

**BEYOND CULTURAL BOUNDARIES: IMAGINING THE NATION IN  
*MALOONED***

**Boneace Chagara (B. Ed.)**

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Nairobi.**

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## DECLARATION

This research project report is my original work and has not been presented for examination or award of a degree at any other University.

Signature

Date

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Boneace Chagara

This research project report has been submitted for examination with our approval as university supervisors.

Signature

Date

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Tom Odhiambo, Ph.D

Signature

Date

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Simon Peter Otieno, Ph.D

## **DEDICATION**

A refrain for Leah—  
the unsung hero, archer, and bow of my arrow.  
See, now she lives on.  
Unbowed.

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This research project has been completed through the grace of God Almighty, to whom I owe the breath of life, good health, and insights expressed herein.

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## ABSTRACT

In the contemporary global society, identity claims are always invested with multiple if not infinite subject domains based on identity categories such as “race, gender, generation, institutional location, geopolitical locale, sexual orientation” (Bhabha 1994: 1), among others. In concurrence with Bhabha, it is imperative to look beyond the so-called “narratives of originary and initial subjectivities” to the particular “moments or processes” that emerge out of the “articulation of cultural differences” (1994:1). It is precisely within these so-called “in-between spaces” that it is possible to elaborate “strategies of selfhood” (Bhabha 1994:1). Eventually, these strategies aid in the creation of “new signs of identity, and innovative sites of collaboration, and contestation” (Bhabha 1994:1), thereby contributing to new ideas of being and belonging to the collective society. It is precisely within this specific framework, that the present study interrogates how Bob Nyanja’s film *Malooned* (2007) contests and negotiates cultural identities through its audio-visual discursive strategies, which represent the nation as an integrated value-sharing community that embraces difference and/or diversity.

# CHAPTER ONE

## BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

### **Introduction**

According to Neal Sobania, in *Culture and Customs of Africa*, Kenya is a country of many contrasts, defined by a complex medley of vast geographic, cultural and linguistic diversity (2003: 1). Steve Akoth Ouma echoes this view in *Challenges of Nationhood* arguing that the Kenyan nation was initially constituted as a “constellation of cultural nations” by the British colonial administration (2011:6). Besides people from its over 50 ethnic groups, the Kenyan population presently comprises of people from other continents, including various Asian communities, remnants of settler families, and an ever-growing number of expatriates now living there. Identity and identity formation are, therefore, the essential way through which individuals and groups eventually become rooted and balanced, thereby effectively positioning themselves to address life’s challenges within the broader social context. As observed by Beatrice Wanjiku Mukora, in *Beyond Tradition and Modernity*, human beings are constantly engaged in the process of identification, based on their daily experiences, contextual factors, kinship ties, gender, or even location, thereby shifting their views of both themselves and others accordingly (2003: 219).

The question of the ideal collective national identity has been a major concern for practitioners in the Kenyan cultural industries, particularly in cultural products such as theatrical productions, films and works of literature (Miguel 2004: 331). As a result, cultural industries are playing a significant role in the creation of social subjects by capturing the desirable social values and moralities that sustain order and stability in the society (Treffry-Goatley 2010:15). Specifically, Treffry-Goatley argues that film and the mass media play a profound role in establishing and sustaining the idea of the nation as a unified whole (2010:15). Dina Adhiambo Ligaga, notes in her dissertation on *Radio Theatre* that

broadcasting in Kenya, especially through the state broadcaster (Kenya Broadcasting Corporation, KBC), has often been deployed specifically to that end (2008:3). Thus, the media is well positioned to disseminate the narrative of the nation, thereby sustaining the idea of the nation within the masses.

Nevertheless, Ali Mazrui argues in *Africa between Nationalism and Nationhood* that post-colonial African societies are characterized by “high reproductive symbolism (kinship symbols deriving from heredity and ascription) and a rising class conflict” (1982:40). Reproductive symbolism, according to Mazrui, was bound to become politicised in post-colonial African societies as different kinship groups compete for limited resources (1982:40). In African societies like Kenya, where class factors are defined in ethnic terms (1982:40), acute ethnic cleavages have become so widespread thereby posing as a threat to peace and stability in the nation. For that matter, Kenya is largely divided along its ethnic lines, with ethnic consciousness remaining a core factor even in national politics.

According to Nobel Laureate Wangari Maathai, in her autobiographical account *Unbowed*, the problematic ethnic relationships and perception of difference among ethnic groups is partly attributable to Kenya’s colonial history of stereotypical and discriminatory ethnic profiling (2007: 22). James Ogude tends towards a similar view when he highlights Ngugi wa Thiong’o’s argument that modern ethnicity in Kenya is partly “a product of colonial history of divide-and-rule”, which gave ethnicity its current lethal potency (1999: 39). However, this is not to deny individual agency in the circulation of ethnic stereotypes. While deep-rooted ethnic stereotypes have a basis in the discriminatory and divisive colonial administration policies (Akoth 2011:6), individuals play a significant role in the circulation of these stereotypes. In that regard, rigid cultural boundaries inevitably undermine the idea of the nation as a unified whole.



Bob Nyanja's film *Malooned* (2007), which was released at the height of ethnic hostilities and conflicts on the eve of the 2007/2008 post-election violence in Kenya, addresses the question of nationhood in Kenya. Interesting questions worth of investigation emerge henceforth. Firstly, how does *Malooned* explain the pervasive rigid cultural boundaries that have increasingly threatened to tear the Kenyan nation apart? Secondly, can this film be playing any significant role in fostering political integration and national cohesion in the country? Thirdly, how does the film contribute to nationhood and/or national consciousness in Kenya? In the light of these and such questions, this study aims to explore the role of film in establishing and fostering notions of the ideal collective national identity through a Foucauldian/post-structuralist discourse analysis of Bob Nyanja's film, *Malooned* (2007).

To understand how cinema can contribute to nationhood, it is important to reflect on the manner in which the nation is currently being imagined and projected in films like *Malooned*. That leads to the pertinent questions of this study: What is the ideal collective national identity imagined and projected by *Malooned* and, how does the film address cultural tensions in pursuit of that ideal? This study has benefitted immensely from the Cultural Studies' constructionist approaches to the analysis of cultural products, as expounded in the works of celebrated cultural theorist Stuart Hall. I hypothesize that *Malooned* (2007) imagines and projects the idea of the nation as an integrated value-sharing whole through its discursive strategies. In so doing, I seek to demonstrate how the rigid cultural boundaries can be contested and negotiated in fostering national consciousness, and by extension, a strong sense of shared destiny within the masses.

My research on the question of identity in Kenya was inspired by several factors, but most importantly, I was motivated by the observation of what I consider to be imaginings of the nation in the writings of various scholars, historians, academicians as well as other

reputable authorities including Ngugi wa Thiong'o, James Ogude, Charles Hornsby, Neal Sobania, Justin Willis and George Gona, among others. An expository reading of their writings confirms that indeed the question of identity and belonging has and continues to raise other critical questions and is not likely to be settled soon. Indeed, as Ogude argues in *Ngugi's Novels and African History*, elites like Ngugi wa Thiong'o and his contemporaries in the 1960s generally imagined themselves as the creators of the nation (1999: 129).

Several papers, articles and books have been written on the topic of nationhood so far, including but not limited to Ngugi wa Thiong'o (1978, 1993), James Ogude (1999), Wangari Maathai (2007), Makokha Kibaba (2004), Charles Hornsby (2013), Justin Willis and George Gona (2013), among others. Generally, this body of work appears to be focussing extensively on the problematic of identity and belonging as well as ethnicity and its effects. Continuing research, especially in history, cultural and media studies, seems to be focusing on a whole range of issues. Bodil Folke Frederiken (2000), Beatrice Wanjiku Mukora (2003), Rachael Diang'a (2007 and 2013), Dina Adhiambo Ligaga (2008) as well as Kinyanjui Wanjiru (2015), among others, are concerned with the role and impact of the Kenyan media, especially the daily print newspapers and audio-visual media.

I have also watched various films, including *Malooned* (2007) and *Ni Sisi* (2013), both of which address the issue of heightened ethnic consciousness, as well as identity and belonging in Kenya. The name '*Malooned*' is derived through a corruption of the English word '*marooned*', which literally means 'trapped' and 'isolated', to reflect the film's setting in the toilet. The film narrates the story of a married Luo man and an engaged Gikuyu lady, who become trapped in a washroom on the 15<sup>th</sup> floor of the Teleposta Towers in Nairobi over an Easter weekend (*Malooned* 2007). *Ni Sisi* (2013), on the other hand, was written and directed by a British-born director Nick Reding, and it also grapples with the question of identity and belonging in the Kenyan society. Set in a typical Kenyan village characterized by

a unique blend of diverse and rich cultures, the film demonstrates how rumours and mistrust could easily provoke violence that could set a community on the path of disintegration (*Ni Sisi* 2013).

There is no doubt that films are a potentially powerful media through which masses can be significantly influenced, organized and even mobilized for any particular social course in society. Alan Williams, in the *Introduction to Film and Nationalism*, observes that films are “terribly effective tools of nationalist (or any) propaganda”, particularly because they seem to be quite capable of mobilizing nations, thereby giving them a “new direction” (2002: 8). Williams further argues that films can “reflect and keep in circulation values and behaviours associated with a particular nation” (2002: 8). The African film in general, and specifically the Kenyan film industry, has and continues to play a critical role in the on-going socio-cultural processes of identity contestation and negotiation.

Manthia Diawara, according to Mukora, argues that African films belong to the social realist narrative tradition, which often entails critiquing the on-going social-cultural issues (2003: 221). African films, therefore, often join in the “contestation of, and struggle for identity within, the postcolonial site” (Mukora 2003: 221). Mukora observes that, like most African films, Kenyan films also highlight and project the cultural way of life of the Kenyan people and their constant struggles to negotiate identity in the post-colonial space that is marked by tension between tradition and modernity (2003: 219).

Mukora emphasizes that Kenyans are not a “monolithic group, both fixed and static” (2003: 227), but a complex medley of diverse cultures. In other words, Mukora attests to the existence of a vast range of cultural diversity and difference that characterizes the Kenyan society. Deeply engaged in local politics, small cinemas such as Kenya’s provide an opportunity to analyze the idiosyncrasies of a country’s culture and social customs (Falkowska and Lenuta 2015: vii). In that respect, it is worth investigating whether the

contemporary Kenyan films have remained conscious of the great diversity of its audiences and attempted to incorporate them in their pictures.

### **Definition of Concepts**

Before proceeding with this study, it will be vital to contextualize some of the key terms and concepts that will be critical to my thesis including representation, culture, language, ethnicity, identity, cultural identity, nation, national identity, and national cinema and stereotypes.

### **Representation**

The concept of representation occupies a very significant place in Contemporary Cultural Studies. It is what essentially connects meaning and language to culture. The conventional meanings of the term as ‘to present/image/depict anew’, and to ‘stand in for’ or ‘take the place of’, as in the case of political leaders, are too simple and straight-forward (Hall 1997: 16). Hall contests these meanings of the term because they engender the notion of representation as either a reflection or a distortion of some true meaning that already exists in the world out there. Consequently, this notion presupposes the existence of one, fixed or true meaning of events, situations, or groups of people and so on, against which the level of distortion can be measured. To take such a stand, in the context of the present study, will be to suppose that there is a true and fixed essence of identity that the Kenyan national cinema must capture and project.

