, Karmen uses her sexual appeal to destabilize social norms and transgress sexual boundaries. Her bisexuality is an identity that refuses narrow pigeon-holing, exemplified in the proverb about a rebellious bird that no one can tame. But even the carefree Karmen, in deference to the spirit of *teraanga*, is willing to let Lamine Diop have all her share of the loot after the heist. “One pile for me and Lamine,” she tells Samba. This is her way of loving Lamine Diop without letting him cage her. Ramaka, as an ordinary citizen, ensures that Karmen belongs to everyone, rather than just the jealous Lamine. She is a national treasure. Hence Samba tells the jealous corporal, “Lamine, you should leave her alone. That you take some distance before it’s too late. You love her too much. You love her badly.” The only way to love Karmen properly is to let her be.

Drumming, singing, proverbs, rhythm, and musical expression are core oral forms that drive forward the plot of *Karmen Gei*. A drum such as a *djembe* derives its name from the saying “Anke djé, anke bé” which means “everyone gathers together in peace”, thus showing how music and drumming are art for life’s sake. The drumming is for communal purposes. Thus:

Musical expression (or, essentially, rhythmic expression) is not divorced from other forms of communication – speech, gesture, greetings, and dance – but derives directly from these. ...Africans do not suddenly “become rhythmic” on the village arena where they do their daily dance and drumming. Rather, a unitary conception informs the variety of ways in which they express themselves rhythmically, whether this be in the form of children’s game songs, lullabies, or music accompanying worship or work songs, songs of insult, or greeting formulas, or dance, or speech (Agawu 1987, p. 403).

Karmen, whenever she sings amongst others, consistently draws on the oral form of antiphony or call and response. Call and response itself depend on the assumption that stories have many tellers, and that storytelling is a form of communion. Sale (1992, p. 41) has argued that “Call-and-response patterns provide a basic model that depends and thrives upon audience performance and improvisation, which work together to ensure that the art will be meaningful or functional to the community.” Furthermore:

“These patterns both value improvisation and demand that new meanings be created for each moment. The valuing of these characteristics suggests that importance lies not only in what is said but also in how it is said. The assumption is that a story will be repeated and will change with every telling and that the success of the telling, and so

of the story, resides not so much in its similarity to the original as in its nuances and its ability to involve others” (Sale 1992, p. 42).

Essentially, the structure of call and response fits the position that *Karmen Gei* is a revision of *Carmen*, not a “faithful” stage-to-screen or page-to-screen adaptation. What allows us to accept this re-versioning is that, in part, the singing that overlays most of the scenes includes call and response and the plurality that comes with it. There are no single meanings about what *Karmen* is doing or singing about, about the past and the present, or the actions of the characters in *Karmen Gei*. Instead, the film draws on orality to keep a generative openness. For instance, Senegalese proverbs are incorporated into the film to show *Karmen Gei* within its social and cultural milieu and to signify and amplify the *teraanga*. For instance, “The wind that uproots the baobab doesn’t stop the bird from flying” and “The wind pushes the leaf into a hole but doesn’t push it out”. These proverbs expand the theme of *teraanga* since their role is to provide grounding in ancestral wisdom, warning, and direction for living. Bizet’s refrain about “Love is a rebellious bird, and no one can tame it” is recast as a Senegalese proverb that not only references love but freedom as well.

4.4 Conclusion

Dovey (2007, p.151) has argued that adaptations in fact “update” their source texts. Ramaka in *Karmen Gei* has “updated” George Bizet’s *Carmen* into a Senegalese story that, through the life of the irrepressible *Karmen*, is relevant to the notion of being Senegambian of *teraanga* which expresses national culture. When *Karmen* sings to Lamine: “Very well, soldier. You forbid me to talk. I won’t talk anymore. He didn’t say anything, but I like him. And real pleasures are to be shared. That’s why I made my choice, my soldier. Love is a vagabond child. A child who knows no law. If you don’t love me, I love you anyway. And if I love you, be on your guard,” she is encapsulating the themes of *Karmen Gei*: the sacredness of real pleasures that are to be shared, untameable freedom, the agency that people must shape their destinies, (risky) love and eternal vigilance to protect what one values. These themes are translocated from the source texts to *Karmen Gei* by orality.

Chapter Five

The Oral: Tracing Voice, Postcolonialism and Storytelling in *Xala*

5.0 Introduction

This chapter examines Sembene Ousmane's *Xala* from the standpoint of orality. I argue that the film represents Sembene Ousmane's search for a national culture through orality, what I call m/orality. It was Frantz Fanon in *The Wretched of the Earth* who identifies the search for an authentic national culture as an ongoing pursuit if Africa is to properly develop, achieve freedom and decolonization, and realize its full potential and humanity. *Xala* highlights Sembene Ousmane taking up this challenge and donning the mantle of a griot who warns Africa's new rulers of the pitfalls of national consciousness through the proverb riddle, "What one hand removes, another can put back". My thesis is that *Xala* succeeds in large part because of Sembene Ousmane's skillful use of the oral form as a carrier of important ideas about the African condition. *Xala* is a warning about the surreptitious return of colonialism as neo-colonialism if there is no new ethic of vigilance that makes demands on the whole society, from beggars to presidents. I show that *Xala* illustrates a high-level interplay of orality (as form and cinematic aesthetic) and morality (as "didactic" content).

This interplay is held together by the proverb-riddle, the curse cure of the *xala* itself, the use of Wolof, the dramatization of the griotic role, song, costume, irony, verbal art, and other elements. *Xala* would not be half the film it is for the form, content, and utility of orality. The chapter looks to prove this thesis. *Xala*, in the end, is successful in showing (although this is not its only aim) that oral forms and oral discourse remain relevant to modern storytelling as well as political work in African societies. The chapter is divided into six sections, including this introduction. The second section briefly accounts for who Sembene Ousmane was, including his griotic outlook. The third section introduces the film, *Xala*. The fourth section is a reading of and conversation with existing literature and scholarship on *Xala* and the question of orality, including a review of how other scholars treat the problem of orality in *Xala* and an identification of the gaps, silences, and absences in their work on orality in *Xala*. The

fifth section carries my analysis discussion, and observations. The concluding section is the conclusion, which draws together all the networked themes of the chapter.

5.1 Establishing Shot to the Filmmaker, Sembene Ousmane

Ousmane Sembene was born at Ziguinchor in the southern region of Casamance in colonial French West Africa, now Senegal on January 8, 1923. Sembene was a fisherman in Casamance before he got enlisted into the colonial army in 1939 where he fought with the French and Germany during World War II. Ousmane Sembene studied film in Moscow at the Gorki Studios in the early 1960s. After his professional training in filmmaking, Sembene took to film fully to reach a greater number of people. He produced his first film, *Barom Sarret* in 1963. Other films by him include *Niaye* (1964), *La Noire de* (1966), *Mandabi* (1968), *Xala* (1975), *Ceddo* (1977), *Camp de Thiaroye* (1987), *Guelwaar* (1992) and *Moolaade* (2004). Ousmane Sembene died on June 9, 2007, at the age of 84 in Dakar, Senegal. A self-acclaimed Marxist critic, Sembene puts the social burdens upon himself by utilizing art as a tool to lampoon the dehumanizing forces of the African bourgeoisie and how, similar to their colonial like-minds, they exploit their people. In fact, according to Lynn (2003, p.183), what sets Sembène apart, apart from his prodigious skill, was “his unflagging commitment to the common and dispossessed people of his native Senegal and modern Africa in general, a commitment reflected in his recurring dramatization of both the plight and the tremendous strength and spirit of ‘ordinary’ Africans.” This taking up of the social burden, through socially committed art (in this case through film), leads us to the framing of Sembene as a griot. Sembene, in some senses, saw himself as a griot and indeed hinted at this in several interviews. For instance, in an interview in 2001 he said, “I have to be with the public – because, if I claim to speak on behalf of the people, then I have to be accountable to them” (Lynn 2003, p. 184). This quote shows that Sembene Ousmane saw himself as speaking on behalf of the people, a function which accords with the normative role of the griot. In 1977 he said “The artist must in many ways be the mouth and ears of his people. In the modern sense, this corresponds to the role of the griot in traditional African culture” (Lynn 2003, p. 184). If Sembene himself regarded himself as a griot, then we must at some level take him at his word. However, we also must subject his films to the sort of test that I am doing in this study to find if and how his work and his

films fulfilled the griotic role. One way to do this test is to study the prevalence and use of the oral form in his films.

5.2 Cut to *Xala*: A Brief Introduction to the Text

Xala is an adapted film from a novel of the same title by Sembene Ousmane. It shows the unraveling of the fortunes of a member of the *nouveau riche* in newly independent Senegal, through the trope of impotence. The new class of leaders is shown to be impotent and bankrupt and only a deep cultural, political, ritual, and social cleansing can radically bring about authentic liberation. The original novel was published in 1974 and was made into a film in the same year. Interestingly, the adaptation from literature to film is not straightforward. As Gugler and Diop (1998, p.152) inform us, Sembene “had started out writing a film script. While waiting to find funding for his film, he transformed his script into the novel. Subsequently, from the novel, he developed a new script for the film”. As such, Sembene had always intended *Xala* to be a film, and the original film script gave way to the novel which was later adapted into the film. The setting of the film is not apparent, but it can be intimated that it is post-colonial Senegal. The film’s subject matter addresses an important aspect of the postcolonial lives of the Africans faced with neo-colonial control. To address this thematic preoccupation, the film appropriates both the historical development of French colonial administration and the paradox of the African political system, most significantly in French-speaking states.

Xala satirizes the corruption, violence, and hypocrisy of the Senegalese bourgeoisie and *nouveau riche* after independence, showing how unsustainable the new regimes are and the shape of the resistance that might be waged to undo the damage. The film, as Gabriel (1980, p. 204) has insisted, is “a poignant satire on the neo-colonial leaders of Africa”. Thus:

To Sembène, this new class of *nouveau riche* presents a much more sinister force than the openly exploitative European colonialists. Whereas the latter could be readily identified by race, language, dress, custom, manner of worship, etc., the new enemy is much – more insidious in that he shares all the outward aspects and

cultural attributes of the African and has assumed his inimical role through a conscious political choice (Gabriel 1980, p. 203).

As Ngugi wa Thiong'o (1986:2) argues in *Decolonising the Mind*, "African realities ...are affected by the great struggle between the two mutually opposed forces in Africa today: an imperialist tradition on one hand, and a resistance tradition on the other." In *Xala*, Ousmane Sembene shares with Ngugi Wa Thiong'o the ethos of decolonization. In the end, *Xala* emerges as a site of "many emergent conflicts, and where several types of space converge to form an all-encompassing heterotopia" (Dima 2013, p.137), a film that deliberately sets out to represent postcolonial experiences more truthfully and to resolve tensions in the national culture which could not be avoided. Thus, in *Xala*:

"There are conflicts between the individual and the community, between generations, cultures, genders, and races; we encounter various spaces, public, private, aural, visual, social, and ideological, and they are all connected yielding a new, unique space that may explain the complicated inner workings of the colonized space" (Dima 2013, p.137).

As the discussion of the scholarship about the film below will show, the 'conflict' in *Xala* is dramatized through the interplay of the filmic mode and orality.

5.3 *Xala*: Engaging with the Scholarship

Xala is one of that handful of African films that has been made the subject of dozens of studies in journal articles, books, conference papers, interviews, dissertations, and theses (cf. 1994; Gabriel, 1980; Harrow 1980; Fischer, 1980; Pfaff, 1982, 1984, 1994; Landy, 1984; Landy). This study adds to this corpus. The ready availability of literature on Sembène's film means that the present study has much to draw on. At the same time, the abundant literature allows for a fertile engagement with the scholarship, as well as an identification of gaps, silences, and omissions in the literature. The discussion of the literature will center on how the scholarship sees *Xala* measuring up to the question of orality and how it does so. The general scholarship that considers the orality question in *Xala* concurs that the film has a salient dimension and that Sembene Ousmane plays a griotic role (Gabriel 1980; Harrow 1980; Lynn 2003; Kaborè 1985; Diawara 1987;

Pfaff 1994). This section assesses this scholarship, what it says, and how this relates to my core research questions in this study.

Some scholars have suggested that *Xala* is patterned like a folkloric narrative, complete with a journey motif and quest, singing, tricksters, riddles, and a moral at the end (cf. Lyons (1984; Iyam 1986; Landy 1984; Diawara 1987, 1988; Gabriel 1980). On the one hand, *Xala* is “a simple moral tale of a man who loses everything as a result of living beyond his age and means” (Gabriel 1980: 204). On the folktale motif-index, the plot of the film would fall under the so-called “Reversal of Fortune”, in the context of a fall from grace (Garry and El-Shamy 2005). Lynn (2003, p.183) argue that the invocation of oral narratives in creating modern texts is a means by which African authors and artists “reinterpret and revalidate narrative resources that are part of their heritage.” Sembene Ousmane was keenly aware of the need for this reinterpretation and revalidation where one used a modern artistic form (cinema) to communicate to the public who were steeped in orality while affected by low rates of literacy. The film could bridge this gap as a “night school”.

In my view, *Xala* as a film refuses easy categorization precisely because of the element of orality. It is not possible to pigeonhole the film because orality occurs on so many sites of signification and meaning-making. Diawara’s categorization of African film into three genres, namely social realism films, return to the source films, and colonial confrontation films is shown in *Xala* not to suit any singular categorization since *Xala* has all elements of social realism, return to the source, and colonial confrontation, without settling on any one and even managing to add a fourth element, the “night school” whereby the oral and the moral cohere in the storytelling by the fireside. The “night” in night school, for Africans, means a time for storytelling by the fireside and therefore shows the seamless combination of entertainment and moral instruction. The “night school” dimension of *Xala*, while perhaps not necessarily a category at the same level as those named by Diawara, still allows Sembene Ousmane to expand Diawara’s third category of colonial confrontation by showing that confrontation with colonialism does not need to be direct and can happen even after the end of colonialism! After all, colonialism itself, as far as *Xala* is concerned, does not end but returns via the back door. As such, resistance and confrontation can take place as a continuum rather than being fixed to the discrete categories found by Diawara. Also, if, for example, a film

like Xala uses “the material of oral literature to reflect the ideology of the time and not that of the oral tradition” (Diawara 1987, p. 38), it cannot be accused of a slavish “return to the source”. Instead, the film must be properly regarded in terms of reinterpretation and revalidation. By this I mean that a filmmaker like Sembene “returns to the source” on his own terms, choosing what he finds salient and meaningful. Sembene picks and chooses those parts of tradition that align with his intent to use cinema as a form of political action. In an interview, Sembene is forthright about this attitude towards tradition and the past, saying that, “a new Africa is being born, and the precondition for this change is a rupture with the African past” (Rapfogel, Porton and Sembène 2004, p. 21).