However, since the meaning that people make out of an event will vary, depending on how the event has been represented, the meaning of an event, Hall argues, is constitutive of the event itself (1997:5). In that case, the meaning of events in *Malooned* is subject to interpretation, thus cannot be entirely fixed or secured. For that matter, this study adopts the ‘constructionist/constructivist’ approach to representation as “...the production of meaning

through language” (Hall 1997:16). This view of representation emphasizes that individuals use signs which are organized into varied languages to ‘communicate meaningfully’ with other people. While these signs may refer to phenomena in the material world, they may also reference fantastic ideas or imaginary worlds that do not exist at all.

## **Culture**

Stuart Hall argues that individuals of the same culture share the same “conceptual and linguistic universe,” and this enables them to comprehend their world (1997:22). Since people share concepts together with other folks, it enables them to make sense of the world together and, to build a social world together (Hall 1997:22). This view is echoed by Ngugi wa Thiong’o, in *Homecoming*, where he defines culture as “a way of life fashioned by a people in their collective endeavour to live and come to terms with their total environment” (1978: 4). Ngugi further emphasizes that living cultures are never static as individuals often struggle to master their physical environments while creating a collective social life together (1978: 4).

According to Hall, therefore, cultures consist of the “maps of meaning”, “frameworks of intelligibility” or basically, all the things without which the world would be incomprehensible to human beings (1997:21). Hall argues that meaning arises out of the shared conceptual frameworks or maps which members of the different groups or of a shared culture have in common. The shared conceptual maps can also be understood in another way, as the ways in which we classify and organize the world, to make sense of it. The present study approaches culture in the same manner, as the “maps of meaning” or “frameworks of intelligibility”, or “shared concepts/ideas”, which enable people to comprehend their environment (Hall 1997:21). In the Kenyan context, the Kenyan culture comprises the maps

of meaning, which makes it possible for Kenyans to understand each other and to build a social life together as a whole.

## **Language**

According to the Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary, language can broadly be understood as a “system of words or signs” that humans use to communicate their “thoughts and feelings” to each other. Ngugi argues that language is “a carrier of values fashioned by a people over a period of time” (1972:16). Since people’s concepts of the world find their way into communication through language, individuals must also have a shared way of interpreting meaning of the signs of a language (Hall 1997:19). Hall uses ‘language’ in its broadest sense to refer to a vast range of languages including, but not limited to the languages of speech and writing, electronic/digital languages, the language of musical instruments, film, dance, facial gestures/expressions, and the use of the body or clothes for communicating meaning (*Representation and The Media* 2011).

Hall perceives language as that which “gives sign to the meanings that we have in a form which can be communicated to other people. In other words, Hall regards language as that which “externalizes (makes available as a social fact/ a social process) the meanings that we are making of the world and of events” (*Representation and The Media* 2011), without which meaning cannot be exchanged. Language, in the context of this study, refers to the language of visual images, the language of music, and dialogue. In that respect, this study is primarily concerned with language as a system of audio-visual signs, which are used to communicate meaning.

## **Ethnicity**

In ordinary usage, 'ethnicity' is regarded as a cultural concept that denotes a certain form of social organization based on shared values, beliefs, norms experiences and memories, among other traits. In other words, individuals from the same ethnic group base their belonging on what Chris Baker refers to as "shared cultural signifiers" (symbols and practices) that have been engendered by particular social, historical and political contexts (2012: 255). These so-called "shared cultural signifiers", therefore, function to enforce and perpetuate the notion of belonging, partly by alluding back to some shared mythical ancestry. Indeed, as Baker puts it, ethnicity should be understood as "a relational concept that is concerned with categories of self-identification and social ascription" (2012: 256). This study approaches ethnicity as a relational concept that arises as a result of discursive practices rather than as a fact of nature. This position recognizes that ethnicity is largely a product of the manner in which individuals talk about group identities and identify with the signs and symbols that constitute it.

## **Identity**

The Merriam-Webster online dictionary defines 'identity' as 'who someone is', 'the name of a person/ the qualities, beliefs' which differentiate a person/group from others. This definition already presupposes the existence of identity as something universal and constant or, according to Baker, it implies that there can only be a "fixed essence of femininity, masculinity... and all other social categories" (2012: 221). However, the unity that is assumed in identity categories such as gender and the rest is merely a constructed sense of closure as opposed to a natural one. In that respect, this study adopts the non-essentialist "strategic and positional" concept of identity as a cultural phenomenon that constantly shifts depending on the time and place. Hence, identity in the context of this research will be regarded as a constantly shifting and "emotionally charged discursive description" of the self (Baker 2012: 221).

## **Cultural Identity**

Hall, in *Cultural Identity and Cinematic Representation*, offers two approaches to ‘cultural identity’. The first view of cultural identity is the notion of “one, shared culture, a sort of collective ‘one true self’, hiding inside the many other, more superficial or artificially imposed ‘selves’, which people with a shared history and ancestry hold in common” (Hall 2004: 387). The second approach to cultural identity, however, recognizes that there are just as many similarities as differences among people that consider themselves to be of the same cultural group. This view holds that due to the intervention of history, “we cannot speak for very long, with any exactness, about ‘one experience, one identity’, without acknowledging its other side” (Hall 2004: 388). In that respect, the present study adopts the stance that cultural identity is not necessarily only a matter of being, but also of becoming in that, as Hall argues, “it belongs to the future as much as to the past” (2004: 388). In the analysis of *Malooned*, the study is particularly interested in the process through which individuals can aspire towards the ideal collective national identity that is imagined and projected by *Malooned*.

## **Nation**

Perhaps one of the most problematic concepts in the discourse of the nation is the term “nation” itself, whose meaning has been contested on many grounds, particularly on the basis of what constitutes “nations” well as “nationhood”. However, Benedict Anderson’s 1983 definition of the nation as “an imagined political community” is a significant starting point in thinking about the concept. Anderson’s definition makes it clear that it is through public debate that the nation emerges as a meaningful entity that can be talked about and, through media institutions of a specified geographical reach, the nation eventually gains its shape (Higson 2000: 18).



Since, according to Anderson, all communities are basically “imagined”, the difference between them lies not in their ‘falsity/genuineness’, but rather in the varied ways in which they are ‘imagined’ (2007: 256). Anderson’s view of the nation is fundamental to this study, especially his attribution of the national identity to modes of communication. This implies that a standard language and the collective recognition of time are fundamental aspects of the nation as an imagined political community. This can be seen with respect to the media, which often perpetuates the notion that events occur simultaneously across space and time. Nevertheless, this study takes issue with Anderson’s seemingly conservative notion of the nation as having a “secured” collective identity and sense of belonging within a specifically demarcated geo-political space. This has also been highlighted by Higson who argues that, “the nationalism project in Anderson’s terms, imagines the nation as limited, with finite and meaningful boundaries” (2000: 18).

Obviously, taking Anderson’s view of the nation all the way inevitably undermines possibilities for both the “experience and acceptance of diversity” (Higson 2000: 18). Eventually, if this were to be the case then we ignore the fact that cultural differences and diversities may and actually do exist, not only within nation-states, but also among ‘national’ communities that are dispersed geographically (Higson 2000: 18). Furthermore, Williams criticizes Anderson’s view for ignoring the fact that nations need not only to be created, but must also to be maintained thereafter (2002: 3). Nothing could be further from the truth, especially considering that Anderson imagines the nation as “inherently limited and sovereign” (1983:6). As such, Anderson’s definition falls short and cannot be adopted wholly.

Hall defines the nation as “a symbolic community” (*The question of cultural identity*, 1996: 612), a phenomenon that grants national culture the capacity to actively create and regenerate both a profound sense of identity as well as allegiance among its members. Baker

reiterates this point arguing that besides being political formations, nations are also “systems of cultural representation” within which the “national identity is continually reproduced through discursive action” (2012: 259). Hall argues that both allegiance and identification to “tribe” or religion, among other categories of social identification, eventually shift to the nation with more inclusive representations. In that respect, the ‘nation’ in this study is taken to be a “symbolic community” within which meaning is constantly negotiated between diverse and ever-shifting cultural identities. This view of the nation not only accounts for the cultural diversity and difference that characterizes the Kenyan population, but also reflects the intricacies of nationhood, in view of the multiple identities of the postcolonial subjects as well as the transnational-basis of cultural production and consumption in the globalized world.

### **National Identity**

This study approached national identity as a form of “imaginative identification” both with the ‘symbols’ and also with the ‘discourses’ of the nation as a culturally derived entity (Baker 2012: 259, 260). However, this study approaches the national identity as something dynamic and manifold rather than fixed and homogenous. In that case, the national identity is constantly being contested, negotiated and circulated through all kinds of media, which normally intervene in the face to face communication between people. Since the establishment, maintenance as well as transformation of the national identity is as a result of collective action, cinema as a form of collective action has a much greater role to play in this collective process.

## **National Cinema**

The idea of a “national cinema” is also a problematic concept to grasp. Higson observes that “there is not a single universally accepted discourse of national cinema” (2002: 52), especially because, cinema is and has always been a globalized medium, particularly with regards to the global diffusion of personnel and aesthetics (Stam and Shohat 2000: 382). The unequal terms of exchange of cultural products, particularly films, across global audiences reflects the hegemonic power play that often characterizes the global cinema. Nonetheless, societies often appropriate and indigenize foreign cultural products to suit local ideals, tastes and preferences. Thus, global mass culture coexists with local cultures thereby yielding a whole new cultural form, which then becomes the driving force of cultural identification.

Undoubtedly, it is much prudent to think of the national cinema as ever shifting, to accommodate and reinforce changes and transformations in the popular myths of cultural specificity (Treffry-Goatley 2010:18). For that matter, no particular cinema can be defined with certainty as a typical national cinema since notions of cultural specificity are always shifting due to socioeconomic and political pressures, among other factors. Consequently, what is termed as the “national cinema”, in the context of this study, is actually a complex medley of numerous cinemas. It is important to note that there is also slippage, as opposed to clear cut distinctions, between the various cinemas comprising the so-called “national cinema” (Treffry-Goatley 2010:18). In that case, Kenyan national cinema is made up of a vast array of cinematic images that ultimately make up a vibrant montage rather than a standardized or consistent whole.

## **Stereotypes**

James Rinehart, in *The Meaning of Stereotypes*, defines stereotypes as “sets of beliefs”, often held by groups as “categorical generalizations” about themselves and/or members of other

groups (1963: 137). According to Hall, stereotyping is a representational practice that “reduces people to a few, simple and essential characteristics, which are represented as fixed by nature” (1997: 257). Power inevitably plays a significant role in stereotyping since it not only results to the exclusion of all minority groups from the social and symbolic order, but also from the moral order.

### **Statement of the Research Problem**

The Kenyan cultural industry has explored the question of cultural identity to great lengths. This has been in recognition of the dangerous path of negative ethnicity, especially in the context of mounting ethnic tensions and conflicts that have put the country’s stability to great test. Evidently, ethnic cleavages are a great threat to the nationhood project as repeated ethnic strife could potentially tear the nation apart and obliterate its very essence of existence. In that respect, it is imperative for the nation’s diverse population to be mobilized and integrated in the creation of the nation for the purposes of fostering peace and stability.