Diawara (1987, 1988) has argued, somewhat contentiously, that African film, unlike Western cinema, can be regarded as having its authentic modes and repertoire. In the same vein, Gaston Kaborè (1985) opined, that African filmmakers would have to find an ‘authentic inner self to discover a cinematic language that could ‘reflect African history and civilization’. This cinematic language emerges it could be said, in orality. Oral literature becomes the source from which *Xala* ‘borrows narrative devices and takes lessons on African history and culture’ (Kaborè 1985, p.199), allowing for an examination of the orality as ‘cinematic language’ both within the struggle and experiences of life in the post colony. Diawara (1988, p.10) has argued that “the structure of oral literature has helped to shape the originality of African cinema” even to a point where “the subject of orality determines the form of narration in the film”. I will refer to this determination-by-orality of cinematic subject matter as m/orality. That is, when the cinematic language that Kaborè speaks of appears in the space of intersection between orality and ethical performance and morality, we have the moral and the oral cohering together in a way that they would not do in a filmmaking tradition where the cinematic language is not drawing from primarily oral traditions as is the case in Africa. I shall expand on the notion of m/orality below. While the experiences of life in postcolonial sub-Saharan Africa differ from African diaspora due to different historical and geographical contexts, Jeanne Garane (2000, p.151) insists that they nevertheless share a similar sensibility, united by an aesthetics of orality rooted in a real or mythic rural space.

Since, as Kaschula and Diop (2000, p. 14) opine, “oral performances cannot be divorced from the socio-political contexts in which they take place”, the filmmaker as griot has a key role to play in shaping what Fanon calls the “national culture”. While Sereigne and Gorgui play the role of the griot in *Xala*, it appears that Sembene takes upon himself the role of the griot. In an interview, he asserts that “What interests me is exposing the problems confronting my people. I consider the cinema to be a means for political action.” Sembene’s conceptions of the politicized griotic role, however, “are neither uncritical assimilations of European Marxism nor are they nostalgic fantasies of an African culture progressively destroyed early through the African slave trade, by the Muslims, and by European colonialism” (Landy 1984, p. 31). Instead, Sembene weaves his idiom in which the griot – whether in the diegesis of the film or as the filmmaker – is the repository of the “national culture” and the conscience of society. We see this “conscience” both in the roles of Sereigne and Gorgui and in the way Sembene utilizes orality. A consideration of *Xala* as oral text of course draws, in part, on what the filmmaker himself said about how he regarded his role. Sembene regarded himself as approximating a griot, stating

“The artist must in many ways be the mouth and the ears of his people. In the modern sense, this corresponds to the role of the griot in traditional African culture. The artist is like a mirror. His work reflects and synthesizes the problems, the struggles, and the hopes of his people” (Sembene, in Gugler and Diop, 1998, p. 147).

The traditional and normative role of a griot is steeped in orality, incorporating a complex relationship with politics and power. It is instructive that Sembene considers himself not just the mouth and ears of the people, but also a mirror. This composite self-description combines functions that can be considered embodied and performative (mouth and ears) as well as mediated (mirror). The mix of mouth, ears, and mirror anticipates a convergence of tradition and modernity, with the mirror being an ambivalent element in African identity due to the slave trade and colonial commodity and trinket exchanges that included mirrors in destabilizing African society. The film, as an imported technology (just like mirrors), provokes the same ambivalence, partly due to its use by colonial authorities throughout colonial Africa to “civilize” the natives and propagandize the “values” of Western modes of life.

The use of film by a griot is therefore not straightforward. Instead, it incorporates elements of both synthesis and dissident use. Thus, in Sembene's words:

“[We] must see, feel, and understand ourselves through the mirror of film. For us, African filmmakers, it was then necessary to become political, to become involved in a struggle against all the ills of man's cupidity, envy, individualism, the nouveau riche mentality, and all the things we have inherited from the colonial and neo-colonial systems” (Sembene, 1984, qtd in Eid and Ghazel 2008: 156)

Use of film by Africans are therefore reappropriations of a Western technology originally meant to subjugate and brainwash. Such reappropriation is facilitated by the griotic role whereby the griot will utilize any instruments at his disposal to be the mouth and ears (and eventually the mirror) of his people. Here, the construct of synthesis is important in achieving the resonance of the oral within the cinematic medium. As Sembene himself said in a 1995 interview with Niang and Gadjigo (1995, p.176), “As far as I am concerned, I no longer support notions of purity. Purity has become a thing of the past.... I constantly question myself. I am neither looking for a school nor a solution but asking questions and making others think”.

Mouth, ear, and mirror dispense with purity in favor of a visual, aesthetic, and ethical syncretism based on posing questions and provoking deeper thought. It is the shift away from seeking purity that, Sembene suggests, enriches the turn to filmmaking by Africans steeped in the griotic tradition. As Diawara (1987, p. 39) argues:

“a *griot* is not viewed the same way in film as in the oral tradition. A return to the inner-self or African culture does not therefore mean a subordination to tradition for the director who uses oral literature. It is a questioning of tradition, a creative process that enables him to make contemporary choices while resting on the shoulders of tradition.”

Polysemic syncretism explains Sembene's assertion that, “For me, cinema is a kind of evening school. Of course, a new Africa is being born, and the precondition for this change is a rupture with the African past and a connection with the West. The artist has to try to explain these changes.” (Rapfogel, Porton and Sembène 2004, p. 21).

Yet, still, such syncretism requires skill and nuance, which, fortunately, Sembene has to an exceptional degree. Unlike the mirror as a trinket, the film in the hands of the griot is shaped in the image of what is beneficial to the community. The griot is not at the mercy of the technology. Instead, he uses technology subversively. Essentially, the film-as-mirror, in the hands of Sembene, is far from a one-to-one traditional oral text nor is this its aim. Where colonial film sought to brainwash, Sembene uses the film medium to reverse the damage of colonial distortions. In the end, Sembene in *Xala* “transcends the griot, therefore, and surrounds him and his old narrative with a new vision which traces the mechanism by which people...are exploited” (Diawara 1988, p.9). *Xala* enfolds the griot’s narrative within a larger narrative about the fate of the African nation, its people, and Africa’s future. Furthermore, one can argue that *Xala* demonstrates griotic agency – how a filmmaker like Sembene alters the idiom of social realism and makes it wear a Senegalese face in the same way that Fanon took Marxism and bent it to suit African contexts. Indeed, Josephine Woll, in Françoise Pfaff’s *Focus on African Films* (1994), makes much of Sembene’s film education in Russia as the pre-eminent factor in his use of social realism. However, this connection is overdrawn. The signifying object at the center of the film – the *xala* – is the best indication of this altered signification. That is, whereas social realism intends to draw attention to the tangible social and political conditions of the day, the *xala* is not tangible and hard to prove. Commentators who want to see A leading to B in linear causation would be disappointed with the way Sembene Ousmane disrupts such causality by putting a “curse” at the center of the film’s signification.

I would argue that the reason Sembene Ousmane found no problem with centering the intangible curse in his film is precisely because he trusts his audience – of Africans – to recognize what he is doing. In orality, causality is not linear, leading from A to B. Instead, causes can occur in a circular fashion such that the effects are not seen immediately and, indeed, in the case of El Hadj, effects were delayed for many decades until he had forgotten the harm he had caused to the villagers in his prior life. The fact that El Hadj blames his wives and enemies and travels around the country seeking answers shows that he has no idea what is behind his *xala*. The real cause is only revealed at the end, suggesting that causes not only can have long delayed effects but, sometimes, effects – like the curse – can come back without reference to the original cause. So, for instance, El Hadj’s *xala* returns when he fails to pay Sereigne, not because

of robbing Gorgui and his people of their land in the forgotten past. Had the cheque not bounced, El Hadj might have avoided the humiliation that followed. So, was it the curse that caused the cheque to bounce, thus allowing the final humiliation by the beggars to take place? In a social realist milieu, this question would not make sense. However, in orality, where cause and effect have a complex relationship tied to ritual and the spiritual, it makes sense to imagine that El Hadji' would temporarily be cured but his cheque would bounce so that the curse would return until the final ritual humiliation took place.

Diawara (1988, p. 6) states that whereas the griot "depends on spoken language as well as on music to actualize the story, the filmmaker...uses the means of mechanical reproduction to give shape to the story." Essentially, whereas oral literature "speaks of life, cinema reproduces an impression of life" (Diawara 1988, p.6). Sembene himself operates in the liminal space between film technology and orality – the space of syncretic polysemy. Such polysemy operates within a framework of popular culture, an aspect highlighted by the evening school reference. The evening school reference is even more apt when we consider, as Gugler and Diop (1998, p.152) do, that *Xala* "seeks first and foremost to reach a large Senegalese public becomes all the more evident when we take into account the songs which accompany key scenes." According to Diawara (1988, p. 7) popular practices such "as song and dance, the performance of the griot, and the representation of African social systems such as polygamy are often used to create the effect of the real in the films". They are filmed in a mode that suggests that the filmmaker is influenced, consciously or unconsciously, by specific oral storytelling techniques, verbal art, and forms of performance.

Xala also draws on the trickster figure, a core element of orality. The two marabouts, Sereigne and Gorgui, double up as trickster figures who together torment El Hadji with the curse. Lynn (2003, p.183) regards *Xala* as having two tricksters El Hadji and Gorgui, such that traits "associated with two different types of tricksters of oral tradition may be discerned, respectively: the insatiable rogue on the one hand (El Hadji), and the avenger and culture hero on the other (the beggar)." I think that there are multiple trickster figures in *Xala*. The largest tricksters are the Europeans who leave in one door and return through the other. Ngoné, who says nothing but cannot be deflowered despite El Hadji's best and worst efforts, is a trickster figure as well. Oumi, El Hadji's second

wife, is a trickster-wife, as well. The business of the chamber practices all kinds of wiles to remain on top. However, the main trickster figures in the diegesis of the film are the beggars who have the last laugh. El Hadji, as a trickster, unfortunately runs out of tricks. While he uses money and power to get his way, his adversaries use asymmetric “warfare” in a form that he least expects: a curse. Indeed, through the curse, “the beggar, like trickster figures in general, jars the routine thoughts and actions of those he encounters and shakes up the conventional order of society” (Lynn 2003, p.184). Gorgui the trickster-beggar introduces himself in the diegesis when he sings from the street corner across from El Hadji’s office, prompting El Hadji to demand that he be removed from there since he is “human rubbish”. The singing that irritates El Hadji is deliberate, with the song playing a powerful role in griotic storytelling. By singing to El Hadji, the beggar is telling the businessman the story of his past which has now become the present. El Hadji is irritated greatly by this song without knowing why which leads to him evicting the beggars from the street. In this way, El Hadji, again without knowing it, causes the removal of his adversary for the second time. The first time he had driven Gorgui away is only revealed at the end of the film when Gorgui reveals himself. Gorgui, of course, is not going away and will, in the end, have the last laugh. In true trickster folklore, the narrative becomes about who will have the last laugh. El Hadji triumphed on the first two occasions and was caught in his own trap the third time. What goes around comes around.

Some readings of *Xala* show an insufficient appreciation of how meanings in the film draw on oral forms – forms that do not work by being just symbolic. For instance, Dima (2013, p.143) over-speculates about the meaning of the poster of Ngoné on the wall. He reads Ngoné’s poster as “Foucault’s first type of heterotopia – a utopia, a non-place. Her picture represents a displacement of the actual space she occupies in front of the camera, a projection resembling the mirror example given by Foucault.” Thus:

Ngoné’s poster functions like a mirror, and we see her quasi-reflection over the back of her naked body. She too, then, is a non-space that eliminates her from the diegesis (the absence of voice helps tremendously with the exclusion, too) but that also raises her to the status of a Barthian myth.... Not surprisingly, El-Hadji fails in his attempt to deflower his third wife who cannot be reached, physically, because in reality, she does not exist, she is merely a symbol (Dima 2013, p. 143).

This Foucauldian reading is interesting but is too foreign to the world of Ousmane Sembène's night school orality to be entirely applicable. I cannot accept the reading that Ngoné does not exist or that she is merely a symbol. In oral forms, for instance, in folktales, characters are not saved from danger because they do not exist or because they are just symbols. Instead, characters escape from danger because they are actively rescued or because they can transform and disappear from the site of danger. Furthermore, mirrors are not just sites of the non-existing and the symbolic. Instead, mirrors were part of the concrete political economy of the triangular slave trade. It is not true that mirrors produce just the symbolic, just as it is not true that film produces only the symbolic. Instead, film was actively used to subjugate and brainwash Africans by colonial film units, although such uses were also actively resisted.

5.4 Analysis and Discussion: Towards a Syncretic Polysemy and Complex Morality in *Xala*

The opening scene of *Xala*, following the Africans taking control of the Chamber of Commerce, sets the scene for the syncretic polysemy of film and orality by using dance, performance, and allegory to situate *Xala* in Africa, in Senegal, and a post-independence milieu. In this opening scene, orality is heightened in the form of the allegorized performance of the expulsion of the French from the Chamber by the sound of drums, dance, and highly stylized mime. Through contrasting images, the end of an era for the French is shown as a moment of triumph and celebration for the Africans. The narrator's commentary makes clear the process through which we are taken at the beginning of the film is one of change and transition. Having survived colonization and lived to see its apparent end, the spirit of resistance in the indigenous people is awoken. As the transition in the Chamber is taking place, orality, through the narrative of oral address, takes over in the form of a voice-over filled with the gravitas of the moment: "Mr. Minister, deputies, and honorable colleagues ... Never before has an African occupied the Presidency of our Chamber. We must take what was ours ... what is our right. We must control our industry ... our commerce ... our culture ... Take in hand our destiny." As Fisher (1987, p. 75) notes, "narration comes closer to capturing the experience of the world, simultaneously appealing to the various senses, to reason and emotion, to intellect and experience." In what appears as a decisive move and

victory for the people, the voice-over address continues: “Before our people we must show ourselves capable like other peoples of the world. We are businessmen. We must take over all the businesses ... even the banks. We can’t turn back. Our struggle for true independence is finished. This is a historic day.” The quote whether in rhetorical or literary contexts, tends to assume that certain narratives are sufficiently a part of a given oral culture that a few allusions are sufficient to trigger and make the mythos a functioning part of the text. Although not immediately political, the president’s speech does perform similar constitutive work as it creates a mythic narrative.

Damagingly, the expulsion of the Europeans transforms into the allegory of return because the White foreigners driven out of the room find a way to return to the chamber using the black comprador class. This is the larger theme of *Xala*. The departure of the French is shown to be fake as they remain in Senegal and continue behind the scenes “to manipulate the new ruling class through financial control” (Landy 1984, p. 31). By means of allegory, Sembene develops:

the film’s conflicts (class, sexual, and racial) and the problems of change and resistance to change within a specific historical narrative. The allegory allows Sembene to develop simultaneously the psychological dimensions of that history as well as the problems of myth and ritual as retreats from history (Landy 1984: 32).

Thus, as Diawara (1988, p. 8) observes, elements of orality “accentuate the transition of power in the story as a return to authenticity”. The theme of El Hadji’s impotence and his search for a cure draws from this well of West African lore. Lyons (1984, p. 320) argues that “our understanding of (*Xala*) can be increased by a knowledge of West African folk traditions”, a view that I concur with. Orality allows Sembene to disseminate his message not just in the aforementioned “night school” mode, but also to audiences beyond Senegal. Thus, there is scope to think that the fable of impotence itself, for instance, is “not specific to the Wolof or to any other Senegalese group. Rather, (it) may be found in the mythology, folklore, and traditional exegeses of peoples throughout Francophone West Africa and perhaps other regions.” (Lyons 1984: 322). Themes from religion and folklore “are vehicles which Sembene consciously employs to carry his message” (Lyons 1984, p. 322).