Principally, the quest for an ideal collective national identity is as real for the Kenyan filmmakers such as Bob Nyanja as it is for Kenyan writers and scholars like Ngugi wa Thiong’o and his contemporaries, who have also imagined and narrated the nation through their writings. Evidently, Kenyan historians, writers, academicians, and scholars, among other authorities have long recognized the urgent need to foster national consciousness by reiterating their commitment to the identity question through their writings.

The dire need to sustain the idea of the nation as a unified whole, despite obvious differences within Kenya’s diverse population cannot be overemphasized enough and so is the question of the role of film in fostering nationhood. For that matter, reflecting on the manner in which the nation is currently being imagined and projected in *Malooned* is a particularly significant starting point to that end. In other words, this interrogation seeks to

highlight how films like *Malooned* can contribute to national consciousness, thereby fostering nationhood in the Kenyan society in general.

### **Research Questions**

This study is guided by the following research questions:

- i. What is the ideal collective national identity imagined and projected by *Malooned*?
- ii. How does *Malooned* contest and negotiate cultural identities in Kenya?

### **Objectives**

Objectives of the Study are:

- i. To investigate the notion of the ideal collective national identity imagined and projected by *Malooned*;
- ii. To discuss how *Malooned* contests and negotiates cultural identities in Kenya

### **Hypotheses**

The underlying hypotheses of this research are:

- i. *Malooned* imagines and projects the idea of the nation as an integrated value-sharing community that acknowledges and embraces difference and/or diversity.
- ii. *Malooned* contests and negotiates cultural identities through its audio-visual discursive strategies

### **Justification for the Study**

According to Hassan Arero Wario, the many difficulties encumbering definitions of the “nation” or the “national identity” of nations has been epitomized in many countries, particularly in the post-colonial states (2007: 292). Arero argues that the search for the “nation” has often been a “turbulent and circuitous process”, beset by numerous challenges

(2007: 292). Severe disagreements emanating from divergent ideas, perceptions and imaginations of what the “nation” and the “national process” ought to be have often undermined national consciousness in many aspects. Margaret Njoroge and Gabriel Kirori argue that rigid cultural boundaries are still a significant challenge to the realization of a collective national identity in Kenya (2014: 357). Kibaba Makoha observes that different ethnic groups regard each other with mistrust and suspicion, leading to conflicting relationships (2004: 156).

Nevertheless, the profound enthusiasm expressed by Kenyan writers, scholars and historians such as Bethwell Ogot and Ali Mazrui, among others, in the on-going nationhood discourse indicates both the significance of the identity question and the centrality of identity in people’s lives. From their articulations of “imagined” collective existence and communality, Kenyan thinkers are not only collectively reflecting on the identity of the people of Kenya, but also on the diverse experiences of Kenyans. In retrospect, such are the “imaginings” of what it means to be Kenyan and the unique experience it entails that have stirred both curiosity and intellectual interest in the topic of national identity as represented in *Malooned*.

It is important to explore how film can contribute to the question of national identity in the Kenyan nation, since it seems to be capable of having significant psychological effects on its audiences. Christian Metz, in *From the Imaginary Signifier*, argues that cinema, unlike all the other arts, is more “perceptual”, particularly because it incorporates signifiers of most if not all the other forms of expression within itself (2004: 820). For instance, while presenting pictures to us, cinema also lets us listen to music and it is made up of photographs too; this explains why cinema is sometimes referred to as a “synthesis of all the arts” (2004: 820). In that regard, the film medium, through its audio-visual discourses and innovative cinematic techniques, is most likely to have a greater psychological impact on the masses.

Certainly, a significant amount of research has already been undertaken in the general field of Kenyan films, and specifically on topics such as identity and belonging in Kenyan films (Mukora 1999), the history of Kenyan films (Diang'a 2007) and the style and content of Kenyan message films (Diang'a 2013). While it will be imprudent to dismiss the existing research and its noteworthy contribution to knowledge, it is worth acknowledging that its focus on the identity question is not necessarily exhaustive. Beyond research theses by a handful of reputable scholars in the field of film studies, research on Kenyan films and the Kenyan film industry is thoroughly limited. Indeed, systematic scholarly research focusing specifically on representation of national identity and belonging in contemporary Kenyan films is thoroughly constrained. Perhaps, the limited research interest in the infantile Kenyan film industry could be explained by the inadequate access to film education, insufficient material and unavailability of relevant information regarding the industry in general, as addressed by Justin Edwards's report, *Building a self-sustaining, indigenous film industry in Kenya* (2008: 3).

According to a 2010 Baseline Survey Report prepared for the Kenya Film Commission on the economic contribution of the Kenyan film and television industry, documentation of information about the industry is generally inconsistent (2008: 6). Similarly, the report indicates that information on the Kenyan creative industries is highly aggregated. Consequently, a researcher would need to collect data from varied information sources and to interview individual players as well, to obtain an overview of the Kenyan film industry. Recognizing the industry's promising potential and fast growth rate, the report recommends that there is need for carrying out regular research to track its performance and contribution to the economy.

In concurrence with the findings of the KFC's report, there is indeed an urgent need to establish a body of knowledge on the Kenyan film industry through research. In that respect,

the present study makes a significant contribution to existing body of knowledge by aiding the understanding of ideological differences and rigid cultural boundaries encumbering national consciousness. Most importantly, this research raises further questions that will hopefully provide the much needed direction for future researchers. It is worth noting that knowledge gained in this particular research might also be beneficial to relevant stakeholders including educators, planners and practitioners in the Kenyan film industry in general.

### **Literature Review**

The idea of being Kenyan or basically, the concept of ‘Kenyaness’, defined by Peter Wafula as “an ethical and philosophical doctrine that aspires or inspires Kenyan people into the love for the country” (2010: 53), has often eluded many, scholars and historians alike. Perhaps, two of the major events that have elicited intense public debates and discussions on the nationhood question in the recent past are the state-sponsored ‘*Najivunia Kuwa Mkenya*’ (*I am Proud to be Kenyan*) campaign and the *National Dress project*. According to Wafula, the barrage of negative criticism that targeted these two events signified the elusiveness of the concept of ‘*Kenyaness*’. Wafula points out that the ultimate results of these events were either “hotly disputed,” or “generally ignored” (2010: 50). Wafula’s argument underscores the view that different people or groups of people have a varied understanding of what it actually means to be Kenyan. This phenomenon can be accounted for by the country’s characteristic cultural diversity, which is partly attributable to the multiplicity of historical experiences of its citizenry.

Elisha Stephen Atieno-Odhiambo and John Lonsdale state that, “New states are often declared in the name of peoples not yet aware of their own collective existence. Their heroically unified past and manifest joint destiny has yet to be imagined for them” (Atieno-Odhiambo and Lonsdale 2003: 1). This statement immediately foregrounds the argument that



is inherently at the core of this study. Atieno-Odhiambo and Lonsdale point out cases across the world, from Europe to America, and finally to Africa, all detailing the manner in which achieving a unified sense of nationhood has often proven to be a challenge for many nations. Professor Ali Mazrui echoes similar sentiments saying that “acute ethnic cleavages” have continuously hampered national consciousness thereby making transitioning from “African nationalism to African nationhood so painful and demanding” (1982: 23).

In the Kenyan context, Ogude points out the conscious attempt to unite the country under a common myth of the nation, without privileging any particular group or alienating another. For example, Ogude posits that “to privilege the role played by the Mau Mau fighters would (have been) tantamount to suggesting that only the Gikuyu... fought for independence, a position that would have alienated those ethnic groups not involved in armed struggle” (1999: 129). According to Ogude, Mzee Jomo Kenyatta, Kenya’s founding father and first President, “positioned himself as the ultimate architecture” of Kenya’s nationhood thereby assuming the obligation of forging the nation as a collective community that embraces its diverse populations (1999: 129). Indeed, in *Suffering Without Bitterness*, Kenyatta states that:

The most essential need which I have constantly sought to proclaim and to fulfil in Kenya has been that of national unity; nationhood and familyhood must and can be contrived out of our many tribes and cultures. Nationalism rooted in loyalty to Kenya must come first and be made a living force that can impel and compel aggression and subversion. (Kenyatta 1968: ix)

Kenyatta further on states, “We have been creating throughout Kenya a family or community spirit” (1968: xi), akin to the Tanzanian version of “Ujamaa”, which eventually failed but is arguably one of the most daring and fairly successful attempts at fostering national

consciousness by an African country. These passages are significant pointers and evidence of the manner in which the nation of Kenya was founded after independence, as an imagined community that knows neither boundaries nor differences.

Njoroge and Kirori investigate the meaning and consequences of ethnocentrism on the Kenyan society and argue that since independence, African states are yet to integrate their multiple ethnic identities into concepts of the nation state, citizenship and common good (2014: 357). Ethnocentrism in this case is defined as acute affinity for one's own ethnic group on the assumption that other groups and cultures are inferior. In that regard, ethnocentrism can be viewed in the same regard as prejudice, stereotyping, discrimination and racism, given that it often undermines understanding and provokes conflict while encouraging the tendency to manipulate ethnic identities for private interests.

Njoroge and Kirori deem ethnocentrism as the principle cause of divisions among members of different ethnic groups, races and religious groups in the society (2014: 357). Atieno-Odhiambo and Lonsdale make a similar observation in their critical analysis that national histories are rife with bitter struggles over the essence of nationhood rather than forward progress of comradeship (2003:2). In the Kenyan case, according to Atieno-Odhiambo and Lonsdale, arguments over nationhood often revolve around issues like who paid the ultimate price for self-determination, whose efforts remain unacknowledged, or who has benefited most from the resulting freedom, and at whose expense (2003:2).

According to Wafula, 'Kenyaness' as a concept is a "contested typology within the various class structures that inform contemporary Kenyan realities" (2010: 54). Nevertheless, existing cultural groups once lived and interacted across porous cultural boundaries in pre-colonial times. Pius Wanyonyi reckons that many studies carried out among the pre-colonial people of Kenya have indeed shown that they lived together, interacting across the span of the geopolitical space of what later came to be recognized as 'Kenya' (2010: 54). These

studies, therefore, seem to suggest that prior to colonial intervention, there were no strict cultural boundaries separating the various indigenous communities since members mixed and interacted freely through cross-cultural marriages, trade and other forms of exchanges. Wanyonyi further points out that nearly all modern Kenyan ethnic groups can trace their present existence to a sociocultural medley where dominant categories assimilated minor ones (2010: 35). Similarly, Wanyonyi observes that the history of the migration and settlements of the Kenyan communities affirm the heterogeneous ancestry of Kenyan people.

Wanyonyi traces the rise of ethnic consciousness to the advent of colonialism, when colonial administrators inhibited existing linguistic and cultural interactions through rigid administrative boundaries (2010: 36). Through divisive and discriminatory colonial policies that forbade free movement and interaction of the African people, the colonial administration system engendered rigid ethnic boundaries. This can be seen in the naming of boarder areas as ‘white highlands’, ‘native reserves’, ‘outlying districts’ and ‘closed districts’, which was pervasive during the colonial era (2010: 37).

To make matters worse, the same divisive and discriminatory criteria was also applied to further separate and isolate the respective ethnic groups even on private settler farms. Maathai observes that ethnic communities were restricted to the specific job category assigned to them and could not interact or live in close proximity to one another (2007: 22). For instance, while the Kikuyu worked in the fields, the Luo undertook domestic chores and the Kipsigis tendered livestock. She further asserts that, “Except for the skin colour we shared, we were as foreign to one another as the British settlers were to us.” (2007: 22).

The African Nationalists, cognizant of the oppressive colonial reality, attempted to resist and subvert this ethnic consciousness by establishing trans-ethnic political parties. Nevertheless, the adverse effects of the colonial legacy have persisted even in the post-colonial Kenyan context having been reincarnated in the form of “specific ethnic stereotypes

and interethnic exclusivity” (Wanyonyi 2010: 37). Significantly, relations between Kenya’s Luos and Kikuyus— which became sour in the aftermath of the assassination of Tom Mboya, the flamboyant Luo politician, by a Kikuyu named Nahashon Njenga Njoroge in 1969 (Wanyonyi 2010: 41)— have worsened throughout Kenya’s political history.

Years of ethnic bigotry under successive divisive and discriminative regimes have further entrenched ethnic consciousness among the people (Akoth 2011:8), thereby further strengthening ethnic divisions in Kenya. In an interview with Kenyan talk show host Jeff Koinange, renowned Kenyan playwright professor Micere Mugo remarks that Kenyatta “failed to create a nation”. She remembers the independence moment in nostalgic reverie, noting that, “...people had rallied behind him, ready, hungry for the creation of a nation...at independence, buses came from Kisumu, from Mombasa, from Garissa, and so on to come and greet the father of the nation, and the spirit was there (Mugo 2015).”

As Justin Willis and George Gona observe, independent Kenya was a ‘developmentalist’ state with alien formal institutions, language, and practices that had been inherited from the colonialists (2013: 450). In her 2012 thesis, Angela Odhiambo notes that the concept of nationhood became particularly important at the instance of political independence, since the country needed “a committed and responsible citizenry” that was equipped with virtues of national identity and unity (2012: 30). Odhiambo argues that the country needed to replace the strong affiliation based on ethnicity that had existed before independence period.

The efforts to forge a national consciousness aimed at minimizing the impact of ethnicity in people’s minds, so that they could utilize their varied talents for the benefit of the whole nation. Language was targeted as one of the fundamental aspects that could aid in unifying the 44 ethnic communities that formed the three major language groups in Kenya. According to Odhiambo, being Kenyan implies that one belongs to multiple levels including

the national, the local, the ethnic group, and the supra-state. Bethwel Ogot once wrote that “the peoples of Kenya are nations without a state” (Mureithi 2013), to imply that varied groups may feel bound by a common descent, history, culture or language but may not necessarily identify with the state.

Indeed the Kenyan case is not unique in any way as Miguel highlights that societies that are ethnically diverse are more likely to be politically unstable and to suffer adverse corruption, low institutional performance and slow economic growth (2004: 328). In that context, addressing the issue of ethnic divisions is of critical importance, particularly for Africa, the most ethnically diverse and poorest continent. Nicholas Cheeseman and Robert Ford assert that ethnic polarization is on the rise in certain African countries including Kenya (2007: 25). For instance, Michael Kniss observes that Kenyan elections from 1992 through to 2002 have always been accompanied by violence and conflict (2010: 2). However, the scale of conflict in the aftermath of the disputed 2007 elections was much appalling as nearly 136 out of the then 210 electoral constituencies were affected by violence. Kniss argues that the 2007/2008 election violence had an ethnic basis, particularly because tribal affiliation is the single most critical basis of social relationships and identity in Kenya.

According to Marcus Garvey, in *Ethnicity and Nationhood in Kenya*, ethnicity undermines nationhood as the point of identity for Kenyans as the two are always opposed to each other (2010: 5). Nevertheless, Garvey argues that ethnicity can be acknowledged while at the same time strengthening national cohesion and reiterates the need for a national consensus on how to address ethnic divisions for the sake of unity in the future (2010: 15). Atieno-Odhiambo and Lonsdale argue that Kenya needs to “broaden its historical experiences to embrace the multicultural and multi-ethnic nature of the Kenyan state (2003: 5).” They recognize that Kenya’s nationalism was not as a result of one but multiple wills with many ‘visions for the future’.

Steve Akoth Ouma, in *Challenges of Nationhood*, points out that there are indeed instances when Kenyans express what can be termed as collective “Kenyan-ness”, as during national holidays like Madaraka Day or during Rugby tournaments (2011: 2). Such performances of being Kenyan are akin to the usual state rhetoric encapsulated in the now common dictum “Najivunia kuwa Mkenya” (“I am Proud to be Kenyan”). Moreover, the 2010 Kenyan constitution guarantees the right to be different in an inclusive Kenyan society. This revised constitution recognizes that Kenya is a plural society that is defined by gender, cultural, regional and generational categories, among others.

With regards to the national identity, Charles Hornsby argues that Kenya was a ‘colonial invention’ and that its post-independence history has been ‘a story of endurance’ with alien colonial structures (both political and economic), as well as an “unfulfilled promise and weighty historical baggage” (2013: 1). Notably, Hornsby argues that ethnicity is a central force in the collective behaviour of both individuals and groups in Kenya’s post-independence history. Ethnic conflict has endured in Kenya, despite many attempts to establish a national identity. Ethnic conflict has had a profound influence on the political system to the extent that it is impossible to discuss politics without the mentioning of ethnicity in Kenya. Gabrielle Lynch argues in *I Say to You* that ethnic identities “enjoy a seemingly natural or primordial appeal” (2011: 1) and their capacity to unite and divide rely on the assumed harmonies and dissimilarities of history and culture.

Bodil Folke Frederiksen, in *Popular Culture, Gender Relations and the Democratization of Everyday Life in Kenya*, discusses the impact of popular culture narratives both in the debates and discourses on equality and authority in Kenya’s urban informal settlements (2000: 209). His underlying argument is that popular culture narratives are an integral part of a discursive public sphere, and that they aid young people in negotiating core life areas. In order to account for the intricate interplay between production

and reception processes, this research utilizes both data from surveys as well as from content and reception analyses of select written and visual popular culture discourses. Frederiksen's investigation reveals that the increasing influence of popular culture in key life areas is paralleled with an overall social transformation that has rendered the authority of traditional institutions such as the church and the state highly contestable. Most importantly, his research highlights that the media offers open discursive spaces which allow both women and poor people to participate in on-going discussions on critical social and moral issues.

Ogude examines the portrayal of postcolonial Kenyan realities in Ngugi's major works of fiction including *The River Between*, *A Grain of Wheat*, *Petals of Blood*, and *Matigari*. Ogude highlights that soon after Kenya's independence, the elites of the country, fronted by Kenyatta, "positioned themselves as the brokers of Kenya's nationalist agenda and national unity was being erected as a repudiation of anything that would threaten this agenda" (1999: 129). Ogude's work is significant in highlighting the intricacy of the national discourse from the early 1960's onwards, thereby reflecting the ambiguities and contradictions that characterized the process of national building.

Ligaga argues that radio theatre has been instrumental in promoting the national government's agenda of fostering national unity in Kenya (2008: 3). Ligaga confirms that the theme of national unity has been the core focus of Radio Theatre, as the state under the dictatorship of President Moi sought to create and project "the idea of a unified nation" that was eager to unite its diverse ethnic groups (2008: 3). Through the moral story theoretical perspective, Ligaga's study highlights the fact that even though the state-owned national broadcaster is home to radio plays, their creators take much liberties to convey certain didactic messages to the masses, particularly because their content is inspired by everyday life experiences.

Mukora observes that the Kenyan film industry, despite being one of the oldest on the African continent, has not been adequately focused, thus, joining a host of other largely under-theorized Anglo-African cinemas (2003: 219). Mukora traces the origins of the Kenyan film industry to the British colonial era, when film was introduced by colonial administrators as an educational tool. She regards the Kenyan film industry as actively engaged in a critique of the post-independence experiences while reflecting on Kenyan cultures as they struggle to negotiate their identities in the nexus of tradition and modernity. At the core of her thesis is the idea that “colonial structures engendered tensions between tradition and modernity”, which are still at play up to date (2003: 219). Mukora notes that Kenyan cinema and literature has largely been concerned with the process through which individuals redefine their identities by positioning themselves between oppositions (2003: 220).

In *Disrupting Binary Divisions* (1999) (*Beyond Tradition and Modernity* 2003), Mukora, examines how identity is portrayed in two Kenyan films, Anne Mungai’s *Saikati* (1992) and Wanjiru Kinyanjui’s *Battle of the Sacred Tree* (1994). Through content and textual analyses of the select films, Mukora demonstrates that it is essential to transcend binary oppositions in pursuit of self-determination and self-definition. Mukora deploys the literary criticism’s African feminist approach to explore the manner in which individuals go beyond the limiting binary structures by using their existing wide range of identities. From the African feminist theoretical point of view, she argues that people often tap both into their multiple identities and into their varied influences to forge new forms of identities rather than merely subjecting themselves to static binaries.

Rachael Diang’a (2007), in *History of Kenyan Films (African Re-creation of western Impressions* 2011), traces the development of the Kenyan film with a particular emphasis on the evolving image of the African. She explores how the colonial experience greatly influenced the representation of Africans in western films, and how those western images of



Africans continue to influence portrayal of Africans in selected Kenyan films (*Out of Africa*, *Kitchen Toto*, *Kolormask* and *The Battle of the Sacred Tree*). Diang'a argues that by aspiring to correct the representation of Africans in western films, African filmmakers end up making films that do not even remotely depict the existing ambiguities in the postcolonial space.

In her unpublished doctoral thesis, *Style and Content in Selected Kenyan Message Films* (2013), Diang'a embarks on an enquiry of the style and content in selected Kenyan message films that were created from 1980 - 2009. Drawing from the insights of various theories, including the Formalist, *Auteurist*, Postcolonial and viewer-response perspectives, Diang'a contends that the director, having made the stylistic choices during filmmaking, could ever dictate the meaning of message films. Contrariwise, she argues convincingly that the meaning of message films is ultimately subject to the viewers' interpretation (2013: iii). Nevertheless, Diang'a's study underscores the view that the way a film is packaged, through content and style, eventually influences the manner in which viewers engage with it to derive its meanings. In that context, Diang'a establishes that both content and style are essential elements without which message films cannot accomplish their didactic functions effectively.

### **Theoretical Framework**

Broadly speaking, this research is strictly a qualitative study and it exclusively focuses on the analysis of *Malooned* (2007) film as a case study. My work is generally grounded in the Contemporary Cultural Studies' theoretical and methodological techniques to the study of cultural texts. The broad scope and profundity of the work that is undertaken in the name of Cultural Studies, hereafter referred to as "CS", has led to the field being described simply as a cross-disciplinary approach to the study of culture ("Stuart Hall and Cultural Studies" n.d). CS, especially in recent times, has increasingly been associated with the work of Stuart Hall, a Jamaican-born cultural theorist and historian.

Nevertheless, the field of CS was officially organized in 1964, when Richard Hoggart launched the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies in the English Department at the University of Birmingham, England (Turner 2003:62). However, it was during Hall's tenure as director from 1969 that the Centre achieved much of its significant growth and acclamation thereby becoming an independent department (Turner 2003: 59). Much of its efforts were directed towards a vast range of cultural forms, practices as well as institutions and how they were connected to society and social change. In that respect, CS focused its analyses on various objects of study, including but not limited to the so-called 'popular', 'low' as well as 'mass' cultural forms such as advertisements, television, films, magazines, literary genres, radio, photos, and performance arts (Leitch 1991: 75).