Orality is very obviously performative, but not just in the sense of song, dance, poetry, and the like. Instead, in *Xala*, we see that the performativity of orality is much more conceptual as well, in that it manages to organize and hold together some of the most important themes of *Xala*. For instance, our discovery that El Hadji Abdou Kader Beye's *xala* is the result of a curse inflicted on him by a forgotten victim of his (from whom he had expropriated land in the past) accords with the principles of justice in African cultures and folklore. In these traditions, grievous harms never disappear until and unless there is recompense and reparation. The whole film has been a slow, unfolding reckoning towards justice. As Martin Luther King Jr famously stated, "The arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends toward justice" (Carson, Shepard and Young, 2001). The plot of the film, which ends with the beggars spitting on El Hadji, bears out this truth. Only by being humiliated, debased, and treated wretchedly can the victimizer be humanized again. Although we cannot see beyond the end of the film what course El Hadji's life took after the atonement, we can rest assured that the spitting is a form of performative justice that is classically African. What Eid and Ghazel (2008, p. 156) refer to as "a fable of impotence" is much more. *Xala*, through its circuits of orality, is a fable of justice as well. One can say that it is a fable of African justice or, at least, justice delivered in an African mode. African justice never forgets. The final flourish delivered by the marabout's thrice repeated proverbializing, "Remember: what one hand removes, another can put back", is the clearest invocation of both the cycle of justice in the African mode and the orality of its morality (and morality of its orality).

Hence, the "proverbializing" of justice is treated aesthetically by the constant background presence of the African map even as El Hadji struggles to resolve his moral campus. Dima (2013) regards the posters on the walls as heterotopic spaces. Such posters can have a figurative link to the conflicts in the film, for instance, the divide between Rama and her father. Hence, for example:

When Rama speaks, we notice behind her a map of a unified Africa, with no separation lines between countries. [...] To the left of El Hadji, another map is visible, the same type we had seen at the beginning of the film in the Chamber of Commerce... and this is a regular map that highlights all countries separately. The maps highlight the separation between the characters, as they represent divergent mentalities (Dima, 2013, p. 141).

There are thus two maps of Africa, both of which in Dima's view yield new heterotopias. As Dima suggests, the maps highlight the differences between the characters. This is a reading that I concur with, but also which I feel a need to extend by applying an interpretation supported by reflecting on the uses of orality in the film and the role of the griot. When Sembene Ousmane as the griot highlights the separation between Rama and her father using the two maps, this is not done for the sake of merely highlighting conflict. Instead, it is for a much larger restorative purpose. It is to show that a divided Africa can also become a unified Africa and vice versa. This is a reading that becomes more plausible when one considers the proverb-riddle "what one hand removes, another can put back" and also if one considers that griots (and even the beggars) in *Xala* have a larger dual role of healing and cursing as Sereigne and Gorgui do.



Fig. 5.1 African orality is demonstrated aesthetically by the constant but quiet presence of the African map in the background.

The constant presence of the maps on the wall makes it seem as if Africa is keeping watch and biding its time and, finally, as if Africa strikes back or will strike back. Visually, the map of Africa on the wall is productive of a contrapuntal tension with El Hadji's bottle of imported Evian water sitting on his desk as he talks to Rama. The work of Samir Amin on the subject of the "return of the global south" (see, for instance, *The Long Revolution of the Global South: Toward a New Anti-Imperialist International*) speaks to what the marabout calls "vengeance" at the end of *Xala* and what postcolonial theorists have called the empire striking back. As a postcolonial/Marxist socialist-realist author, Sembene's novels are part of the canon of the empire writing back. Sembène's films, most of all *Xala*, constitute this return, writing back, or "vengeance". Amilcar Cabral refers to it not as a return to the source but as a *reversion forward* into modernity by grounded Africans. For this reason, we see Cabral's picture on the wall in Rama's room. The picture of Cabral and the map of Africa belong on the same plane of meaning as the beggars in *Xala* who are, in a way, the secret guardians of Africa's liberated future. This is confirmed when we see that Gorgui the marabout puts on a hat like the one worn by Cabral in the picture. There is thus strong visual and ethical-allegorical transference between Cabral and Gorgui.





Fig. 5.2 Strong visual and thematic transference between Cabral and Gorgui via costume. Their hats look similar.

Sembene achieves this transference of roles masterfully through costume and the *mise-en-scene* of the pictures on the wall, as well as contrast. Hence Rama responds to her father in Wolof when he speaks to her in French. Later, the Chamber of Commerce refused to give El Hadji permission to address them in Wolof. Here we see the nexus of language and cultural identity and the role of language in the clash of values. As Ukadike (1994, p. 23) argues, the essence of African language as a cultural creation is important because it contributes to oral history, “relying heavily on the cultural codes of the people vis-à-vis the value of the word for meaning and nuances, oral narrative serves as the genesis of communication influencing all aspects of community concern.” Norton (2013 p. 33) argues that identity itself is constructed via language:

By extension every time language learners speak, they are not only exchanging information with members of the target language community, but they are also organizing and reorganizing a sense of who they are and how they relate to the social world. As such they are engaged in identity construction and negotiation.

Indeed, the contrast between Wolof and French is one of the most powerful in *Xala*, bringing together the play of language, culture, meaning, and identity. Petty (1996, p.100) argues that “Rama is a Wolof cultural nationalist, affirming the cultural, moral, and linguistic values that have sustained Wolof society through wars, colonialism, famine, and many other trials. It is a context in which family pride and dignity are

honored.” El Hadji initially rejects the culture and language of his people in favor of the French, thus underlining the alienation of the *nouveau riche*. The internal conflict in the African bourgeoisie’s home, for instance between Rama and her father, takes on the proxy of language as a terrain of struggle and exhibits a “strong charge of political, social, and cultural tension” (Ukadike 1994, p. 118) that only dissipates in the final scene when the El Hadji family seems united in adversity. Sembene, by foregrounding language, clearly privileges orality as a vehicle and a marker of meaning in *Xala*. That is, given the use of language to reintegrate African identity, Sembene Ousmane privileges his mother tongue, Wolof, to project “a vehicle of expressions of national sentiment and certainly have been bulwarks in the fight against colonialism and against political, economic, and cultural imperialism” (Sanneh 1994, p. 29).

Regarding the larger framing of contrast in *Xala*, Eid and Ghazel (2008, p. 156) argue that:

The importance of contrast for an understanding of Sembene’s film as a whole can hardly be overestimated. In *Xala*, the water images contrast the superfluous affluence of the bourgeoisie with the abject destitution of beggars. At a time when there is drought in Senegal and the population starving, El Hadji indulges in nourishing his imported car and himself with imported mineral water.

Indeed, contrast is one of the most important figural techniques in *Xala*. For instance, while the indigent people generally put on traditional costumes, El Hadji and other newly rich ones wear European suits even in the tropical heat. The beggars generally walk while the bourgeoisie are driven in luxurious motor cars. Oumi dresses in the modern style while Adja embraces the African style of dress. Sembene Ousmane thus pictures the conflict between African and Western cultures and values through *storytelling of contrast*. Oumi, El Hadji and his co-businessmen are considered as the embracement of French policy by the African elites. On another hand, the characters such as Adja, Rama, and the beggars are a portrait of Africans whose cultural values point more to an authentic “national culture”. Contrast, as a powerful element of oral storytelling, signifies the “clash of cultures” in *Xala*.

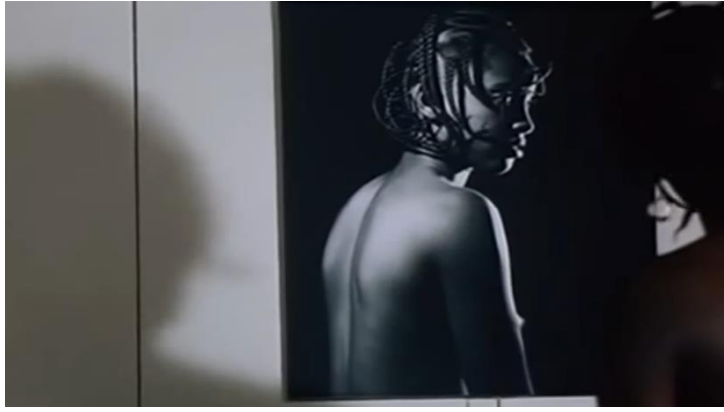


Fig. 5.3 The wall portrait of Ngoné as a *femme objet*” in contrast to the picture of Cabral.

Within this storytelling of contrast, the maps of Africa and Cabral’s picture are visually contrasted in quite a powerful way with the picture on the wall of Ngoné, the third wife. As Pfaff (1984, p.153) suggests, Ngoné is “little more than a *femme objet*”. The same cannot be said about Cabral’s picture or the map of Africa. As Rama is departing her father’s office, he asks her if she wants anything, and in answer, she says, emphatically, “Just mother’s happiness”. The background of the African maps suggests that this “mother” is not just Adja but also the motherland, Africa. It is the trope of *mother’s happiness* (Africa’s sustainable future) that Sembene masterfully invokes in *Xala* in general and specifically in the figures of Cabral, Rama, Adja, and Gorgui. These characters together represent a new proposition: *just mother’s happiness*. Such a proposition fits with Sembene’s belief that “a new Africa is being born” and therefore the reason cinema must be deployed as an evening school to explain what is going on. When the blight of neo-colonialism – a broader neo-colonial *xala* – is removed from Africa, then the mother’s happiness can ensue. These meanings and effects are achieved by Sembène’s adept interweaving of visuality and orality in service of a higher ethical message about Africa’s past, present, and future. *Xala* thus, in performing African modes of justice, manages to achieve a synthesis of aesthetics, allegory, and ethics. This is what I have referred to as m/orality, a double pivot and double entendre whereby orality coheres in morality and ethics, and vice versa. The larger point is that orality is the golden thread that runs through these syntheses, giving them resonance and signifying power.



Fig. 5.4 The orality of *Xala* culminates in a resonant message about the happiness of “mother Africa”.

The invocation of m/orality is the counterpoint to the feeble, unsuccessful, and impotent attempt to expel the French statuary at the beginning of the film. In other words, Sembene, in a Fanonian key, manages to show the shortcomings of national consciousness that result in the circuitous return of colonialism via the backdoor. The tool of analysis of m/orality points the way to a vision of an authentic mode of justice that, while it might be slow and gradual, is eventually paid in full. Whereas the return of European power via the backdoor of neo-colonialism shows that African independence may have been stillborn or short-circuited, the orality of that culminates with El Hadji being spat upon by those he had considered “human rubbish” is a fitting antidote to the corrupt and fake transition of African independence. Orality, powerfully, uses irony and reversal, because those that El Hadji has classed as “human rubbish” turn out to be those sitting in judgment over him. Indeed, those that he had called human rubbish turned out to be his guardians who could either curse or cure him. They hold

his future in their hands. That is, while scholars such as Eid and Ghazel (2008, p. 160) would see the beggars as “Sembene's instrument for evoking the history of the material exploitation of the countryside and the urban poor” the beggars mean much more. The power to curse or cure belongs to a higher plane of significance than is implied by the interpretation that ties the beggars solely to exploitation. That is, Sembene creates a distinction between the *yelwaan* (street beggars) and the Senegalese state that begs Europe for crumbs and loans with onerous strings attached. Whereas the *yelwaan* have redemptive qualities, Sembene does not have any patience with state begging, or *quemander*, saying:

We have spent the last thirty years in Senegal begging for help from Europe, America, Japan, and Germany. It has been estimated that Senegal receives one billion CFA francs per day in foreign aid. One does not need to do a thorough analysis of the situation to realize that there is a waste somewhere, but, above all, that the country cannot survive from being raised into a state policy (Niang, Gadjigo, and Sembène 1995, p. 174).

Where things like the French language, corruption, loans, and imports like the Evian water are what Sembene refers to as “factors of division” (Niang, Gadjigo, and Sembène 1995 p.177), the use of Wolof, the griotic music, and the “group physiognomy” of the beggars constitute repair and renewal. In a larger sense, “They are human and thus complex beings” (Niang, Gadjigo, and Sembène 1995 p. 177). Here, Sembene roots for the underdog.

Xala, the film, thus manages to retain *Xala* the novel’s inspiration from Fanon’s *The Wretched of the Earth* where both Sembene and Fanon, unlike Karl Marx, have strong belief and faith in the capacity of the so-called *lumpenproletariat* to bring about change, transformation and “mother’s happiness”. Even the film’s theme music on the soundtrack is, as Gabriel (1980) notes, a commentary on their situation. Indeed, Iyam (1986) refers to the *yelwaan* as the “silent revolutionaries”. After all, the dramatic conflict “is predicated on the social circumstances of the members of this class who, though silently watching the story unfold, are themselves vicariously pitched against the antagonist of the drama” (Iyam 1986, p. 79). If a new Africa is being born, as Sembene contends, it is more likely to appear from the *yelwaan* from below rather than

through compromised state policies. Through m/orality, everyone has a part to play. Indeed, those that are forgotten and cast away turn out to have the most important roles.

By remembering what El Hadji had long forgotten, and bringing the past to bear on the present, Sereigne and Gorgui show themselves to be the nexus between the memory of the past and present unfolding reality. Their didactic role put them on a collision course with the establishment when El Hadji and the President decided to remove the “human rubbish” to sites where the griots could not cause any unwelcome remembering. The attempt by the authorities to cleanse the city of the beggars is, thus, in fact, an attempt to remove the griotic mirror from reflecting their corruption at them. Thus:

Although charged with highly poetic language, (the) declarations (of the griots) highlight their dual role as historical bonds and cultural mirrors. Authorized with the responsibility of fostering cultural ideals and values, Wolof griots likewise perpetuate descriptions of themselves in idealized terms. These idealizations constitute the oral foundation of their professional image (Magel 1981, p. 183)

For Sereigne and Gorgui, the formulaic recitation of the “what one hand removes, another can put back” is part of their stylized function as truth-bearers and as the unbending oracles of social morality. This is akin to the role of the seer in Shakespeare’s Julius Caesar who reiterates to the powerful emperor about the ides of March”, or the blind Tiresias who warns Oedipus that he cannot escape his doom. As we saw, the “human rubbish” speaks back to the establishment via ironic reversal when El Hadji is the one who is cleansed by their spit.

The marabout-griot-trickster can cure El Hadji, but only because he was the one who placed the curse on El Hadji in the first place, the power to curse and cure shows the duality of this character. The riddle that “what one hand removes, another can put back” is also a form of prophecy that, we discover, is in fact part historical since Gorgui has a prior acquaintance with El Hadji. The marabout, as oracle, trickster, and griot, tests how much El Hadji can go in understanding the deeper meanings and the deeper forces that regulate social life and social behavior. The marabout thus plays an implicitly political role sanctioned by the filmmaker and fitting Sembene’s social realist vision:

In many societies, such as the Shona of Africa (sic) and the Berbers of Morocco, diviners play a role in politics, healing, and even cursing. But they often have to rely on their ability to keep their prophecies in line with the popular will. In other words, the ‘credibility of oracles depends on their apparent wisdom, and apparent wisdom is defined by the beliefs and opinions of those to whom it must appear as wisdom’ (Garry and El-Shamy 2005, p.152)

The proverb that “what one hand removes, another can put back” is, in part, a prophecy and an oracular riddle that seeks a diegetic resolution. The fate of Africa itself is a riddle that is hard to solve. In *Xala*, El Hadji goes on a quest for a cure that takes him across the country and concludes with the provision of a cure that is conditional on understanding the cycle of fortune and misfortune. In a larger sense, the riddle forms part of the commentary on the return of colonialism as neo-colonialism. However, it is also a comment profiling El Hadji’s life. Thus:

The riddle is a verbal puzzle or cipher, at the heart of which is a metaphor. Solving the riddle usually entails recognizing multiple connections between the riddle’s vehicle (the metaphorical substitution) and its tenor (the meaning or solution to the riddle). Such multiple similarities extend and enlarge the metaphor, moving it in the direction of allegory...puzzle, or enigma (Garry and El-Shamy 2005, p. 243).