CS has benefited from many ideas across a vast range of fields and academic traditions. Some of the notable figures whose ideas have contributed to CS include Howard Becker, E.P Thompson, Raymond Williams, Roland Barthes, Louis Althusser, and Michel Foucault, among others. It is precisely within this particular context of cross-disciplinary relations that the overall theoretical framework in this study can be described as being eclectic. This work has benefitted from a wide range of theories which are relevant to particular aspects of the research. Nevertheless, this research is grounded in the social constructivist/constructionist view of language and representation, which encompasses both the semiotic approach (advanced by Saussure and Barthes) and the discursive approach as theorized by Michel Foucault and a host of other so-called post-structuralist theorists such as Jacques Derrida and Roland Barthes. I lean towards the constructionist approach because, unlike the reflective and intentional approaches, it acknowledges the 'public/social character of language' (Hall 1997: 25).

Contemporary CS pays a special attention to exposing the control of representation ("Stuart Hall and Cultural Studies" n.d). In that regard, CS has come to be recognized as a

critical perspective that seeks to explain the political effects of mass culture. Since the 1990's, CS has become particularly concerned with questions of subjectivity and identity, that is, how individuals understand themselves as beings as well as how they describe themselves to others respectively (Baker 2012: 11). Generally, CS seeks to understand how individuals become who they are, how they are produced as subjects, as well as how they identify with specific subject domains.

Hall is highly critical of what he terms as 'mainstream' communication research for its claims of being empirical and quantitative while limiting its focus on one-dimensional cause-effect relationships (Griffin 2012: 334). He is particularly sceptical of the ability of the social sciences to provide adequate answers to critical questions regarding the massive influence of the media. In that respect, Hall and the Birmingham school seek to 'articulate' what they perceive as a cultural struggle between opposed forces (Griffin 2012: 335), and to reveal the power asymmetries in society, which the media often masks. In so doing, Hall and the Birmingham school seek to help liberate individuals from unwittingly falling prey to the dominant cultural ideology. Hall, in *The Problem of Ideology*, defines ideology as the "mental frameworks— the languages, the concepts, categories, imagery of thought, and the systems of representation— which different classes and social groups deploy...to make sense of, define, figure out and render intelligible the way society works" (1996: 26).

Unlike the Marxian view of ideology, Hall views oppression as "a cooperative achievement" by adopting the idea of "hegemony" in discussing the cultural function of the media in society (Griffin 2012: 336). The idea of hegemony acknowledges the existence of other cultures and ideologies which struggle for position and influence in different contextual situations. The media may often present multiple issues but it often "props up the status quo" by favouring the taken-for-granted interpretations of reality thereby reproducing consent in the guise of an already-existing consensus (Griffin 2012: 336).

The multifaceted nature of culture reflects the ways in which different individuals and groups are adapting to the mundane experiences in their environments ("Stuart Hall and Cultural Studies" n.d). Different cultures are ranked differentially, based on the social group to which they belong. While elite cultures are ranked higher than the rest, they are equally fragmented and negotiated, thus require "an alliance of ruling-class fractions— a historical block", to dominate the rest ("Stuart Hall and Cultural Studies" n.d). In that respect, cultural hegemony is achieved most effectively through a certain degree of consent from the disenfranchised classes— through accommodation and incorporation tactics— as opposed to coercion.

The dominant group wins consent that allows it to subtly assert its power and influence over the rest by co-opting aspects of their cultures and absorbing the subordinate classes into key institutions and structures. Consequently, the subordinate classes live and work within those very structures and relations that perpetuate and sustain the "power and social authority of the dominant order" ("Stuart Hall and Cultural Studies" n.d) thereby becoming subjected to the ideas and expectations of the hegemonic culture. In that respect, the mass media plays a significant role in consent-making, thereby assuring the masses, comprised of workers and people of the subordinate classes, that they share mutual interests with those individuals that wield the reins of power (Griffin 2012: 336).

## **Methodology**

For a long time, CS used semiotics— attributed to the seminal work of the Ferdinand de Saussure— as one of its paramount methodological approaches to the study of culture. However, the semiotic approach tended to limit the idea of representation to the view of how words function as signs in language (Baker 2012: 20). In that respect, semiotics often confined the "process of representation to language, and to treat it as a closed, rather static, system" (Hall 1997: 42). The discursive turn in cultural studies was a ground-breaking move

in that it linked language and practice; in this context, representation must be understood as a site for the production of social knowledge. This implies that representation is viewed as a more “open system” that is closely aligned with “social practices and questions of power” (Hall 1997: 42).

For Foucault, it is imperative to understand how knowledge is produced through language, which gives meaning not only to physical objects, but also to social practices (Baker 2012: 20). Since analyzing power relations is more critical to Foucault than simply looking at the relations of meaning, he emphasizes discourse (rather than language) as a system of representation. Foucault deploys the term “discourse” in a way that is radically different from its usual application in Linguistics, simply as “passages of connected writing or speech” (Hall 1997: 44). Foucault is particularly interested in the specific “rules and practices that produce meaningful statements thereby regulating discourse in different historical periods” (Hall 1997: 44).

According to Hall, Foucault’s concept of discourse refers to a cluster of statements that provide the language for conversing about or representing the knowledge regarding a specific topic in a definite historical context (Hall 1997: 44). This means that discourse not only delineates the topic of discussion, but also specifies and restricts the manner in which individuals can talk about the topic in question. In other words, discourse outlines the appropriate and intelligent manner of speaking, writing, or conducting oneself regarding the topic or producing knowledge concerning it. Thus, Hall argues that discourse can be regarded as “the production of knowledge through language” (Hall 1997: 44). Nevertheless, Hall regards all social practices as having a discursive aspect as well since they entail meaning, which ultimately influences and shapes the conduct of both individuals and groups.

It is important to note that Foucault regarded discourses that are typical of the way of thinking at any particular time or within a specific institutional structure as consisting of

multiple statements, texts, actions, and sources (1972:45). This has the implication that the same discourse will appear (as forms of conduct) across diverse texts and institutional sites in the society. Such diversified discursive events are said to constitute a single discursive formation when they are referring to a single object in the same way, thereby enforcing the somewhat naturalized or taken-for-granted interpretations of the world (Griffin 2012:338). This phenomenon can be understood as some kind of intertextuality; for instance, both the media and the state discourses may at some points converge, thereby enforcing a particular interpretation of a given reality in society.

For Foucault, knowledge is a form of power since it always yields real effects when applied in the real world, consequently becoming true (Hall 1997:49). This implies that all kinds of power relations have their correlative body of knowledge, just like all knowledge also presupposes and constitutes power relations. Hall succinctly sums up this view when he argues that “knowledge linked to power not only assumes the authority of ‘the truth’ but has the power to make itself true” (Hall 1997: 49). It is important to note, therefore, that power/knowledge is neither simply oppressive nor firmly centred within institutions. Rather, this power/knowledge is both creative/productive and permeates all relations concurrently (Foucault 1995:194).

The present research deploys this discursive approach to culture in a task that entails illustrating the manner in which the nation eventually becomes, taking shape and form through symbolic representation in the discourses of the selected contemporary Kenyan films. This approach is particularly helpful in illuminating notions of the ideal collective national identity imagined and projected by the selected films besides revealing how they contest and negotiate cultural boundaries. Therefore, the Foucauldian/poststructuralist discourse analysis is most suitable for the task of this research for the simple reason that it is well placed to interrogate the taken-for-granted with respect to representation (Foucault 1972:22).

What is particularly critical for this research in Foucault's argument is the idea that discourses eventually produce the objects of their knowledge within specific social cultural contexts and that nothing could ever conceivably exist meaningfully out of discourse (1972:41). This raises a very fundamental question: do identities exist naturally or can they always be won or lost, thus, must be struggled over through subsequent discourses that compete for position and influence? With hindsight that all social practices have a discursive aspect and that nothing meaningful exists out of discourse (Foucault 1972: 44), I will particularly be interrogating the function of statements in discourses that attempt to fix certain dominant power relations or the status quo as well as the correlative formation of subject domains and objects of their knowledge.

In any case, I do not seek to engage in an argument of whether (or not) there is an essence of the ideal collective Kenyan national identity that is represented in *Malooned* (or that ought to be imagined and projected in cinematic representations of this kind). Far from it, I seek to explore the manner in which diverse subject domains and objects of diverse discourses may be created, particularly through the marking and articulation of difference. Similarly, my intention in this research is not necessarily to argue for or against cultural homogeneity, that is, the truth or falsity of cultural boundaries in that geopolitical space called Kenya. On the contrary, I discuss how notions of cultural boundaries can be contested and eventually negotiated through discursive strategies that result to the unfixing of previously entrenched meanings or representations.

This study regards discursive practices as statements or enunciations that frame that which is constructed or constituted as belonging and that which is excluded as the 'Other' in signifying practices. Foucault's approach to truth as a discursive formation (1972:44) is particularly helpful to this end. Here, the productive power of the discursive practices is put to question in an attempt to appraise the potency of representation as a process through which

certain 'truth-objects' may be formed. Interrogating the audio-visual and musical discourses of *Malooned* especially insofar as they relate to matters pertaining to both individual and group identities reveals its insights regarding the issue of national identity and belonging.

The Foucauldian view that power/knowledge is not a possession that can be monopolized by anyone (Balan n.d) informs my analysis of the manner in which power is exercised and contested in the selected film. Here I also deploy Foucault's idea of 'panopticism', inspired by Bentham's Panopticon, which not only "automatizes", but also "disindividualizes power" thereby "dissociating the see/being seen dyad" (Foucault 1995:202). Examining the contested power relations in the discourses of the selected film has been significant in highlighting opportunities for forging new domains in pursuit of more inclusive representations that foster national identity and belonging.

My critique of the persistent cultural stereotypes that manifest as the fundamental basis for identity and belonging thereby subverting national consciousness pursues the logic of a certain kind of unfixing of the already taken-for-granted interpretations of the world. In this area of analysis, I refer immensely to theories of stereotypes. Hall conceptualizes stereotyping as a representational practice that "reduces people to a few, simple and essential characteristics, which are represented as fixed by nature" (1997: 257). Naturalizing difference fixes and firmly secures difference (Hall 1997: 245), thereby halting the inexorable shifting of meaning. The function of this naturalization is to secure what Hall refers to as "discursive or ideological 'closure'" (1997: 245). With respect to *Malooned*, I will particularly be concerned with how the film attempts to counter entrenched cultural stereotypes through its representation of cultural difference.

My analysis of the ideal collective national identity, imagined and projected by *Malooned*, draws immensely from the idea that contemporary societies are anything but homogenous empty spaces (Foucault 1997:331). Rather, contemporary societies are saturated



with what can be termed as shadowy qualities that seamlessly fuse into one another ceaselessly. The aspect of space features predominantly in Foucault's early structuralist thought, especially because he was concerned with the use of space "as an institutionalized demarcation of structures of power" (1997: 329). To that effect, I deploy Foucault's concepts of 'utopia' and 'heterotopia' in my analysis of the use of space and its meaningful associations in *Malooned* (2007).

Foucault describes utopias as "arrangements which have no real space" (1997: 332). In that case, utopias are spaces that exist in "a general relationship of direct or inverse analogy with the real spaces of society" (1997:332). Two aspects of utopias are that they represent the perfect society or its exact opposite and they are essentially unreal. On the other hand, heterotopias are "real and effective spaces" found in society; however, they "constitute a sort of counter-arrangement, of effectively realized utopia (Foucault 1997:332). That is to say heterotopias are simultaneously real and mythical, existing side by side with everyday spaces. Thus, According to Foucault, a heterotopia is the kind of place that "lies outside all places and yet is actually localizable" and, unlike utopias, they are places that are "absolutely *other* with respect to all the arrangements that they reflect" (1997:332).

Foucault argues that all cultures as well as civilizations on the face of the earth consist of heterotopias since heterotopias are a constant feature of all human groups (1997:332). Foucault identifies heterotopias of crisis, comprised of "privileged or sacred or forbidden places" set aside for individuals that can be said to be "in a state of crisis with respect to the society or (their) environment" (1997:332). Foucault provides the 19<sup>th</sup> Century boarding school, military service, the train, and the honeymoon hotel, as typical examples of heterotopias of crisis. Nevertheless, these heterotopias are slowly giving way to what Foucault refers to as heterotopias of deviance, reserved for those particular individuals that deviate from the acceptable standard or norm of behaviour in society (1997:333). In our

present society, heterotopias of deviance include places such as the rest homes, psychiatric clinics, prisons, among others.

### **Scope and Limitations of the Study**

This study is primarily concerned with how films can help in fostering a sense of national consciousness and belonging. To allow for a more comprehensive discussion of the research topic and rigorous engagement with the case material, this study has limited itself to the analysis of Bob Nyanja's film, *Malooned* (2007). Nevertheless, this study has also made vast references to many other films such as *Ni Sisi* (2013), among others, albeit only for basic illustration purposes.

While focusing on the analysis of one film undoubtedly guarantees an in-depth analysis of the case material and discussion of the research question, it is also a potential weakness. Given the limited sample of cases of contemporary Kenyan films utilized in the study, it inevitably renders itself vulnerable to criticism for being incomplete. However, this risk is adequately mitigated for by the fact that this study deliberately eschews making any sweeping generalizations regarding representation of notions of the ideal collective national identity in contemporary Kenyan films. Therefore, the present study is particularly significant in highlighting how the selected film specifically contests and negotiates rigid cultural boundaries in projecting its vision of the ideal collective national identity.

Nevertheless, this research recognizes that meaning is inevitably always subject to interpretation and can never be ultimately fixed (Hall 1997: 23), thus, whatever conclusions are being drawn herein are neither final nor absolutely complete. Even so, this research remains conscious of the innumerable pitfalls that discourse analyses through a Foucauldian/post-structural framework are likely to face. Most significantly, the risk of this work being dismissed as some kind of "unsystematized speculation", especially in view of the reproof of postmodern criticism as some sort of "tiresome playfulness" (Graham 2005:4),

has been adequately mitigated. While this study does not make any absolute claim to truth and/objectivity through the so-called precise and/or scientific methodological principles, it is as systematized and as objective as it can get.

For that reason, insofar as apprehensions regarding objectivity are concerned, this study has strived to be as systematic and/or objective as possible, through precision as well as the use of plain language and simple sentence structures that guarantee clarity of thought and comprehension. The question of objectivity has also been addressed by deliberately delimiting the research topic and contextualizing terms to avoid any potential weaknesses attributable to the confusion that often arises from misinterpretation of critical terminologies. This study has also strived to be precise about its theory and methodology by explicitly defining the analytical framework it follows to arrive at its conclusions from the general hypotheses regarding the research topic.

Nonetheless, this research acknowledges that filmic analyses (such as this one) often tend towards qualitative research and are therefore largely descriptive and analytical, hence may be limited in terms of what they can and cannot reveal about the research topic. In the context of the present study, the effectiveness of the film medium as a tool that can be harnessed in the nationhood project, to foster a strong sense of national identity and belonging within the masses, cannot be appraised with utmost certainty. Consequently, both the arguments in this particular study and the conclusions reached thereafter can only be meaningful within certain acknowledgeable limits. Stated otherwise, findings from this particular case study analysis cannot be generalized in making conjectures regarding the efficacy of contemporary Kenyan films or cinema in general, as a tool in fostering a strong sense of national identity and belonging within the masses, and should therefore be used with utmost caution.

## CHAPTER TWO

### SHIFTING LENS: EVOLUTION OF A NATIONAL CINEMA IN KENYA

#### Introduction

According to Femi Okiremurete Shaka, in *Modernity and the African Cinema* (2004), three institutional practices have often competed for the control of Africa's cinematic institutions. These production practices have been dictated by commercial interests as well as those of missionary sponsors and the government. Shaka observes that each of these production practices have often followed a particular kind of "formal regime of representation with respect to the constitution of African subjectivities and identities" (2004: 20).

Nevertheless, the Kenyan film industry has come a long way, thanks to various historical developments and policy interventions towards the establishment of a truly structured national cinema. According to Mukora, the Kenyan film industry is among the oldest film industries on the continent, dating back to the British colonial administration era (2003: 219). For many years now, Kenya has served as a location for many film shoots, from the 1930s productions such as *Solomon's Mines* (1937) and *Mogambo* (1953). In that respect, understanding the historical origins and trajectory of Kenyan national cinema is a significant starting point in exploring its current position and focus on post-independence turmoil in contemporary films. Indeed, Nwachukwu Frank Ukadike has mentioned that "African cinema must be understood from the point of view of historical experiences spanning from colonialism to neo-colonialism" (1994: 9).

The principle aim of this chapter, therefore, is to situate Bob Nyanja's film within its specific socio-political and historical context in the Kenyan national cinema. To that end, this chapter briefly discusses the socio-historical and political factors that have significantly shaped cinematic representations in the Kenyan nation over time. Consequently, this chapter highlights key periods in the history and development of the Kenyan film industry, from the

colonial era to the present era of independent filmmakers and contemporary films. The first subsection of this chapter reflects on the beginnings of film in Kenya through the colonial British experiments of educational cinema. Next, the sub-section on the heritage film grapples with a profoundly fundamental question with regards to cultural representations. In other words, it responds to the question, is there a typical essence to African cultures, which must be captured and represented in African films? I also explore the era of foreign-made films, which eventually paved way for the epoch of independent filmmakers and a burgeoning film industry in Kenya respectively. I conclude this chapter by reflecting on the current state and the future of the Kenyan national cinema with respect to the shifting cinematic representations, as a precursor to the filmic analysis in the subsequent chapter.

### **The British-Kenyan Films: Cultural Dislocation and Domination**

Pioneers of film on the African continent often justified their project on an assumed moral duty to ‘civilize the Africans’ (Diawara 1992: 1). Unlike other commercial ventures such as cash crop farming, which were critical sources of revenue for the imperial government, cinema was not given much attention by the colonial British administration. Nevertheless, the contemporary Kenyan cinema traces its roots to the colonial British projects of educational cinema, which sought to leverage the film medium as an ideological tool for propagating and sustaining imperialism. The first of these projects was the *Bantu Educational Cinema Experiment*, which was set up in British colonial Africa in 1935 (Diawara 1992:2) under the direction of the *International Missionary Council*.

Through funding from various interest groups such as the then New York-based Carnegie Corporation, this project sought to establish and sustain positive views of the British culture and mannerisms among African audiences in colonial territories (Diawara 1992:3). Under the guise of educating Africans in the proper conducts of behaviour, the films that

were made sought to indoctrinate blacks into western ideals. Shaka outlines that the documentary-style practices of both the missionaries and the government agencies are comparable since they both sought to teach the Africans how to do things in a modern way, in tandem with the colonial government's developmental policies (2004:19).

In that respect, Shaka's argument does suggest that these films nearly had some sort of a "propagandist or didactic orientation. That is clear from the stark juxtapositions of Africans and Europeans in film titles such as *Mister English at Home* and *An African in London*. Pitting stereotypical representations of blacks against flattering images of sophisticated whites functioned to legitimate and sustain European supremacy. Images that depicted the negative aspects of European lives as in films by Charlie Chaplin were not shown to Africans because, according to the colonialists, they were "too sophisticated for African minds" and would corrupt them through their "powerful means of persuasion" (Diawara 1992:1).

It suffices to say that unlike mainstream European and Hollywood films, colonial governments, missionaries, and anthropologists sought to bequeath Africans with an altered cinematic heritage. In retrospect, Ngugi argues that:

...the European knew and feared the threat posed by men with confidence in their own past and heritage. Why else should he devote his military might, his religious fervour, and his intellectual energy to denying that the African had true gods, had a culture, had a significant past? (Ngugi 1978: 9)

The *Bantu Educational Cinema Experiment* wound up its operations in 1937 thereby paving way for the *Colonial Film Unit* (CFU) in 1939, which continued the assault on African cultures while justifying imperial domination (Ukadike 1994: 44). Many British technicians and Anthropologists came to Kenya in the 1940s thereby augmenting the official colonial discourse through their respective practices. Sociologists such as Gordon Wilson and legal

scholars like Eugene Contran orchestrated a deliberate social engineering project that sought to territorialize ethnic groups and to map ethnic boundaries as natural and permanent (Akoth 2011: 5).

The elaborate and flawed colonial statecraft was premised on the assumption that cultural differences between Kenyan ethnic groups were pure, primordial and unchanging (Akoth 2011: 5). It is the mythicization of cultural blocks as homogenous cultural blocks that eventually legitimized the colonial state's regimentation of ethnic groups for administrative convenience. Consequently, anthropological work often tended to support the imperial notions of Africans as closer to nature, thus primitive and barbaric, unlike the sophisticated Europeans. A host of anthropological films, particularly about the so-called primitive societies and peoples of Kenya were made in this period.

Nevertheless, the rise of African nationalistic attitudes in late 1940s through to the 1950's indicated strongly to the British colonial regime that a revolution was imminent. The increase in political tension in Kenya, as a result of the continued assertiveness of the Mau Mau movement, compelled the British to retreat and prepare for an imminent power transfer to Africans. The CFU officially wound up its operations in 1955 having declared that its mission of introducing educational cinema to Africans was complete. From then henceforth, the natives were expected to carry on with the financing and production of their own films, despite that most of them had not been trained to operate film equipment, leave alone to write, direct and produce films.

### **The Heritage Film: Reclaiming A Mythical Past**

In the aftermath of colonialism, Kenya, like most independent African states that had emerged from the stranglehold of the imperial regime, embarked on a spirited struggle against economic and cultural domination. There was even talk of a return to the so-called

“cultural roots”, in order to assert and reaffirm the cultural “authenticity” of Africans and African countries (Ngugi 1978:12), which had been trampled upon by the colonizer. This period coincided with cultural and national movements, which thoroughly decried and attempted to subvert the devastating colonial effects on indigenous cultures and cultural identities. Shaka argues that, “with its politics of cultural reawakening,” the early post-colonial period, “attempted to romanticize traditional African institutional practices” (2004: 19).

As noted by Mukora, there is a sense in which filmmaking in Kenya can be considered in the same light as the works of novelists such as Ngugi wa Thiong’o, Grace Ogot and Meja Mwangi, since like them, it also began as a ‘counter-colonial discourse’ (2003: 227). Through their literary works, Kenyan writers had long explored the problematic postcolonial identities, particularly in the context of the clash between tradition and modernity. Mukora observes that, like most African films, Kenyan films also highlight and project the cultural way of life of the Kenyan people and their constant struggles to negotiate identity in the post-colonial space that is marked by tension between tradition and modernity (2003: 219). Ngugi poses a very fundamental question with regards to cultural authenticity when he asks, “Is there such a thing as original culture?” (1978: 4). Ngugi observes that soon after independence, most African states embarked on the search for a distinctive national culture, establishing institutions devoted to this task in some instances (1978: 12).