If it is correct that “the presence of riddles in folk narratives often functions as a test of the hero or protagonist” (Garry and El-Shamy 2005, p.243), then both the riddle and the pronouncements of the marabout serve the (oracle) function of regulating social behavior, but only if El Hadji can resolve and understand the complex meaningfolded in the marabout’s proverb. El Hadji’s speech in the Chamber of Commerce towards the end – and the request to use Wolof instead of French – suggests that he may be on the path to redeeming himself, although this transformation is not definitive. The fact that he loses everything at the end suggests that the riddle has been fulfilled and consummated, although El Hadji may not have benefitted from its resolution.

On the other hand, if Sembene in *Xala* is the contemporary griot who wields the mirror of cinema to speak truth to power, he constantly has to negotiate how he conveys

uncomfortable truths. Although *Xala* was not subjected to egregious censorship at the level of El Hadji's "human rubbish" injunction, and authorities allowed the film to be shown in Senegal, the regulators prescribed a total of ten cuts to the final film. Hence:

Senegalese audiences were not to see the unceremonious removal of the bust of Marianne, the symbol of the French Republic, from the Chamber of Commerce; the Frenchman ordering police to push back the crowd in front of the Chamber; the members of the Chamber opening their attache cases to find them stuffed with cash; the Frenchman conducting the police raid on the beggars; El Hadji's statement to the members of the Chambers that they had the police and the army in their pockets; Gorgui lecturing Awa that prisoners are happier than peasants, fishermen, or workers; and the call to revolt that closes the film (Gugler and Diop 1998, p. 153)

Sembene was not happy about this and responded by distributing flyers that detailed the scenes that had been cut. The removal of certain scenes from *Xala* shows how, "for hygiene's sake", power can flex its muscles to protect its image and erase inconvenient utterances. Here, the deletion of ten scenes from *Xala* indicates an interest by the authorities to purge unpalatable memory.

This reading about the cuts to the film suggests that one may go further than most scholars of *Xala* in the interpretation of the meaning and significance of the curse of impotence. To my thinking, the curse of impotence, taken to its logical conclusion, ought not to just be seen as spelling out impotence. Instead, Sembene Ousmane is talking about the castration of African leadership. By limiting the reading to impotence, scholars of *Xala* give African leadership a soft landing. By applying the reading of castration, however, one can begin to appreciate Sembene Ousmane's real point: that the class of new leaders that inherited the colonial mantle is beyond repair. By castrating them, Sembene shows that such a class has no productive role to play in the future of Africa. The castration also effectively prevents El Hadji from ever breaking the virginity of the pure and innocent Ngoné. Dima (2013, p. 142) is of the view that:

In the end, the message could be that Ngoné is not meant to be married, or at least not yet, not to El Hadji. Her virginity doubles for the virginity of the African land, and the beauty of its landscape. She is a daughter of

the land, and she must be preserved, not given away to a member of the new bourgeoisie.

However, this reading, aside from its troublingly sexist undertone, is unconvincing in the absence of a possible new reading that foregrounds the castration of the would-be ravishers. The point about castration is one of the inflection points of the film. It is important because it resolves a hitherto unresolved important problem in *Xala*: the role of the Europeans in El Hadji's curse. At no point does the film show us the whites cursing El Hadji. Even when El Hadji is speculating about who might have bewitched him, he never suspects the Europeans. The film also does not overtly point us in this direction since the *xala* is an exclusively African curse.

So, by focussing too much on the ritual source of the curse, scholars have missed a deeper point: that while Sereigne and Gorgui might have cursed El Hadji with impotence, the Europeans had castrated him. This reading is altogether severe and unforgiving compared to the one that reads the *xala* only in terms of curable erectile dysfunction. The roundabout return of colonialism as neo-colonialism happens through the castration – not just the impotence – of African leaders. The punishments by the African poor on their leaders leave room for restoration and repair. The castrating actions by the Europeans, however, are final, just as colonialism is final and is never meant to end as shown by its return as neo-colonialism. This return shows that nothing has changed, and perhaps that things have become worse. It also attributes Africa's problems to Europeans much more directly than the normative "impotence" readings of *Xala* have hitherto assumed. Normative readings of *Xala* that centre impotence tend to blame the Europeans only indirectly and even to unintentionally absolve them of the most egregious blame. My alternative reading centering on castration removes this problem. It re-centers the whites into the middle of the problem of colonialism. In the diegesis of the film, the Europeans lead the attacks on the beggars, showing that the castration reading is one that Sembene Ousmane himself might have preferred. This scene was censored by the government and cut out of the film, as indicated above.

I want to surmise that the images of whites having a leading role in a new, independent Senegal unnerved the government because the images directly suggested castration rather than just impotence. The current national problems facing French West African

nations, including the fact that their gold is kept in France and their franc currencies are dictated to by the French central bank, and French West Africa remains a playground and a sphere of French interests, indicates that what took place at independence was castration rather than impotence. We can also see this in the way Sembene Ousmane distinguishes the begging of the poor beggars on the streets versus the begging of the national leaders in France and at the IMF and the World Bank. The reading about castration is only possible if one applies a nuanced consideration of how orality communicates via an onion-like peeling of layers of meaning. The one meaning and the one story are never the only meaning or the final meaning. Instead, there are other meanings that lurk behind the surface meaning. Sembene Ousmane leaves it to the audience to connect the figure of castration. The griot never spells out everything. My reading about castration may be correct if one considers Teshome Gabriel's (1989, p. 60) contention that the diegetic space of African film is non-linear but, rather, contains "many interlocking stories and permutations of stories". My reading about castration is a permutation which I owe to the richness of permutation allowed by orality.

5.5 Conclusion

The chapter establishes that orality facilitates, to a large degree, a richness of permutation and meaning in *Xala*. The film succeeds in large part because of Sembene Ousmane's skillful use of the oral form as a carrier of important ideas about the African condition. I show that *Xala* illustrates a high-level interplay of orality and morality, an interplay that is held together by the proverb-riddle, the curse-cure of the *xala* itself, use of Wolof, the dramatization of the griotic role, song, costume, irony, the trickster, verbal art, and other elements. The chapter sought to demonstrate that *Xala* is the film it is to a large degree because of the form, content, and utility of orality. *Xala* is successful in showing that oral forms and oral discourse remain relevant to modern storytelling as well as political work and political communication in African societies.

Chapter Six

Framing Orality of Protest in Invasion 1897 (Lancelot Imasuen, 2014)

6.0 Introduction

Invasion 1897 is a Nigerian film produced and directed by Lancelot Oduwa Imasuen and released in 2014. The film is an adaptation of the history of the British incursion into and the invasion of the ancient Benin Kingdom in 1897 which led to the looting of Benin artifacts by Great Britain and the dethronement of the then Oba of Benin, Oba Ovonramwen to Calabar.

Lancelot Oduwa Imasuen is a prolific award-winning filmmaker born on July 27th, 1971, in Benin City, Nigeria. He graduated with a degree in Theater Arts from the University of Port Harcourt, Nigeria. He kickstarted his career with the Nigerian Television Authority before venturing into full-time filmmaking. Imasuen directed his first film at the age of twenty-four. He has a special interest in promoting the Edo language through his films; he has done this with films such as *Ikuemiting*, *Olidara*, and *Ebuwa*, which premiered in Benin City with over twenty five Nollywood stars in attendance.

From this biographical note, it could be pointed out that the special interest of Imasuen's imaginative predisposition to harness orality in his film production has not only been his objective but also a phenomenon about identity in Nigeria's video film industry and Africa at large. Most African filmmakers agree that there is an essential requirement to 'Africanize' their films as a means of articulating the identity of the African people. The film *Invasion 1897* flows around this foundation of thought as it occupies the organic space of cultural values and African identity.

Invasion 1897 represents the Nollywood industry quest for identity rebirth as the film can be analyzed as an offshoot of adaptation and identity. The filmmaker Lancelot Oduwa Imasuen's interest in cultural promotion has given him recognition in the Nollywood industry (his biographical account is credited to <https://www.africanfilmny.org/>). This chapter concentrates essentially on how folkloric

oral art forms are characterized in *Invasion 1897* to epitomize both the realistic manifestation of Benin's historical past and its noticeable experiences during the era in which British colonialists invaded the Benin Kingdom. The orality of protest is the core of the film's analysis in this chapter. The film *Invasion 1897* is inspired by actual historical events of the February 1897 invasion and destruction of the ancient Benin Kingdom in the present-day South-South part of Nigeria, by colonial Britain.

Treating film as a secondary orality adaptation, the filmmaker goes into the depth of orality to excavate the richness of the recorded facts about the force that overwhelmed the kingdom of Benin during colonialism. He makes use of the historical repertoire to reproduce the deplorable events through video film, in an attempt to give the audience a glimpse of the historical invasion of the 1897 Benin empire. Through this cinematic medium, the filmmaker Imasuen, creatively protests the Benin massacre.

The film's depiction of the invasion of Benin is believable when the film is compared to the events as recorded by several scholars and historians. This does not erase the fact that completeness and originality of the actual event will not be achieved in its entirety in the film. This is partly because filmmakers can only draw material from rich oral forms to make such epic films. Even when films are adapted from creative books or history, during the making of the film, a lot is done to maintain such facts which will lead to some creative transformation of the events carved into the development of the plot.

The film opens with a scene in London where a young African student of history from Benin gets agitated after the revelation he gets from the lecture of that day and sets to get back 'what belongs' to him. He gets apprehended by the police and is charged to court. He refuses to plead guilty and tells the judge and other people in the court why he should not plead guilty. This brief legal encounter at the beginning of the film is an intentional foil for the film's unerring focus on the primacy of protest in the film's orality. Using the adaptation, politics, and exilic story, the film brings us into the horrific event of the invasion of the Benin Kingdom massacre leading to the dethronement and exile of the deposed Oba of Benin. The audience's desire to make sense of what is being visualized and heard is resolved in the audio narrative of the film. All through the film, the point is made, and audiences are led to believe, that the

attempted stolen artifacts in the museum and the right to re-possession are interlinked, and that in the fight to protest, the forceful invasion of the Kingdom was a significant force.

The oral is a construct that shares this structure. It has its idealized sites like masculinity, figurative expressions, and manipulative tendencies which represent human ideals of power, substance, and form. It has rhetorical features such as idioms, proverbs, panegyrics, and folklores, which represent our social modes of communication. The film's orality also includes themes of war, sounds, and music. The way the film's orality is structured emphasizes Oba's character on one side, the sub-titling on the other, and the cinematic deployment of oral forms in which time, space, and history coalesce.

The protest narrative in the film is visualized through the deployment of oral forms. The identity frames of *Invasion 1897* are different from Xala in terms of identity ethos: the image and ideology. Rather than distinguishing between oral forms in Senegal and Nigeria, Imasuen preferred to connect his experiences with a collective unconscious that lies beyond questions of identity. The director built a narrative edifice full of Benin cultural affiliation; his natural place of indigeneship. The film is full of Benin artifacts, but it is there as an external signifier in the adaptation work rather than as an expression of core identity. The filmmaker used the images of Benin artifacts to situate his audience between the facts and the imaginary. The filmmaker produced the film through a unique way of telling a particular story of the past ages during a contemporary dispensation. The constant flow of horrific images, the litany of African oral tradition, and the powerful, yet moody music all create the feeling of tension, even angst, in the audience. The tension expressed in the film mirrors audiences' inner anxiety about the invasion of private spaces. The film highlights a continuing battle between our private identities and public identities. The film's privileging of protest through oral tradition, music and idioms clashes with the visual in the film, because the visual presents a moment of silence and prejudice to reality. The film's director tracks the occupation and looting of priceless Benin bronze statue which represents their ancestral tradition and history. Yet, the film is concerned with two central ideas: protest and the fluidity of orality.

6.1 Opening Shot



Fig.6.1: Shot of the setting of the court room

A film setting can also imply time, reveal or enhance a character's mood, and the style of the film's narration. A setting can even reinforce the genre of a film. These and others are functions of a film setting. The courtroom setting in *Invasion 1897* features a realistic urban setting. This gives a clue about the place where the film is set. Also, the time of the film is implied by the setting. The court scene stresses the mood of the protagonist enhancing his tense mood which is a general atmosphere that surrounds a court session.

The opening scene of the film starts with a plot setting in the Benin Kingdom; a classroom setting where we see a student dressed in African attire. He decides to steal a Benin bronze statue locked away in the university's highly secured museum after a discussion with his history lecturer. He was arrested in the museum and charged with suspicion of stealing in court. Rather than feel guilty of his action, he justifies his action in court. The setting of the above visual is a realistic urban setting. Almost every physical thing around the setting emits modernity. The setting is a true reflection of modern-day facility. Although there is a little touch of cultural deposition concerning the costume worn by some of the characters, the entire setting that houses them all strives for modernity. The artworks in the visual are focused on by the camera in a high

angle shot. The camera uses the mid shot to capture the awesomeness of the artwork and uses tight framing to enhance its importance. The tight framing of the artworks does not only draw eyes to it but also captures the difficulty it takes to get it back even though it was looted from a group of people long ago.

Also, the composition of the visual places the artwork in the central position and the camera focuses on it against the blurry background. This is to state the significance of the artworks over the other things surrounding them. In the composition, the blurry red dress of the judge, her table, and the microphone are adopted as the creative framing to prevent eyes from exiting the image of the artwork. By putting the subject of the camera in an enclosed area, eyes tend to focus on the salient. The general background of a visual can be blurry if the things in the background are generally inconsequential. In the above visual, the background is blurry to accentuate the major subject of the visual and muting other things which are at that moment irrelevant or a point of digression for eyes.

The camera alternates the image of the protagonist and that of the judge in the setting. The camera employs close-up shots to make the two alternating images the salient points. The camera movement here enhances the tension between the alternating figures as they talk back and forth. With the help of high-key lighting, the camera emphasizes the importance of the two images in the scene and almost shutting out other things in the scene.

6.2 The Palace

The setting of the palace is a realistic rural setting. Everything that revolves around the physical setting points at the traditional setting of the palace of Oba of Benin. The type of houses, the dress mode and the costume are all showing the pre-colonial physical setting of the Benin people. The time setting reminds the viewers of Benin before colonization. The palace is in sharp contrast with the courtroom setting. It is a realistic rural setting in terms of place. It presents the viewers with the impression of a pre-colonial era in terms of time. This setting contributes to the dilemma of the kingdom in general. The editing of the setting reveals the helplessness and the looming disaster that

later happens. The setting creates the historic impression of the Benin before the deposition of the king.



Fig.6.2: The shot of the visual above is a low angle shot. This shot is used to show the importance of its main object. In the above visual, the shot makes the king stand out as the central object. Even though the camera seems to be far from him, the shot presents him as the vocal point.



Fig.6.3: This is a wide shot from an high angle. One of the reasons for deploying this shot is to show a tense or gloomy atmosphere which is the major reason why it is employed here in the scene. Looking at the picture, one can feel the gloominess of the scene because there is no sign of excitement.



Fig.6.4: Shot of the King, and his chiefs in the palace: the camera pulls back revealing the innermost worries point-of-view through the subjectivity of the lens.