In the Kenyan case, the independence government co-opted most of the British colonial structures and governing institutions, albeit with a few alterations. The post-independence regime simply inherited the colonial ideologies that had operated to regulate the Africans within these same state institutions. Additionally, centralized national bodies were created to foster the development of media and communication structures. These organizations were largely ineffective since they functioned primarily to perpetuate the



national government, and as such they operated under stringent state control. Significantly, the development of the national government, as well as the media and communication infrastructure coincided with the emergence of what Ngugi, in *Moving the Center*, refers to as an ethnic-based comprador bourgeoisie (1993:50).

Consequently, Ngugi argues that attempts to distort and to “bury the living soul of Kenya’s history of struggle and resistance” while normalizing the “tradition of loyalism to imperialism” did not end with colonialism (1993: 98). The nascent ethnic-based comprador bourgeoisie that arose after independence, who were largely the “loyalist colonial home guards”, simply reincarnated into the ‘guard dogs’ of the neo-colonial Kenyan reality (Ngugi 1993: 98). In that case, how could a revolutionary cinema that would actively contest the stereotypical images of the Africans while creating more positive images by representing the richness and diversity of Kenyan cultures emerge and grow in such an environment?

The Ministry of Information and Broadcasting took up licensing and censorship of film and video, among many other roles, as part of the government’s strategy to foster state-sanctioned cultural hegemony. The Ministry played a critical role in TV programme services on the then State-owned Voice of Kenya (VOK) TV and Radio. A Documentary Film Production Unit was found in 1972 not only to support the development, but also to help project a positive image of the country (Kinyanjui 2014: 69). The “Kenya Newsreel”, which replaced the “British Pictorial” in 1975, was played between the National anthem and the main feature film in cinemas around the country (Kinyanjui 2014: 69). These 10 minutes-long newsreels were shot on 35 mm and often had a political or development agenda.

Two branches of the government that were created specifically to handle film activities are the Kenya Film Corporation (KFC), which was established in 1968 (Ukadike 1994: 114), and the Kenya Institute of Mass Communication (KIMC). The KFC has handled distribution of films since 1972 while fostering development of mobile cinemas around the

country as well as producing TV commercials (Diawara 1992: 117). Founded in 1976 through financing from the Friedrich Ebert Foundation of Germany, the KIMC was provided with a lab for processing 16 mm films (Kinyanjui 2014: 69). Unlike KFC, the KIMC focussed on training of media technicians and filmmakers, and is credited for having trained many of the country's foregoing film and media professionals. Notable film producers and directors the country has ever known, including Sao Gamba, Anne Mungai, Jane Lusabe, and Dottie Yambo Odotte, among others, are some of the celebrated pioneers of the KIMC.

The Film Production Department of the Ministry of Broadcasting and Information, which was created in 1981, automatically absorbed KIMC graduates who were tasked with the production of films on various matters, from international relations to trade, to social issues, to science and technology, among others (Kinyanjui 2014: 69). All the films that were made in this era were basically state-centric in the sense that they were produced from the government's perspective and were therefore didactic or propagandist in nature (Kinyanjui 2014: 69). The ministry had its work cut out for it already, thus, its core function was to facilitate the production and dissemination of films that would teach and influence the people. The ideological function of these films was clearly spelt out in their names as in the case of titles such as *Family Planning*, *The Kenya Trade Fair*, *Wife Beating*, and *Heritage of Splendour*, among others (Kinyanjui 2014: 69-70).

In concurrence with Ngugi, the coming of independence in post-colonial states like Kenya heralded little or no hope at all for the "liberation of people's productive forces" (1993: 44). It is clear that the break of independence was merely a shift from one form of domination (colonialism) to even "more vicious" neo-colonial domination (Ngugi 1993: 44). For that same reason, Ngugi argues that what passes for authentic African culture is, in most cases, a touristic sort of art that is free of all the "content of struggle" (1993: 44). These kinds

of cultural products eschew all manner of criticisms against the state and instead sing endless praises for its leaders as Heaven-sent.

### **Foreign-Made Films: Romanticized Representations of Africa**

The birth of foreigner-made films in Kenya was prefigured by the film “*Theo in Africa*” (1910) by the then world life photographer Cherry Keaton, who covered American President Theodore Roosevelt’s 1909 Safari Tour in Kenya (Ogunleye 2014: 66). Other foreigner-made films which also “exploited the picturesque terrains of Kenya” like Keaton’s film did, followed many years later, as the colonizer extended his imperial claims on the continent (Ogunleye 2014: 66). According to Sobania, many people, particularly westerners, gained their first ever view of Africa through the earliest Kenyan wildlife films that were made in the 1920s-30s by Osa and Johnson, including *Trailing African Wild Animals* (1923) and *I Married Adventure* (1940) (2003: 77).

Shaka points out that unlike the films of missionary and the government-sponsored institutional practices, those of commercial cinematic practices were custom-made for audiences in Europe and North America (2004: 20). According to Shaka, these films often used the continent as “an ethnographic space for rehashing popular European images of Africa as a frontier site full of barbarous natives engaged in cannibalism, paganism, perennial inter-tribal warfare, and other forms of bestialities” (2004: 20).

Consequently, these films engendered the “wild” view of Africa that persisted across the western world for many years. For instance, films such as *Trader Horn* (1931), *The Snows of Mount Kilimanjaro* (1952) and, *Mogambo*(1953), among others, narrated the triumphant battles of Europeans with dangerous exotic forces of nature and eccentric African cultures (Ogunleye 2014: 66). Further on, the introduction of plotlines to later films served to reinforce the colonial stereotype of Africans as “caricatures of themselves” (Sobania 2003: 77). Images of the brutality of colonial rule such as marginalized and displaced rural farmers

and of the urbanized underclasses that were subjected to rigid pass laws were completely missing in these films.

Interestingly, there was no major shift in cinematic representations of Africans in the early post-independence period, contrary to expectations, as African films continued reproducing and projecting western stereotypes. Another generation of wildlife films followed in the 1960s-70s including *Hatari* (1962), *Africa Texas Style* (1967), *Born Free* (1966), and *Living Free* (1972). These films engendered and sustained the homogenizing view of African movies either as of the “*Tarzan of the Apes*” style or as tales of adventure and big-game hunting” (Sobania 2003: 78). As Sobania observes, the consistency and invariability of these films eventually served the imperialist agenda by supporting and reinforcing the perception of Africa as “the dark continent” full of “dangerous savages” (2003: 78).

To make matters worse, there were no alternative pictures of Africa and Africans, apart from what was depicted in these wildlife films. Local filming activities in post-independence Kenya subsided gradually and the infantile film sector suffered major drawbacks. Like the imperial government, the Kenyan government paid very little attention to the film sector. Consequently, local film production activities gave way to British and American films that continued to take advantage of the country’s cinematic terrain in their backgrounds. In the absence of local film productions, the Kenyan film scene was largely defined by the upsurge of foreign-made films and exhibitions of foreign films in theatres.

Significantly, Kenya’s consent to British and American film enterprises to use her exotic landscapes gave rise to films that reminisced over the past victories of the empire, as highlighted by Joseph Gugler in *African Film* (2003: 23). In other words, these films tended to reproduce and reinforce colonial stereotypes in their narration of European experiences of the continent. One of the most significant films in the era of the foreign-made films is

undoubtedly Sydney Pollack's *Out of Africa* (1985), which has been taunted as "the most successful film ever to be set in Africa" (Gugler 2003: 23). The film was based on Karen Blixen's romantic memoir titled *Out of Africa* (1937), which details her "eighteen-year struggle" with coffee farming in the Kenyan White highlands between 1913 and 1931, her "adulterous love affair" with an "aristocratic English playboy" (Denya Finch-Hatton), and her marriage to Bror Blixen (Sobania 2003: 75). Starring Meryl Streep and Robert Redford, the film is visually appealing and finely crafted, except that it eschews a critique of the imperial British occupation, domination and displacement of indigenous peoples.

According to Gugler, the film is a significant exemplar of "the 'beautiful Africa' approach to Africans in the west" since it does not only present the viewers with a valorised "Garden of Eden", but also projects the Europeans as the "masters of that universe" (2003: 23). The film's time and location in the early phase of colonialism in Kenya, enables it to fantasize on "an Africa long gone" where Europeans thrived off the blood and sweat of Africans. The film plays out to the classic western myth of Africa through the portrayal of Africans who, despite having been dispossessed of their lands, are happy to serve their white master's bidding. I concur with Gugler that indeed, through films such as *Out of Africa* (1985), Hollywood continually treats its western audiences to "the vicarious experience of belonging to the master race" (2003: 24).

Other films about Kenya that were also made in this era are *Kitchen Toto* (1987) and *White Mischief* (1988). The former narrates the story of a small child that worked in a District Commissioner's house and kitchen in the 1950's era of the Mau Mau uprising, after his father who was a Kikuyu Christian Minister was murdered by the rebels. The film generally explores the colonizer-colonized relationship and how the two forces influenced and counter-influenced each other (Sobania 2003:76). As expected, the characters in the film hardly get room to develop as they come off as caricatures to fit the colonial stereotypes and

romanticized perceptions of Africans. Michael Radford directs *White Mischief*, focusing on the life of the so-called “white upper classes” and their significant influence in the 1940’s in a narrative of the murder of an “unpleasant British aristocrat” (Sobania 2003:76). Nevertheless, the film presents Kenya more or less as a mere backdrop for the story, despite posing as a significant period film, thereby completely ignoring the colonial situation at that particular period in question.

This period was a significant point in the history and development of the Kenyan film industry as it set forth a standard of filmmaking practices and activities by incorporating Kenyan technicians and practitioners in key positions on the set. However, despite its interactions with international scale film productions, the Kenyan film industry has struggled to rise, partly due to underfunding. This is partly attributable to the colonial structures of governance that entrenched a culture of reliance on the metropole, thus the pervasive reliance of the Kenyan cinema on foreign funding. Undoubtedly, many national cinemas in formerly colonized countries can also attest to the fate of the national cinema in Kenya. Thus, despite the fact that the so-called “Third World” cinemas in Africa, Asia and Latin America constitute the majority global cinema (Stam and Shohat 2000: 382), Hollywood still retains a hegemonic position.

Significantly, Hollywood has managed to stamp its foot among global audiences thereby choking and nearly suppressing cinemas of the World, particularly because, according to Stam and Shohat, it inhabits the “communication infrastructure of empire...which literally wired colonial territories to the metropole (2000: 382). As a result, imperial powers have still managed to keep global communications in check by constantly monitoring and shaping the image of events around the world. The unequal terms of exchange of cultural products, particularly films, across global audiences reflects the hegemonic power play that characterizes the global cinema. The widespread circulation and

domination of western cultural products can be read as an attempt of power and ideology to ultimately fix meaning that sustains a particular regime of truth through representation.