The above visual gains depth and dimension using the three elements which are integral parts of any visual text. The elements are the foreground (the main focus or closest object to the camera), the middle ground (the middle portion of a visual), and the background (the part further away from the camera). The foreground of a picture is the closest object to the camera. In the above visual, the Oba is the foreground which means he is the major focus of the camera thereby enhancing his importance over the background and the middle ground. The composition of the visual makes use of the middle ground (the chiefs) as the vector or the leading line that directs the eyes to the focal point of the visual.

The volume of the foreground (Oba) is another thing that emphasizes the dominance of the king. Although he only occupies a corner in the visual, he boldly appears and thereby has more volume than the chiefs who are relegated to the middle ground in a blur of the visual. The composition also uses contrast to stress the king's importance in the visual. The heavily beaded neck and head of the king are in sharp contrast with the middle ground and the background of the visual. The colour contrast directs eyes to the king who stands out as the color of the bead is limited to the portion of the visual where the focal point is placed in the composition.

The scene is introduced to the audience with the king's close-up shot. The camera later dollies out slowly the background revealing the chiefs. The camera later adopts the tracking shot as it tracks aright in a medium close up shot of the chiefs one after the other. The picture later dissolves into the extreme close up shot of the king as he sings. The camera, in this scene, deploys different movements. There are moments of slow push-ins on the king to emphasize his internal conflicts. When the king says he will meet the white man, the camera cuts to a medium-long shot revealing the entire palace setting and its occupants as the chiefs exhibit their unanimous shock. There is a case of random shot that stresses the chaotic disagreement of the chiefs in succession. The camera, again, employs a slow push in on the king before he finally makes his decision.

6.3 Subtitling as subtext



Fig.6.5: Shot of subtitling: an example of imagery from the protest used in *Invasion 1897*.

The shot of the above scene is a mid-shot in a low angle. This is deployed to show the dominance of the main object of the camera. In the visual, the shot stresses the importance of the king. The subtitle underneath reveals the word spoken by the king (signifier). The subtitle carries subtext (meaning of the signifier) that points to the emotional discharge of King. The film's orality uses the language of the Benin which may not be understood by the majority of the audience. This is where the subtitling comes in. Not all the utterances in the setting are rendered in English. There has to be a way to make it all-inclusive. Therefore, the subtitling plays a role in submerging the audience into the world of the film.

The visual composition of the scene is a rural palace setting. The king who is the salient point occupies the middle position. The tight framing is mostly employed to trap the king and reflect his limited options in the situation. He is placed in the middle and surrounded both left and right by the chiefs (almost equal numbers at each side) against a reddish background. There is a different background in the case of the king. In addition to the reddish background, there is a leopard skin and two big white elephant tusks. This accentuates how important the figure is.

The lighting on the King is high-key. The setting is generally bright because of the key lighting, fill lighting, and backlighting. The chiefs are presented with the effect of low-

key lighting. The lighting on the king boosts the audience's view of the king. We even see him more brightly with the effect of the hard lighting. The lighting could be seen as a deliberate attempt to show the intensity of the King's dilemma.

The strong, unbending will of the people of Benin and the stubbornness of the White walk hand in hand in creating room for the eruption of violence. The Benin people see it as trampling on the law of their land for a visitor, most importantly, the White to step into their land while they cleanse their land with ritual rites. So, they refuse the White entrance into their land. The White on the other side, are willing to do all it takes to enter the land by defying the law of Benin. The straw that broke the camel's back was the statement of the white man that strings both invective and deposition of the king together in a sentence. A simple agreement to the proposition of the Benin could have averted the calamity. Better still, informing the king after overhearing the White before taking drastic action may have issued another peaceful way of handling the matter.

6.4 Authorship and Oral Storytelling

The protest expressed in Imaseun's fictional Benin invasion are partially the site of expression of regret, search for equality, and yearning for earthly recovery of stolen artefacts of Benin in 1897. The film is presented through narration by Igie, who also is a character in the film and who recounts almost the whole history of the pre-colonial Benin Kingdom. Through the oral narrative he uses, the contemporary generation and other audiences who may not have known the history and traditional identity of the people of Benin are made aware and knowledgeable about the history and the traditional practice of the Benin empire

The device of oral storytelling is textualized because it is imaginative and can draw on a multiplicity of narrative modes as a thread in the film. The authorial intent that is a mix of titles, singular viewpoint, and oral storytelling forces the audience to reflect on authorship, on the power of oral storytelling as "truth spoken to text" and the filmmaker's fictional characterization of the nonfictional. Imaseun's cinematographic praxis relies heavily on the notion that oral storytelling can pre-empt collective memory about the past. Oral storytelling is not simply a memorial because it can re-create the historical past in Benin history. The events in Benin of 1897 are recreated on video

film. Because its narrative spans an indeterminate period in Benin's life. *Invasion 1897* uses oral storytelling to draw attention to African traditions in an attempt to recuperate the memory of the past. The rational reading of the stolen bronze statue and the African student who appears in a faraway British museum trying to reclaim the stolen artifact of his people is symbolic.

The stolen bronze statute can only relate to humans as a figment of art, "imitation of imitation", the way a film director might. The bronze is a product of sculpting; a metaphor for understanding beauty that does exist in the actual Benin Kingdom. The audience might visualize the bronze with reverence because the artifact forms an abstract in the filmic text. The attempted recovery of bronze in the museum provides it with significance and authenticity. Imasuen invites us to react to the film in the same way the student reacts upon arrest in the museum during the failed recovery because cultural artifacts deserve respect and protection. But the oral storytelling formsignifies the cultural memory; it reflects and ponders on the past and epitomizes a sortof lived experience. While the outside world considers this as criminal and a violation of private space, the filmmaker does not. While in court, Igie Ehanire defends his planto recover the statue repeatedly; the flashback by the historian in the early part of the film implies that spoken words and visuals bear the mutual significance of protest andmemorability. Because of oral storytelling's propensity, the film professes the communalistic art of the Benin people and their linkage to other societies such as Akurein South-western Nigeria, and the like. Aside from the general storytelling, there are indications of disjointed plots that go beyond the emphasis on memory selectivity by highlighting the idea that memory is a product of interpretation.

Invasion 1897 shows the retentive memory of the Obas in the narration of folkloric animal stories. A typical example of this could be found in the scene where the Oba Ovonramwen narrates the story of the tortoise to his family. To mark the story a folkloric mission, the Oba ends the story in the same manner Africans end their story in the pre-colonial setting: "That is the story of the tortoise." In another scene, the Oba narrates to his family the story of the cockroach and why they walk at night. But the use of non-human elements warns us that the film is fiction filled with caricatures of his Kingdom. These caricatures symbolize universal figures with crafty qualities: strength and weakness. This structure is equivalent to the typical African society of

unevenness and inequality. Such construction of the society does not detract from daily challenges aimed at reducing class differences. *Invasion 1897* draws its cinematographic muse from the rich repertory of Benin history, song, dance, and language, most significantly the ones that have a link with the Benin Oba who is regarded as a wise embodiment of the customs and tradition of the pre-colonial Benin Empire. In Benin communities, just as in other African communities, oral traditions are referred to as the inherited traditions connected to the people, animals, supernatural forces, individuals, and communal experiences. Within this, oral storytelling covers verbal chants, proverbs, folktales, folklores, praise-poetry or panegyric, chant, and others. The folkloric traditions and other visual elements recreate the immediacy of each moment, while the narration, which is sometimes, the Oba's and Igie's, creates a temporal distancing for the audience so that the textual becomes objectivized. The audience is positioned as judge and jury as they examine Igie's courtroom experiences and Oba's folkloric stories. The narration is Imasuen's statement of subjectivity that can be analyzed. The oral storytelling is a fictionalized narrative for the film in the sense that the film is simultaneously a subjective statement of the author and a work of art that can be made meaningful by the audience.

The oral storytelling and the "*Invasion 1897*" protest the invasion. The protest is the world in which knowledge is seeking convenience and recreation. Instead, we enter a world of betrayal and violation, along with the museum, (a sacred space symbolized by a quiet and fortified arena), and into the courtroom where there is unending debate on the ownership or proprietary of the pseudo-cultural bronze artifact. The treatment of an artifact as a revered piece of art bestows a cultural memorial status on the artist. Another especially important constituent in oral narratives is the flexibility savored by the performer to adapt tales as they consider fit so long as the plot framework stays unchanged. This explains the basic substances of an outstanding performance in oral narratives. According to Ahmad (1989) in oral narratives, the narrator is not compelled to "reproduce the narrative verbatim" but, "he is expected to add, subtract and elaborate the details as long as he sticks to the basic plot." (p.113) The orality in *Invasion 1897* prove that the film is largely a form of storytelling in itself; the filmmaker has produced a significant resource in the documentation of Benin history but despite its representation, even though one could argue that some elements of fact are quite missing.

6.5 Protest as Life

The emphasis on the word “protest” as the basic watchword of the film adds to the film’s realism. The orality as the ‘great explainer’ is the hidden voice from beyond, disembodied and ethereal. The correlation between the protest of *Invasion 1897* and its narration in an adaptation form suggests that a significant part of a community’s continued existence is spent seeking redemption of historical tales and taking charge of the narrative. *Invasion 1897* reminds us repeatedly that protest is the way in which reality can be captured. It is quite common for protests by families, clans, and societies to justify their inherent self-centeredness through the forging of ties to ward off intruders. The protest or act of reclamation may be realized by reaching out to its other or leader that is a leading figure such as Oba.

Oba Ovonramwen is not just a figure, he is chief-in-command and commander of the fictional Benin Kingdom. The orality adaptation projects masculinity as a way of engaging with the challenges of physical modern warfare. If the community is the embodiment of weakness and invasion, then Oba Ovonramwen becomes the embodiment of strength and masculinity. Imasuen recreates the Benin kingdom in a protest-like way: as weak, vulnerable, susceptible to subjugation, and male dominated. These parts are easily recognisable, but they often require rationalisation. Benin kingdom embodies visual processes that reflects endless conflicts. And that is what the film offers— conflicts within itself and conflicts with the aggressors threatening their very existence. Both are suffused by protest, and protest find their embodiment in the oral tradition, which turns ideological in the film.

Frank Ukadike (1987) describes oral tradition in his book titled “Black African Cinema” as “literature of protest.” Its role is to implicate the individual in the collective destiny deeply rooted in the pedagogical process to which expression and interpretation are coded in a special language. In *Invasion 1897*, Imasuen takes on minority social position to critique majority status quo conditions. Imasuen reads oral tradition as a tool that is filled with torments that seeks to reinvent itself. The only device that can triumph over the narrative is one that has its form. That is why the opening scene is one that vividly shows the very first synchronization points. Amidst the existing background baritone, there is the whining sound of a person clearly in agony. An accused man is

seen making an incoherent speech as we hear him in the Oba's palace. The other accused also speaks. Other points of synchronization are noticeably glaring in the same scene as we hear the sudden slashing sound of the blade when an accused is beheaded. Following the slashing sound of the blade, we also hear the spurting sound of blood and at the same time, we see the process. Thus, the Benin kingdom is seen both as home and doom, both communal and deadly. The brief opening scenes at the palace, and the monologue accompanying the accused man are restless and inventive, a possible indication of the plight of the human condition.

Just after the man's head is cut off, we hear a big bang immediately following the drop of the man's body to the ground. The scene is terrifying because of the gory visuals after the beheading. That Imasuen projects Benin, and in particular, Oba's palace on its class origins may appeal to the mythology of African tradition and histories, but in Imasuen's *Invasion 1897*, that positive projection cannot be trumpeted from the rooftops. It carries a burden of sacrifice and guilt, especially when the Oba is seen not averting the daylight murder of the accused. In spite of the Oba's personal achievements, the kingdom is presented by Imasuen in *Invasion 1897* as a statement of failure rather than an African statement of triumph over adversity, which indicates how deep the cultural parameters of the society are embedded in his individualism and that of his audience. And that is what the film offers – protests that are internal to individual and collective forces to evade invasion. Both are expressed by spoken words, and utterance find their embodiment in the Benin oral tradition.

In the early scenes, one of the accused men murmurs "...the land that drinks my blood shall be baked by the hail of fire." In this we could deduce that the speaker is not asking to be freed nor does he want to be punished. We could read that he is signaling a kind of warning as to what may likely happen if he is executed. While the accused seeks the solitude of his freedom, of his inner self, that selfhood is contextualized and made meaningful by the external word in which he is reacting. This is accentuated by two elements: the agony of the individual experience and of his spoken words. The former is mediated, while the latter is his oral tradition. But the result is always the subjectiveness of the character or as secondary orality. *Invasion 1897* obviously wants to overcome the inherent difference through the speaker, but it remains an unfulfilled desire in the film adaptation. Curiously, this desire is projected in the interaction

witnessed in the palace between Oba and his royal chiefs. It is worth noting that the palace as a setting symbolizes communal life, togetherness, and struggle in the face of challenges. The palace scene, unlike the individual scene, is filled with different people and sameness. It depicts a convergence point between the ruler and the ruled; a rallying point for multiple voices. In the palace, the Oba and his chiefs are visualized invoking and appeasing the gods. As the Oba prays, the chiefs chorus “Amen” in reference to the god and in anticipation that their prayers are received and answered.

Only by protesting extemporaneously and invoking ancestral gods through traditional rhythms could the commonality of cultural bonds and historical past be preserved. Significantly, the unifying element is symbolized in the oral tradition that drives the story in the film. *Invasion 1897*'s orality is made up of exactly this contradiction between literature and adaptation. It is a universe of narratives working side by side, filled with different modes of protest. Protest is a statement of disapproval, an objection of the vaguely familiar, a resistance. In every protest, there exists a play of opposites in which one space (the past) is infamously occupied (in the present). Imasuen portrays this dichotomy through proverbs; a coded form of oral tradition. The Kingdom's fetish for regularity in appeasing the gods and the ritualistic repetition of assembly in the Oba's palace as a show of faithfulness to the Oba to concort approval or disapproval is held up in the proverbs. On the other hand, the individual utterance of speech under the pretext of karma, intentional warnings into the invasion of space by the Unknown, and the life of the victimized are held up for their defiant process of signification throughout the film. The palace is the domain of oral tradition, while the public space is the realm of execution and negative reality. The palace and the public space become ideological battlegrounds.

The portrayal of human conditions in *Invasion 1897* seeks to focus on the individual's strength beyond the collective involves the elevation of personal and diminution of the social. Two important scenes explain this solipsistic viewpoint of the director. Both occur within the palace precinct – shortly after the supplication (inside) and the prince's room (outside) – which indicates that the oral tradition is the same indoors and outdoors. In the first scene, the Oba assures the prince saying "...whatever the wood insect gathers, it carries on his head." In another sense, it could suggest that anything that happens to man is a product of karma. These different cultural codes in this particular scene and

the earlier scene involving the execution of the accused are equated clearly by the heterogeneity of their mediating elements within the image and sound relationship. The trials of today determine the future.

In another scene, the Oba uses a proverb in a heated tenor to address his people when he hears neighboring town, Akure, has declared their independence and secession from the Benin Kingdom again. The Oba says “Just because the Tiger has a headache does not mean the antelope can dare him.” There is, after all, only one meaning, protesting the internal conflict pervading the Kingdom’s indecision to trade with Europeans. Also, when the elders are deciding how to carry out Oba Ovoramwen’s order (whether to kill the foreigner and his entourage or save their lives as Oba Ovoramwen instructed), one of the elders, Obakhovraye says “You just took the water out of my mouth.” The play of protest in the various scenes is vital to the philosophy of the film. It presents both the internal self and external body as tense and in agreement with the fluidity of the oral tradition as “fragmentary discourse” (see Angus Fletcher).

The next important scene, which marks the significance of oral tradition occurs when the elders go contrary to Oba’s decision. The elders murdered the foreigner and upon arrival at the palace, the Oba exclaims, “we have put our finger in the anus of the tortoise; we must be ready when the tortoise grips.” This expression symbolizes regret and a form of protest. It suggests the full weight of the consequence of their actions of which repression and looming occupation were inevitable. In *Invasion 1897*, the mediation of oral literature, brings African and European characters together in direct conflict. These are not distant oral forms but dynamic and generative oratures.

Even so, *Invasion 1897*’s oral tradition is much more grounded in the psychological than in the mythic structure created for its protest. Lamentation is another device redeemed through individual imagination rather than collective imagination. A chief expresses sadness at the wanton death of people, the palm wine tapper laments the splitting and breaking of his gourd. Also, three women wail over a boy’s demise. At the palace, the Oba and the chief also lament the death of the villagers. The lamentations in *Invasion 1897* do not have any reverential sense of the sacred word found in the proverbs. In fact, orality is allegorical in the sense that our identification of the use of lamentation is then reinforced insofar as the situation in this sequence in the film

logically would project its images of failure, despise, and protest. But these only drive *Invasion 1897* further in its aspiration to serve as a unifying aspect of life.

6.6 The Prophetic Dimension: Idioms, Proverbs, Panegyrics and Folklores

Invasion 1897 takes on a prophetic dimension, which is as far from visible oral elements as one can imagine, and breaks it down into fundamental archetypes in idioms, proverbs, panegyrics, and folklores. In the cultural context of the Benin Kingdom, human oral forms are considered as transmitted traditions that relate to gods or ancestral, supernatural forces thereby possessing prophetic dimensions. In *Invasion 1897*, the invocation of the spirits or their gods is visualized in the film. This incantation scene, filled with an invisible supernatural encounter between humans and gods are comparable to scenes in other religious sites such as temple, mosque, and church. This creates a sense of ritual and mystery, a world infused with prophetic rather than psychological categories. With the King acting as chief priest, the scene is highly reminiscent of the role of the main negotiator or nominated spokesperson found in protests. There is one marked observation in the way Oba Ovaronwen speaks, his idiomatic expression which runs through the spoken words as formulae is observed. These idioms are worthless to non-Africans, the less spiritual in the real world, but they are sacramental. In spiritual warfare, spoken words are important, while in the universe of the supernatural, the choice of idioms is of inestimable value because it represents a body of unconventional, powerful, and reassuring. *Invasion 1897* demonstrates the sacredness of these idioms or proverbs in the way a priest guides his followers.

The success of the film lies in the idioms deployed by the two accused men at the beginning of the film. Reliance in oral literature is considered an intertextual strategy in the adaptation work and can be traced to the origin of folkloric African tradition. The symbolic value of elemental oral forms such as proverbs and panegyric (praise poetry) are central to the film's orality. Folklore, another in the quartet of elements, is present in a unique way. The most mediated oral form in the film is incantation. It would seem that this emphasis on incantation is also carried over to the portrayal of the Benin Kingdom as a site of incantation – of occult, ritual, sacredness, and blood. In the African traditional setting, incantation means a kind of properly organized string of utterances

that can either be sung, chanted, or spoken for the purpose of communication with the outer world. This is done in order to establish a particular spiritual connection, divination, or prophetic change in situations, things, or in the life of someone. This suggests that incantation is closely related to invocation and prayers. In one scene, Oba Ovonranwen carries out incantation during the wedding ceremony of his daughter. Conceiving marriage as godly means prophesying life, success, and good health in the daughter's marital union.

This prophesy continues during the wedding; after the musical and dance performance by a woman, the Oba makes strings of incantations to the gods. It is assumed therefore that the Oba is using the means to invoke blessings and favor of the gods upon his daughter as she gets married. This serves as prayer and it is believed to be efficacious because incantation is considered a sacred formula or divine pronouncement which should result in magical or supernatural transformation in the life of the person for whom the incantation is made. The unspoken is elevated beyond any human comprehension to the delight of the metaphysical. For it to be understood, one must enter into the inner worlds of the supernatural, a place far beyond the universe, a fable mixing of farce, folk ritual, and regard for the ancestors' continued presence. One of the characteristic features of African arts and communications that *Invasion 1897* reveals is that ritual performances describe the 'search for transcendence' (Ireobi, 2005, cited in *Africanist*, p. 11). Folk ritual is rooted in and relies on the search for the supernatural such as gods, ancestors, oracles, and deities. The film equates the spoken word with prophecy and material reality. Every oral tradition has its human counterpart – the prophesy and protest. The prophesy is presented as a site of encounter, reflection, and prediction. The protest is presented as a site of resistance and conquest. The orality envelopes the body through the metaphysical, while flights of protest are the only tools allowing us to soar over the defeated. The orality as protest is the circularity force that is always trying to pull the Kingdom out of invasion.

But *Invasion 1897*'s orality is also functional in festivals. These festivals provide Africans with an avenue to meet at their various local spaces to express and expose their level of commitment to the norms of the land. Festivals are opportunities for congregation and a means of recreational adventure for the people. One notable festival in the film is the Igue festival. Again, rituals and sacrifices are performed to appease the

gods ahead of the festival. Describing the importance of the festivals, Hutchirson (1997, p.87) holds that “the cultural existence of the people of Benin could rightly be traced during Igue festival than any other festival in Benin Kingdom.” Through its association with incantation, the flame of creativity can be read as a prophecy of things and as needing to be actualized. That is why the chiefs advise Oba Ovonranwen against accepting strangers into their land as they prepare for the festival. While the incantation is presented as a prophetic symbol because of its tendency to foreclose the unforeseen future needing to be actualized, proverbs, another oral tradition, is equally prevalent in the film and become the vehicle for actualizing the prophecy. Idioms and proverbs become the organic elements that bring the orality to life or death.

Proverb is considered one of the rhetorical aspects of oral narratives which form the bedrock for the solidity of oral practices in African societies. It is a speech act which is a strong mechanism through which speech is made interesting, educative, more informative, entertaining, effective, and even persuasive. This is because its usage transcends surface utterances and interpretation as against daily and ordinary discourse. In African societies, a proverb is given a high degree of respect as it is considered to be the words of wise elders. According to Finnegan (1977), “proverb is marked by terseness of expression or by a form different from ordinary speech and by a given figurative mode of expression abounding in metaphor”. In the film, *Invasion 1897*, different proverbs are used in almost every point of decision, especially between the Oba and his chiefs. The usage of proverbs in the film is a strong indication that in the ancient Benin kingdom, the people of Benin engaged in formal discussions or discourse using proverb which is characterized by brevity, pungency, and shrewdness. That is why in the film, different proverbs are used at different points of conversation.

In a particular scene, the Oba challenges the authority of the European visitors with a proverb: “Any crab that comes without the safety of its hole is really exposing itself to danger.” The simple interpretation of this proverb could be that the Oba is telling the colonial masters of the dangers that may befall them if they dare to go beyond their limits in the Kingdom. Through this proverb, the Oba figuratively makes it clear that his Kingdom may not be a place where any foreigner can come and misbehave. Furthermore, Oba Ovonranwen uses a proverb at a critical time when he is told that the village of Akure has declared its independence from Benin kingdom. He says: ‘Just

because the tiger has a headache does not mean the antelope can dare him'. At a time when the Benin kingdom was experiencing some uncontrollable circumstances, the Oba brags through proverbs to suggest that despite their current challenges, the Benin kingdom had nothing to do with Akure forming an alliance with the British in terms of trade.

The chiefs, when contemplating on whether to kill the British visitors or save their lives as Oba Ovonranwen has instructed, one of them, Chief Obakhovraye expresses through a proverb thus: "You just took water out of my mouth." Here, he briefly assures that his colleague just said exactly what he has meant to say. This is used to give a supportive confirmation or agreement to what his colleague said in response to the situation at hand. One of the chiefs killed the British delegates contrary to the instruction of Oba Ovonranwen. Upon hearing the news, the Oba laments thus: 'We have put our finger in the anus of the tortoise; we must be ready when the tortoise grips'. This proverb suggests the interpretation that the people of Benin should be ready for war because the chiefs have gone beyond control to kill the British delegates as he believes that the white men shall come to them in full force to avenge the death of their people. No doubt, the Oba's 'fear' as expressed in the proverb results in the Benin massacre of 1897. Out of enormous concern, the Oba is interested in inviting the white men, but one of the chiefs reaffirms, "The white man is a serpent ...we shall fight to protect our customs and traditions". The ways by which the foreigners speak are radically different from that of the people of Benin. There is one marked observation in the way the people of Benin speak. When the Benins' speak, an idiomatic expression that runs through the spoken words as formulae is observed. One could easily differentiate the human voices in the film. The use of orality also shows that the two parties stand for two uneven events. The foreigner appears under the guise of 'doing businesses with the people of Benin. The first attempt made by the white man - reading the first article marks the beginning of their disagreement. This could be seen as an omen of what would later end their relationship.

Panegyric is any form of eulogistic oration that mainly serves to praise someone for who he or she is or for his or her laudable achievement or position. It is also referred to as praise poetry. In a more detailed version, panegyric is a sort of public speech delivered to praise the great deeds of a highly placed personality before an audience. In

the African oral context, panegyric or praise poetry may be seen as any form of oral encomium or rendition, whether in songs or recitation in order to accord respect and significance to a particular dignified personality. Panegyric or praise poetry is part of the film's oratory repertoire that forms the foundation of protest in the film.

In *Invasion 1897*, the chiefs around Oba Ovonranwen performed the role of panegyric or praise poets. This is evident in every notable conversation, whether painful or delightful, as the chiefs praise the Oba in native parlance. The chiefs and others usually commence their conversation with the Oba with, "May the Oba live long". In the Oba's palace, reports of inexplicable dead men, women, and children in the kingdom are brought to the Oba. His face goes gloomy, and he makes an appeal to the gods of the land. The chiefs at this point eulogise the King. Before the chiefs finish up their eulogy to the Oba, his face surprisingly goes aglow. The Oba who assumes the position of the most important personality in the Benin kingdom is the one who enjoys the rendition of panegyric in the film. He is, therefore, a representative of African traditional heroes whose heroic deeds are always spelled out before him in public. Panegyric or praise poetry as presented in the film shows another core form of African oral tradition in *Invasion 1897*.

6.7 Protesting Fear and Failure in Parole

The protest that oral form gives rise to in the film is a protest of fear and failure. The film attempts to expose and possibly to challenge these concerns by recreating the very reality that individuals seek to escape. Of course, the storyline centers on the Benin massacre and the looting of their artifacts. Meanwhile, it is quite clear from the storyline how Imasuen creatively and aesthetically used the various means and characters available in the film to define African identity. Imasuen configures Benin as a site of failure and recovery. This representation is of different classes: of individual history, immersion in the subaltern class of the community, and the kingdom's own range of oral literature. The visuality of *Invasion 1897* is African in its entirety and its cultural identity takes on a unique identity. This unique identity is seen through Igie Ehanire's narration in the courtyard, the mode of dressing in the palace square and hinterland

spaces, their local judiciary, their cultural norms and practices, their religious practices, and their general belief systems take on an illusionary outlook.

Imasuen frames the orality of protest through perspectives based on gender, communality, language, and African tradition. Centered on the traditional Benin Kingdom, the film creates numerous scenes of oral tradition associated with Benin tradition, from the use of local town criers to language as a communicative means. In *Invasion 1897*, town criers were used to pass messages to the wider community. The town-crier system is always used for the conveyance of urgent messages and is a reliable means of disseminating information that is coming from Oba Ovoramnwen and to the elders. For instance, the director, Lancelot Oduwa Imasuen projects Benin communicative system in the scene where the Oba summons the towncrier to announce that no indigene must trade with the Europeans. Firstly, the towncrier channel is used as verification of the filmmakers' inclusion within that specific community. This is observed as the Town crier speaks in a particular *parole* that positions him within the community. The use of town criers seeks redefinition and serves as a new oral in the film. Imasuen's presentation questions Benin's identity and its limitations. The depiction of the town crier and the hybrid cultural identity shapes a postcolonial identity. By this, we assume that the oral form does not readily conform to typical face-to-face oral exchange.

In the discourse of identity in postcolonial Africa, the depiction of communicative structure is quintessential. All societies largely rely on communication to function. A society cannot establish itself without a communication system that facilitates intra- and inter-group collaboration. Communication animates and holds social interactions. Without a doubt, the process is fundamental in transporting meanings and defining actions among individuals and groups in a social unit. This need encouraged African societies in the pre-colonial era to create patterns and systems of communication based on traditional, cultural, historical, and philosophical norms and values in order to define the uniqueness of their identity.

The use of language is negatively mediated in the film because it represents dominant narratives of class, fear, and failure that are embodied in the orality. In this regard, the film *Invasion 1897* endeavors to grapple with the conditions of postcolonial realities. It

presents folks struggling to make sense of their experiences with colonialism and postcolonial realities. The contention is logged in the film's mixture of languages with experiences in the attempt to encourage self-expression, concentrating on the intricacy of articulating and reconstructing identity in the colonial and indigenous languages. The task entails employing spoken English words in a manner that concentrates on the permutation of colonization and African identity in a bid to enforce hybridity. What draws the film to a wide range of audience is that it is performed in different languages: English and Benin. This lingual dualism enables the film to be considered as a creation of new subjectivities, specifically postcolonial identity formation. As a colonial language, English evokes certain ambivalence for colonized people and that is the sole reason why Oba Ovonramwen and other characters use English alongside their indigenous language to signal the fusion of the local and the foreign in a postcolonial world.

African indigenous languages carry the burden of conformity and tradition that seeks to replicate itself in every generation. The future strives to overcome the challenges of the past by struggling for a new and different dimension to deal with numerous challenges driven by fear and failure. Does it mean that orality is purely aspirational and futuristic? No; orality has positive constituents and yields favorable outcomes. For example, a protest can occur in the presence of intimidation; one can not protest without a counterforce. The orality gives rise to the art, and protest creates a fear, opposing failure that at least the Oba and his kingdom value. The orality also provides the context for Imasuen to reconsider issues regarding the Benin Kingdom's identity and elevate it in certain ways to a universal dimension. The ethnic, multilingual, and multicultural mix of the indigenous universe is something prominent in the film, but it is presented as an ongoing struggle that occurs in every tribe.

This can be noted through the orality of Benin kingdom which is the sum total of the film's title, and its invasive power drives the theme of protest. It appears Imasuen is not condemning the implications of invasion so much as he is critiquing the specifics of his native tribe and African oral tradition ideals. It is therefore obvious that Oba Ovoranwen does not overcome his protest; he is exiled. He is symbolic of the protest in the same way that he, as a character, is defined only in the film. Imasuen's cinematic homage to protest transcends the ordinary oral narrative as well as the day-to-day lives

of the Benins and Africans at large. It is in the expression of orality that he approaches the literary adaptation of the fictional Benin kingdom as a narrative of self, bearing testimony to the universality of the human condition. The glue that binds the tale of 1897 in Benin is historical proximity. The film emerges on the cusp of postcolonialism and globalization in the twentieth century and speaks of a new culture as one oriented and placed on the same pedestal as the West (one of overcoming conquest and universality). This culture embraces its own version of a universal message that is adventurous, nationalistic, and challenges a hegemonic stance. These are stories for a diverse audience that address wider concerns.

6.8 Opening and Closing Scenes as Circular



Fig.6.6: Shot of the courtroom: *mise-en-scene* showing the circular narrativizing effect.

If we examine the opening and closing scenes in some more detail: the legal proceedings and Igie's testimony in court and judgement, from within the court, frame the film in its entirety and its diegesis, thus validating the relationship in the film. We see the opening shots. Firstly, the context of the protest is underscored by Igies' comment in court. This artifact belongs to my people! The initial images are in a montage series of protesters outside the courtroom with various inscriptions, judges, police officers, audiences, Benin artifacts, and academics. The courtroom scenes at the beginning of the film match the scenes at the end. The debates in the court over the propriety of the attempted stealing of artefacts in the museum and ownership occupies the beginning and closing scenes causing a circular effect in the overall protest narrative. This mediation strategy aestheticizes the audience's perspective in the audio-

visual, as such this circularising effect contributes to the film's diegesis, framing the worlds of the film and audience. In Fig. 6.6, *mise-en-scene* shows how the narrative framing reinforces the mediation of orality within the film that sutures the audiences. The composition of the above visual comprises a close-in shot of two people (a male and a female) hugging. The two occupy the central position with the camera focusing on them. They are the salient point of the visual. The hard lighting, the position they occupy, and the uniqueness in the color of their attire make them the focal point to which eyes are drawn.

The sequence opens with a close shot of a protester shouting alongside others. There is nothing that a viewer can make out of what they are saying but one can be sure there is an agitation. The camera tilts upward to a placard held by one of the protesters and reads "We love you, Ehanire". This is followed by close-up shots of a protester with the accompaniment of a subtitle saying "He didn't do nothing. He's no thief". The camera cuts to the close-up shot of Ehanire's wife where she says, "This is just injustice all the way". Those are the first two statements to be understood by a viewer in the agitation in this sequence. All thanks to the subtitle. The camera cuts to two barristers in a medium shot as they walk by looking at the protesters. There is a cut to a group of reporters among which a female reporter is reporting live saying "For me, this is the most celebrated case ever. This is Julia reporting from FEVA TV". This shot is followed immediately by a long shot of the street. There are two police vans plying and the camera cuts to a close shot of one of the vans as they stop at the court premises. Now in an extremely close shot from a low angle, one of the police escorts opens the door of the van that conveyed the accused, and another policeman comes down giving way to the accused to come down. There's a quick cut that shows the protesters in a long shot who are seen after a brief obstruction by a passing vehicle. The camera cuts back to the police van as Ehanire climbs down from the van. The camera remains in the same position as when the van's door is opened. There is a close-up shot of the protesters again with a woman in the group holding up a placard and the camera pans left revealing Ehanire's wife. The camera cuts into a tracking shot following the accused and the police escort. Then, almost immediately, the camera cuts to a close shot of the female reporter, Julia asking Ehanire "Did you know you were committing a crime when you got arrested?" The camera cuts to Ehanire who retorts back to the reporter saying "I have not committed any crime". The camera cuts back to the throng

of reporters and a male reporter asks, “Is stealing is not a crime where you come from?” The camera cuts back to Ehanire retorting by saying “I’m not a thief, I didn’t steal anything. After this shot, the camera immediately cuts to the long shot of the protesters as they cheer and run toward the group of reporters and the police escort. There is a quick cut in a medium shot that merges the two groups as the protesters charge. The camera cuts back to the police escort and the protesters but this time, in a close-up shot.



Fig.6.7: Shot of the deposed King been transported in exile: The shot of the above picture is a loose framing angle. It confines its object into the right corner of the frame with an abundance of space left unoccupied. This shot indicates loss and new beginning. On the path of the king, it indicates the loss of his power, his helplessness and the unknown future that awaits him.

This sequence opens with a close shot of an elderly man who sings a solemn song in vernacular (Benin language). The opening song provides no translation of the song in the subtitle. Then, the camera cuts to the image of the king and some his people and the guards. The song continues with no interruption as the king stops at the song to look back in an extremely close shot from a high angle. The shot cuts to the rear view of the sequence capturing the king and the people behind him. The shot is followed by a brief medium shot the man singing before cutting back to a close up shot of the man still singing. As the song is interrupted by a background chorus that fades out the elderly man’s voice, the image of the king is seen in a close up shot from a low angle capturing the guards and the king’s people in the frame. The camera took a tracking shot from a low angle and then stops tracking allowing the king to move close before dissolving into the king’s image in low angle mid-shot. The shows the rear view of the king’s people. The next shot is a static shot of a natural background that is cut from a low angle. Two white men walk into the frame from the right side, and they nod at each other. There is a brief interruption in the frame as another man in white walks in and

out of the frame from the same side of the screen leaving the initial occupant of the frame. The background song continues as all these shots are taken but no provision for translation by the subtitle. The following shot is a medium-long shot of some of Benin people and the guards standing. The king is seen at the far-left corner of the frame sitting almost out of the frame and then the camera cuts back to an extremely close shot of a guard emerging from the lower deck of the ship. He is holding a silky regalia of a kind to be worn by the king as he goes into exile. There is a moment of camera panning left following the emergence of the guard. The camera cuts back to a medium-long shot as earlier before a close-up shot of the king with his people standing behind him as he is dressed in the regalia. The shot that follows in the sequence is a medium shot from a low angle that has four guards in the frame as the ship moves. Almost immediately follows a medium shot of the king with a guard standing behind him. This time, the king says “The ditch that swallows an elephant will have no room for another animal”. This expression is aided by the subtitle that now comes to life. The four-man frame comes back to the screen and then back to the king as he continues to speak in vernacular “White man! Moor!!” There is a quick succession of cuts between the medium shot of the four guards and the long shot of the ship as it cruises in the vast expanse. The king continues to speak as the camera cuts back to him in medium shot, but this time, in English “You have bitten the sweet bitter bile of fame and power, but remember, non lasts nor will your life”. The medium shot of the king dissolves into a long shot of the ship against the natural background.

Imasuen cleverly introduces his stance on the postmodernist take on this philosophical position using the medium of film to actualize it. He makes use of the Oba to voice his inner thoughts by having him repeat “I am doing this for my people” which is mantra-like throughout the film. Resistance implies protest and imagination. As conceived in the title of the film “*Invasion 1897*”, the Benin Kingdom and his oral narrative of “*invasion of 1897*”; this cascade of association suggests that we are dealing with three issues: the historical Benin kingdom, protesting fictional invasion and the imagined invasion. The film enables us to connect fantasy with reality. “I wanted to let the world hear our own side of the story. It was important they hear our own side of the story.” Imasuen explained in an interview. Deploying the medium of film to shape his narrative is indicative of the ironies in the adaptation of literature. If the film had accurately

portrayed his imagined Benin kingdom, it would not have the same impact from the literature.

The oral tradition is a text that the ancient Benin kingdom relied on in their daily communal lives. (The cultural construction of this oral form has its major theme anchored on the elderly, the aged, and those in authority). But the audience is included in this world of oral tradition because we are listening to the text as it “speaks” to us. This turns us into judges who must pronounce verdicts on its direction. The oral tradition is a form of sacred text. Like the sacred temple, it is accessible to the priest, the faithful, and those who attest to the efficacy and supremacy of the Being, which the Oba does not, but which his oracle bearer, does. The belief in ancestral power underlies the film’s text as evidence of the power of traditional African religion and identity. The oracle bearer features prominently in the palace, as a mediator between men and god, a firebrand orator, who consults the gods through the oracle of the land. The oracle bearer on his part always brings forth messages to the kingdom at the behest of the Oba (who is obviously the custodian of the traditional mode of worship). The messages are enshrined as sacred texts to be venerated. As an agent of spirituality, it stands for power and influence in the film. The film (*Invasion 1897*) becomes the medium through which Imaseun messages are commodified.

The orality of *Invasion 1897* is a dialogical engagement in which we can make meanings from the works of the filmmaker through the oral tradition. Every oral form plays a unique role in the imagination of the particular adapted work. Imaseun’s cultural roots in Benin and the orality complement underscore the creation of protest in the film. Protests are often created out of real-world experiences but are structured in non-archetypal ways. The film implies that any historical moments with orality can be mythologized and universalized to suit human comprehension. The culture associated with ancestral powers (religion), the historical past of the Benin tribe, rulership, the judicial system, and African identity, and of course, the local tradition, feature prominently in *Invasion 1897* because this is the culture which Imaseun is familiar.

From the beginning of the film, Oba Ovonramwen is presented as highly confident. The way he speaks, his mannerisms and the way he approaches issues demonstrate his overt reliance on the supernatural. The first killings that we witness in the film signal a level

of warning from the two men who stand accused. They make the Oba know that if the land is consumed by their blood, it will be baked by fire. This among other things is used to foreground the denouement. There is another warning issued by a spirit man who foretells what will happen in the future when the land witness calamity. The man tells the Oba that the land will survive but not before “fire”. Aside from all these signs of warning, the Oba’s daughter also warns him. She told her father that she saw fire and the chiefs were clamoring for a timely solution. The dream also foregrounds what later happens in the film.

The Oba clearly depicts his high level of obstinacy when the White men negotiate a treaty. When the treaty mentions that the Queen wants to extend her protection to the Benin Obadom, the Oba's reaction is absolute and fearful. He shouted at the visitors and told them that ‘he is a spirit’ and ‘a spirit does not need protection, but rather protects others.’ Another crucial point worth noting is the warning of the chiefs to let the white men enter the land while the ritual is going on. His overindulgence in the power of the gods makes him a bit careless, minding the less important things while forgetting the rituals. The overconfidence and overindulgence that the Oba has in the gods leads to the massacre and genocide that befalls the land. In a way, Lancelot Imasuen stresses the fact that abandoning warnings and signs could lead to a calamitous end. Another point that Imasuen could be driving home is the fact that Africa’s ritual culture is rich and cannot be underestimated. The aftermath of its ignorance could be disastrous in the way it happens in the film.

In any given society, the promotion of the identity of the people is usually facilitated by the influence of specific sets of people. This could be a result of the spiritual, political, or economic power they possess among the people. They could command respect from the people without effort. In the film, *Invasion 1897*, the Oba and his chiefs who mainly serve as his special advisers wield a lot of influence. Their influence is evident in several scenes in the film. In terms of identity, as showcased in the film, it can be said that Oba Ovonramwen plays a significant role as the chief custodian of the tradition of his people. This is because, in traditional African society, the traditional ruler is expected to carry on with the absolute responsibility to preserve and promote the tradition of his people. He therefore knows everything that has to do with the custom of his subjects and to keep to the promotion and conservation of same.

The chiefs in the Oba's palace are not left out of the task as they are always found in the Oba's palace either to support him, comfort him, encourage him or advise him. The chiefs advise the Oba when he is set to welcome the white men against the tradition of the land. It is considered a sort of traditional inappropriateness to accept strangers into your land during the Igue festival. In this respect, it is quite obvious how the chiefs in the Oba's palace value the customs and tradition of the land and see to it that they are by the Oba's side at every point in order to enforce some checks and balances.

It is a clear picture in the film that the Oba projects and openly promotes African identity in his Kingdom. This he demonstrates also during the wedding of his daughter. During the wedding, songs are part of the important proceedings of the wedding ceremony. The songs were rendered by some groups of people in the wedding, highlighting the place of songs in social events in Africa societies. More so, traditional dance is presented during the wedding ceremony. The Oba is also seen chanting incantation during the wedding. In some ways, these show the cultural lived experience of the life of the people of Benin kingdom. Seeing the Oba doing the incantation shows how he cherishes the tradition of the land.

Invasion 1897 is no exception when talking about films and orality. The filmmaker put more intensity in the word of mouth and general sounds in the film. It is indisputable that actions are central to films but orality most of the time does the work even better than the action or should we help to ascertain the intensity and degree of an action. Take for instance, the protagonist in the courtroom. The facial expressions display his anger as we see him mostly in extreme close-up shots. But his outspokenness, the energy with which he emits those words and the intensity of his voice as he tries to justify his actions. The use of illustrations by the protagonist, idioms by the king and the chiefs and even some esoteric language of the Benin all play vital role in stressing the importance of orality in the film. If we imagine only the actions without words of mouth or any form of sounds, the characters will just some mere bunch of gesticulating figures.

Like every other African work, *Invasion* comes with its own argument. The film stages the argument that Africa, as a continent, has been a victim of loot and different kinds of theft in the hands of the colonizers. In the film, the Benin people are robbed of

priceless artifact that preserves their prestigious history by the White. The age-long looting of these artifacts brings about the argument of the film. As a result, the film argues that the artifacts must return to their rightful place. This argument is subtly woven into the film.

The different elements employed by filmmakers are to create a world in which the audience would also live. For this reason, the use of lighting, orality, different sounds, camera movement, and the like become necessary. Filmmakers want a work that will be all-inclusive. That is, they want the audience to share their feelings. In staging his argument, the filmmaker of *Invasion* intricately weaves his audience into the film's world. The gruesome massacre of the Benin people that we witness as the audience creates a feeling of sympathy. The empathy that pervades through the film presents the audience with the option to agree with the argument of the film.

That the culture and traditions of a people are a strong point from which the beauty of their language is exhibited is something that has been in existence for a very long time. The people of Benin represent this idea in an unrepentant way. They hold on to the fact that their tradition must prevail over any White man's visit. The film is a means of advocating the preservation of African culture and traditions. The refusal of the White man's entrance into Benin land is a way of projecting Africa's refusal of the new culture. Like many other African films, *Invasion* attempts to depict the strong will of Africans to refuse any attempt to dilute or pollute the chastity of their culture. The primitive Africans are also presented as passionate protectors of culture and traditions. This is a way of revisiting the enthusiastic nature of Africans about their culture and traditions. Africans are seen to be neglecting their cultural heritage and thereby embracing modernity. The courtroom display of the protagonist is a clarion call for Africans to wake up from their ceaseless slumber. The boldness and outspokenness of the protagonist suggest that Africans must always stand up and fight or rather speak out to claim what is theirs. The protagonist is deployed by the filmmaker as a mouthpiece to stress the need for Africans to always stand up for what they believe.

6.9 Conclusion

This chapter has discussed extensively some of the practical issues relating to adaptation and orality in defining film as a multimodal whole. The main issues addressed are the mediation of orality in the visual medium of film and the emphasis placed by the director in the adaptation work which may be read as secondary orality. Through *Invasion 1897*, the textual analysis reveals the adaptation of orality across historical, cultural, and traditional settings; and the ways in which narrative can lead to a greater understanding of its role as protest in film. The emergence of African films is a result of the burden and passion of many contemporary African filmmakers to retell and represent the history, identity, and tradition of their origin. In this light, the film *Invasion 1897* is not just an avenue for Lancelot Imasuen Oduwa to tell the story of the Benin invasion of 1897 but to also project the cultural identity of the Benin kingdom. Above all, the complexity of African films emerges due to the fact that the filmmakers exploit indigenous oral traditions manifested in the form of myths, legends, proverbial expressions, folktales, and festivals in the presentation of African identities in their works. The film explores African identity such that traditions and ways of being in Benin's oral narrative are well-delineated.

Chapter Seven

Discussion and Conclusion

7.0 Introduction

As the title of this study suggests, the research has been conducted to examine the mediation of orality in West African films adapted from literature. The main theoretical framework guiding the study is secondary orality. Several aspects make the findings relevant to the questions of the research. Across the analysis, the identified oral tradition in the film turned out to be highly influential in examining filmmakers' preference for mediating orality. Source texts such as *Carmen* and *Xala* highlight the importance of oral tradition only in passing and none of the texts, mention its importance in the visual. Nonetheless, *Carmen*, *Benin Massacre*, and *Xala* can serve as secondary literature for negotiating what happens to the 'spoken word' through film. To explicate the mediation strategies and representation of orality, the study introduced secondary orality adaptation as a framework for assessing the potential of orality in film. The study involved textual and visual analysis, respectively. In the next section, the findings are discussed extensively.

7.1 Research Findings

7.1.0 Film's Orality as Communication

As a relatively new phenomenon, orality in West African films combines oral tradition and technology as a means of communication among Africans in general, following Keyan G. Tomaselli, Arnold Shepperson, and Maureen Eke (1995) analysis of the concept of orality, by making orality the central focus of the films. For this, communication is presented in both living human and non-human communication, the latter extends to rituals and coded speech as manifest in the films analyzed. Apart from human communication, the reverence to ancestors and gods are significant hence orality as represented in the films takes into cognisance their importance in African socio-cultural condition. Keyan G. Tomaselli, Arnold Shepperson, and Maureen Eke (1995) argue about contemporary African society that 'oral cultures, as one example of cultural divergence, speak a different world than those of written cultures. (1995, p.18-35) has

been considered as descriptive of African oral tradition thereby revealing an aspect of communication and identity in African society.

7.1.1 Research Questions, Findings and Discussion

The focus of this research has been on the complex ways in which selected West African filmmakers mediate orality. The films are strategically configured and structured to be specific voices about the notion of 'secondary orality adaptation' particularly to standing for 'identity'. Some research questions were developed to guide the research: When is oral narrative also orality? What stake does orality hold in the questions of identity in film? Does the idea of orality mean the same thing across different historical moments and production contexts? Is there any difference between orality and oral tradition? What mediation strategies do filmmakers adopt in dealing with orality? Three films were analyzed on this basis.

In *Invasion 1897* the mediation strategies of using oralised history, giving it the perspective of 'protest', in combination with verbal art and soundscapes, were discussed as primary strategies in this film. The emblemizing of Benin Oba, as a library of 'verbal art', represented uniquely within the Benin oral tradition, is a specific device that ascribes him the central position, and the agency of protest in the film. This representation is reinforced by another mediation strategy employed. For example, on one hand, the use of a camera to strategically position the stolen Benin Bronze as a contested object of desire thereby mediating questions of identity through truth, justice, or guilt. Another character within the context of secondary orality is the telegraphic stool, not in terms of its image but of 'cultural memory'. The soundtrack at the end of the film - that of the 'loss' of the Benin Kingdom - due to the British invasion is therefore an act of 'suturing' the audience into taking position with the film's title – but more importantly into agreeing with the film's 'orality' of protest.

Xala establishes a strong relationship between national culture and the representation of the African condition. These are defined in the specific deployment of the film's orality, such that, for example, the filmmaker redefines social realism and uses Senegalese as representative of most postcolonial African contexts. *Xala* achieves its orality by combining multiple mediation strategies. It incorporates a griotic function. It combines cinematic aesthetics and didactic content. The opening scenes and take-over

of the Chamber of Commerce are used as 'orality' to illustrate the context of colonialism and neo-colonialism, as such the scenes give the film impact. The strategic visual thematic transference of costume and African map projects an ideologically driven narrative - a sounding board for modern storytelling - that binds the audience to the film's orality which in turn creates an 'alienation-effect' in Brechtian terms. Broadly, the orality of this film reinforces the relationship between the leadership and the governed, in particular within the political work and political communication.

I will now discuss *Karmen Gei*, a film that stands for another trend of orality in the construction of identity. Like *Xala* and *Invasion 1897*, *Karmen Gei*'s orality lies heavily on what can be described as language. Here, however, the language is not based on the typical oral but underpinned by mediation strategies which of course have been structured to convey ideology and positioning of identity through gender and sexuality. There is a focus on female 'voice' which facilitates a unique cinematic language in postcolonial Africa. The overall representational strategy created is that of praise-singing among other African oral tradition creates *cinema engagé* which suggest liberation, freedom, and lack of subservience and will continue to be the hallmark of independence for the female gender. Even though the film is seemingly adapted from an opera, its 'voice' is structured to be black, female, and cosmopolitan in its sexuality, and has the appearance of being culturally relevant despite the claim of 'misfit' due to the film's theme of lesbianism, thereby making an extraordinary intervention in mediation strategies in postcolonial film of West Africa. The scenes involving prison life, sabar dance, and death provide an undercurrent for the 'voice'. The camera style consistently gives agency to females and feminism within the same frame.

As observed, the mediation of orality by filmmakers in the film is beyond aesthetic, cultural, and political because West Africa's oral tradition is considered ideological, in the way filmmakers have represented its various forms to convey certain powerrelations among indigenous cultures such as *Invasion 1897*, *Xala* and *Karmen Gei*. Let us now link the study's findings with wider implications for Film Studies scholarship.

7.1.2 Orality as Cinematic Language

The mediation of orality in films by West African filmmakers is traceable to themes and proximity to issues that bedevil the social existence and experience of West Africans. As such, filmmakers' action is important as to retain the richness of African languages, and their complexity and sometimes even project the often-isolated historical traditions through cinematic languages. In this way, Barlet's assertion on cinematic language is illuminated along these lines and is understood as not mere aesthetic but also with West African films analyzed in the study. For Barlet (2000)

"The strength of African cinematic language relates to its symbolism, which consists of a surrealism that is both mystical and metaphysical. The films of Black Africa deliberately mingle the esoteric and the sociological gazes. Symbols invade the images. These take the form of gestures, attitudes, rhythms, color, sounds, local and western objects, rituals, and so on, combining with the words or – proverbs [...] They invite the viewer to participate [in the actions and] create a unity [...] in the play of vital forces which rule the world."(p.143)

In this manner, West African orality can be treated as a specific kind of cinematic version of communication that travels from speech to written form and invades the visual, not only for West Africans but maybe for the continent of Africa. The orality of film can reflect the symbolism inherent in societies, especially to its many audiences who tend to rely on film as a medium of information, entertainment, and knowledge exchange. On this note, Ogundele (2000) notes that 'what we see in the videos is a direct reflection both of what happens in real life and of what people think and feel' (p.91)

7.1.3 Film as Streetwise

As part of the findings in the study, it acknowledges that West African films draw extensively from orality, 'on existing popular forms such as song and dance, the oral tradition (both literary and rumors), the popular theatre' (Diawara, 1992, p.141) to reflect on actual realities. The reliance on orality makes the film appealing. Okome (2007) notes that the mission of West African films such as Nollywood in indigenous audiences 'is [to produce] commercially savvy [...] which is to produce culture from the street' (p.2). The sort of culture Okome is emphasizing is the type of West African films produced as insulation from Western influences. Mbye reckons 'the potential of a viable African cinema and audio-visual industry in shaping and promoting the current projects of national, regional, continental and pan African integration is a given that

cannot be overemphasized' (2007). This study reveals that the film addresses the question of postcolonial identity posed by Africans, which is notable in the representation of orality in *Invasion 1897*, *Karmen Gei*, and *Xala*. Not only did the filmmakers utilize human-coded speech such as proverb, praise poetry, and songs, but they also drew from the historical past to highlight the creativity and importance of art forms which was presented in contemporary times for the benefit of the present generation of audiences. Therefore, Des Wilson's reference to African society which 'there is recalling the memory of the ancestors in the past and calling of the people to work together for the future of the community' (2008, p.51) is worth mentioning as being consistent with the concern of this study and its finding.

7.1.4 Film and Third Cinema Perspectives

The interdisciplinary methodological approach in this study enables us to relate some aspects of orality using Third Cinema perspectives. The study relied solely on cultural background where ontologies and cosmologies of West Africans and their oral tradition are used to interpret the mediation of orality in the film. In this way, this study agrees with proponents of Third Cinema in the areas of film interpretation in Africa especially in West Africa. The meaning-making of film products can be understood through textual and visual analysis as against the practice in previous studies using storylines and focusing on aesthetics of the films using Western perspectives (Murphy, 2000; Akudinobi, 2001)

7.1.5 Film's Ideology

Another interesting finding of this study has to do with the ongoing relationship between film and other arts and how these drive film towards cultural convergence and resistance to imperialism. Pines and Willemsen posit 'the impetus of Third Cinema, continues to be participatory and contributes to the struggle for the liberation of the people of Third World' (1989, p.55). This study finds that West African films are unique in the way they incorporate another art form without the essentials of codes or typographies that exist in other models of films such as in the West. Even though there is still a long way to achieve better homogenization of such interactions, this study believes that orality (and other oral forms) can be a good starting point. West African films help to decolonize the mindset and challenge the stereotypes created over time by

Western ethnocentrism. This was obvious in the analysis of films about identity and cultural imperialism. These films challenge dominant negative portrayals of imageries and sceneries; instead highlight the significance of cultural extension and nationalistic values in line with recent studies (Kunzler, 2007; Onuzulike, 2007; Akpabio, 2007; Oluyinka, 2008; Osakwe, 2009; Uwah, 2009).

The next section discusses the contribution to existing scholarships.

7.2 Contribution to existing knowledge

The core focus of the study is the mediation of orality in West African films adapted from literature. This study is driven by the intent to make reasonable claims that film is secondary orality which allows us to reflect on the dynamism of oral forms as primary material for narration. It validates that orality refers to the totality of oral tradition and engagements in the film across time and space, it is not merely sound but adaptation of narrative. The research makes it clear that films are visual planes incorporating oral and needs to be analysed from textual and visual perspectives.

The use of oral tradition forms is highly implicated in the strategies deployed in films that seek to represent the African continent. The use of orality modes are also the vessels for producing knowledge at the same time as they throw into sharp relief, the ways in which they make claims and contest received wisdoms about Africa. In the world of African filmmaking, orality queries their uses and abuses, with effect on thematic and aesthetic directions that such films may take.

Many West African filmmakers lay claim to adapting (oral) tale formats and narrative codes to the film and others use griot characters to narrate the filmic diegesis in the form of a tale. Some other works weave narrated (oral) tales into the main diegesis of a tale, and some adapt actual (oral) tales in the cinema using animal masks and puppets (Gugler, 1993, p.59). In some instances, there is a claim to ‘return to the source’³⁵. This means oral narrative traditions for stories as well as styles and techniques to tell their stories, while some look towards stories written in European languages. One of the

³⁵ The ‘return to source advocacy’ is inspired by Amilcar Cabral (1998). It argues in detail that any effective manner of getting rid of colonial oppression is essentially to be tied to the culture of the formerly oppressed people.

main motivations of the research are to demystify the notion that traditional African oral tradition is not adaptable in contemporary film culture.

Reflections on the so-called adaptation of orality in films as mentioned might yield more insight if we provide empirical evidence to demonstrate the importance of production and reception in media system of representation in addressing question of identity. This study, therefore, provides a deeper understanding of orality in West African films with the intention of proffering a distinct interpretation of filmmakers' mediation of identity.

To this end, a different concept is proposed in this study which can overcome the limitations of existing studies by drawing attention to orality based on West African oral tradition. By focusing on orality in films adapted from literature, the peculiar West African ways of communicating their oral aesthetics, traditional belief systems and discursive context becomes distinct. This thesis succinctly demonstrates how orality is structured in film as secondary orality adaptation.

Amid global concern, there is need to locate African films within cinematic space by interfacing it with other art forms (Adaiza, 1995). This study bridges the existing gap in literature through textual and visual analyses of orality in film. Through secondary orality adaptation, these art forms encounter within the cinematic space, and this is explicable in the research findings of the ability of filmmaking apparatus to magnetise the oral, literature and other art forms.

Consequently, the contribution of this research to the existing knowledge can succinctly be summarised as:

- The research asserts that oral narratives can travel from spoken word, written form into film.
- The research adds significantly to current writing on secondary orality in film by expanding our understanding of the concept in West African films.
- This research also places orality within the contemporary scholarship in film (screen, visual and television) and media at large.

- The research contributes to the fields of adaptation, orality, literary and film studies.
- The research updates existing works in African oral tradition and adaptation of cultural and art forms Ladebo (1992); Onabajo and M'Bayo (2009); Omolola (2013); Ezeigbo (2013); Mgbemere (2015) and Onuzuike (2016).

7.3 Implication for future research

An important aspect of this work is the idea of evaluating the continuous patronage and consumption of West African films beyond the scope of entertainment and visual pleasure. Engaging the film text and seeking a better understanding of the mediation of orality in the films challenges audiences and filmmakers in specific ways such as promoting awareness of its cultures, and oral tradition including improving the overall quality of film production and reception. As the discourse on oral narrative continues to evolve, this work recommends discussing film as an adaptation and cultural identity for West African audiences as well as globally. In this sense, our work highlights some findings that could help situate the social needs of Africans. Due to time and space, findings in research such as this are considered least exhaustive. Notwithstanding, several examinations and studies are needed to develop the findings of this work, the key is the investigation of the critical issues facing the society in which West African film's identity and articulate, for instance, testing the filmic themes on actual audience in order to evaluate the present findings.

Another area is to account for the production and distribution channels of West films across the geo-political zone of the continent. By this, we can study how films differ across cultures and the context of their orality. Since this study was carried out to explore mediation orality in West Africa, another study is recommended to extend the filmmaker's representation in Hollywood mainstream and other industries such as Canadian Cinema, German Cinema, and Russian Cinema beyond Third World perspectives. The textual and visual analysis proved helpful in unveiling the mediation strategies in the film. It would be a useful case study to examine the reception of these films through focus-group discussion, interviews with filmmakers, and in-depth analysis of subtitles to extend the audiences' understanding of orality in films.

Additionally, the study had to rely on literature as secondary text in relation to the individual case studies. This approach proved very useful because we were able to look at how the filmmakers draw character, concepts, and idioms in films. But the fact that the two arts, film and literature, have different production processes may have significantly influenced the outcome of the study. More research needs to be done to examine a specific genre of literature and the influences at work to make more meaningful impact in filmmakers' choices of orality. Research into the relationship between orality and film needs to be expanded by further questioning other sources of storytelling and narratives. Future works should involve testing and exploring orality as a subject in West African film adaptations to see how filmmakers filter, negotiate or make a selection of oral tradition modes and their rationale. Prospective studies could address potential gaps between filmmakers' mediation of orality as a metonymic of West Africa and the objective realities of film as a medium of secondary orality.

An identifiable feature of orality is the cinematic language that West African films reveal. This language is deeply rooted in the quest for the supernatural that is gods, ancestors, and oracles. We see how the influence and powers of these forces in the oral tradition anticipate an organic African cosmology. Therefore, more analysis is required to relate this feature to explore the relationship between the cosmic worlds of West African film in what Ireobi describes 'search for transcendence' (2005, *Africanist*, p.11)

While this present study has attempted to clarify some issues around the mediation of orality in West African cultures in films, opportunities exist in research to solidify the findings and to confirm the thematic inferences presented here. The idea of this work is to explore the mediation of orality in West African films in the construction of identity. The work envisions orality in the film as a culture that expresses the life experiences of West Africans, whereby the oral narratives, and tradition in the visual in some specific ways resonate with their everyday lives.

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