As vividly pointed out by Melissa Thackway in *Africa Shoots Back*, the conventional “negative representation of Africa in Western discourse and film” is part of the broad “hegemonic strategy” by the western nations to spread their “economic and imperial influence in Africa” (2003: 30). That is probably why one of the greatest concerns when it comes to the authenticity of African images in African films has to do with financing up to date. According to Afolabi Adesanya, the film medium provided colonial administrators a means through which they “articulated the need for the actual dislocation of the inherited system and cultural values of Africa” (2014: 15). The aspect of culture is inevitably at the core of African filmmaking. Adesanya argues that the African film industry can only be relevant if and when it defines its own image without any ambiguity.

### **A Paradigm Shift? Towards A Truly National Cinema in Kenya**

Janina Falkowska and Giukin Lenuta highlight that it was conventional to think of small cinemas “in the context of national identity and nation” in the 60s and 70s (2015: viii). However, Thomas Elsaesser, according to Falkowska and Lenuta, theorizes that a national cinema “stands in dialogue with the idea of the nation in the political and the historical realm,” “refers to the historical imaginary”, has “an appeal to memory and identification” and forges “a feeling of belonging” (2015: vi). This does not necessarily imply that the “national cinema” is a standardized or homogenous whole, since it is always subject to a complex and dynamic set of socioeconomic and political forces and interrelationships.

In *Moving the Centre*, Ngugi argues that individuals often wrestle with both their natural and social environments, and even with one another as well, thereby evolving “a way of life” that is exemplified in their institutions and practices. What Ngugi is saying, to borrow

his exact words, is that culture is a “carrier” of peoples’ “moral, aesthetic and ethical values” (1993: 27). Significantly, Ngugi highlights that peoples’ values eventually embody their collective consciousness as a community at the psychological level.

Generally, many ethnic groups attempt to form their own national identities within “wider, more inclusive boundaries of geography and politics” (Ngugi 1978: 4). Perhaps that explains why individuals collectively struggle to master their physical environments in the quest for a social life (Ngugi 1978: 4). Most importantly, Ngugi argues that any change in the nature of the struggle of individuals is bound to result to institutional change, which inevitably triggers a subsequent change both in the peoples’ mode of thought and life (1978: 4). In return, this change in the people’s mode of thought and life also influences the people’s institutions and general environment.

Incidentally, both the economic and political conquest of the African continent resulted to “cultural subjugation and the imposition of an imperialist cultural tradition” on Africans (Ngugi 1993: 42). It is no wonder that military and political domination in Kenya has often been tempered with cultural repression. This explains why, as Ngugi puts it, culture has often served as the battleground for “political confrontation” (Ngugi 1993: 88). Unfortunately, the history of struggle and resistance, as argued by Ngugi is often vulnerable to distortion by tyrannical regimes which always strive to rewrite the past “to make up official history” (1993: 97).

Is it surprising then that, despite Kenya’s “spectacular locations and captivating subject matter” (Sobania 2003: 75), most of the films that have been shot in the country draw from popular literature written by non-Kenyans? This phenomenon conjures Ngugi’s sentiments that the “oppressor nation” is able to establish and project its “ideology, ...values, outlook, attitude and feelings...” through various schemes such as the “maintenance, management, manipulation and mobilization of the entire system of education, language and



language use, literature, religion and the media” (1993: 51). Eventually, this not only influences people’s consciousness, but also regulates how they feel about their individual and collective identities, as well as how they perceive the “oppressor nation or class” (Ngugi 1993: 51). This sort of cultural and psychological domination seeks to secure and perpetuate the existing status quo thereby breeding discipline and unquestionable compliance with the system.

Perhaps this explains why Kenyatta’s mantra of “forgive and forget” led to a conscious suppression of the past after independence. Consequently, all attempts to dig into Kenya’s history by literary and other creative artists have been met with persecutions and exiles (Kinyanjui 2014: 71). In that respect, most writers and government-trained filmmakers have often shunned political themes. Indeed, one of the major roles played by the then Kenya Censorship Board was to read and approve or reject film scripts. This granted the British much leverage and cinematic autonomy in documenting both Kenya’s pre-independence and post-independence history. For instance, two documentaries made by the British, the *End of an Empire* (1965) and *White Man’s Country* (1969), highlight the dark moments in Kenya’s struggle for independence, a part of Kenya’s history that has been stashed away since independence (Kinyanjui 2014: 70-71).

Apart from government-sponsored documentary films and films by western companies, feature films by Kenyan filmmakers have been a rarity in Kenya. Sao Gamba’s *Kolormask* (1986), became Kenya’s first feature film ever, and has been mentioned adversely, as a significant film that marked a fundamental shift in the history and development of the Kenyan film industry (Diawara 1992:117). In this highly acclaimed motion picture, Sao Gamba embarks on a cinematic voyage to “document African cultures”, as charged by critics. The film is based on the story of an England-trained Kenyan scholar that returns home with a White woman after completing his studies abroad. In that case, the

film is highly critical of the confrontation between tradition and modernity in the aftermath of colonialism.

*Kolormask* definitely shifts the tide insofar as representation of Africans is concerned, thereby marking a significant paradigm shift from the conventional stereotypical images of Africans to more positive images of Africans. The success of this film, however meagre, went a long way in proving the potential of a national cinema that would complement the massive efforts made by foregoing elites in narrating Kenya. Such domestic efforts alongside contributions from other Kenyan film scholars studying abroad such as Wanjiru Kinyanjui eventually paved the way for a national cinema whose concern were the articulation of post-colonial experiences and the subsequent identity quest in the postcolonial Kenyan space. Nevertheless, the film too had its drawbacks, especially in representing cultural differences between whites and blacks as natural and immutable. Diawara highlights that the film was criticized for excessively romanticizing African cultures and overstating the cultural distance between Africans and Europeans (1992:117).

According to Shaka, modern African identity is underscored by an aspect of hybridity such that “the modern African experience is characterized by the need to creatively adjust to the concept of modernity” (2004: 8). Shaka argues that the construction of modern African identity in all spheres of life, including that of the cinematic institution, is a product of “the Euro-African contact that started in the 15th century” (2004: 19). Evidently, foreign influence, as a result of the contact between Europeans and Africans in the colonial period, significantly altered African institutional practices (Shaka 2004: 19).

Generally, the global cultural context is increasingly becoming interactive with Hollywood progressively losing its privileged hegemonic position as the “puppeteer of a world system of images” (Stam and Shohat 2000: 383). However, the relationship between national film industries and the global film industry is an ambiguous one since, while striving

to achieve a global perspective, national cinemas also strive to remain particular (Stam and Shohat 2000: 383). Consequently, the so-called “national cinemas” of particular countries such as Kenya should be regarded as forever suspended in this liminal space between being national and becoming global through the representation of hybrid identities.

### **The Epoch of Contemporary Kenyan Films**

Culture still plays a significant role in the hegemonic domination of the so-called ‘Third World’ nations by the US-led western front, through the nascent “comprador bourgeoisie” (Ngugi 1993: 50). Ngugi argues that recognizing the present situation that compels African states is a fundamental prerequisite to achieving truly national cultures. Ngugi radically suggests a break away from capitalism, which is the root of all the socioeconomic decadence in Africa (1978). According to Ngugi, capitalism’s imperialistic phase of neo-colonialism engenders the production of anti-human culture in which sectional and warring interests take precedence over everything else. Ngugi’s thesis implies that for a national culture to be realized there must be a “completely socialized economy, collectively owned and controlled by the people” (1978: 13). Establishment of specific policies that will support the emergence of new attitudes and art-forms is mandatory.

Definitely, the 1980s ushered in a new era that significantly shaped the development and trajectory of cinema in Kenya. A vast majority of the KIMC-trained media technicians and film practitioners including camera operators, producers and editors, among other professionals established the foundation upon which a national cinema was later to be based upon in the country. Thus, According to Sobania, despite the numerous challenges faced by many African countries in various aspects of film production, Kenya was naturally endowed with a host of gifted actors, writers and technical crews, in addition to having fascinating landscapes, vegetation and wildlife that can be leveraged as backgrounds in films (2003: 78). Furthermore, establishment of institutions such as the Kenya Film Commission (KFC), found

in 2005, seeks to support and promote the local film industry both at home and abroad (Firestone 2008: 50).

In recognition of the myriad contradictions and complexities of identity and belonging in the previously colonized countries like Kenya, both literary and cultural industries have attempted to capture all the sharp contrasts and perplexing realities of life in the post-colonial space. This has especially been supported by the rise of a breed of independent filmmakers that are willing to go against the grain in contesting and negotiating African identities in cinematic representations. For instance, Ousmane Sembene, according to Manthia Diawara in *African Film*, often strived to project the myth of an African image by portraying unusual characters that challenge and contest the existing order of things as inherently natural and immutable (2010: 23).

With the onset of independent filmmaking in Kenya, a truly national film industry is slowly but gradually coming to birth. The films by independent contemporary filmmakers differ radically from the traditional government-funded documentary-style films and the heritage films before them because they narrate ordinary stories of happenings in the daily life of ordinary people while trying to remain as true as possible to cultural specificity of their subjects. Bob Nyanja's first feature-length film, *Malooned* (2007), falls in this category of contemporary Kenyan films, and it is also concerned with the ambiguities and incongruities of identity and belonging in the contemporary Kenyan society. *Malooned* not only stands out as an incredible Kenyan story, but also as one of the most successful productions by a Kenyan filmmaker so far.

*Malooned* interrogates tribal differences, stereotypes and ethnic-based politics in the Kenyan nation. The film explores these themes through the perspective of its two protagonists, Luther Vandross Odhiambo (Godfrey Odhiambo), a married Luo man, and an engaged Kikuyu lady, Diana Wanjiru Mwangi Elias "Di" (Gabriella Mutia). Luther and Di

hail from two of Kenya's most populous ethnic communities and bitter political rivals, the Luo and Agikuyu communities respectively (*Malooned* 2007). Luther is a married man while Di is engaged to a Somali fiancée and is on the verge of wedding him.

The film depicts the confrontation between Luther and Di when they become trapped in a toilet on the 15<sup>th</sup> floor of Teleposta Towers (Nairobi, Kenya) for an entire Easter Weekend (*Malooned* 2007). The entire film is set in a toilet, except for a few opening scenes of the cityscape and street scenes. According to the director, *Malooned* was inspired by a true life story of a university professor that got stuck in a toilet for several hours. It is precisely within this forced enclosure that the film's protagonists eventually confront each other, and end up spending their entire Easter weekend.

## **Conclusion**

Ultimately, colonialism was such an influential force that radically altered and modified people's way of life through the western values and/or ideologies. The attempt to reassert the African institutional practices through the discourses of cultural reawakening in the early phase of the post-independence period was an exercise in futility. This cultural project was a short-lived one as the pragmatic integration of both European and African institutional practices inevitably resulted to hybrid institutional practices.

Consequently, the colonial legacy of the British colonial administration has persisted throughout Kenya's postcolonial history, refashioned under continuing neo-colonialism. Consequently, post-independent states like Kenya across Africa have continued to bear the brunt of the discriminatory and divisive colonial legacy in form of split spaces, cultural domination and a debasement of tradition. In that respect, post-independence Kenya, like most African states, continues to struggle against neo-colonialism in the reconstruction of its own national culture and identity through cultural products like film, many years after independence.

Undoubtedly, the many contradictions and complexities of identity and belonging in the post-colonial space have not only resulted to sharp contrasts, but also perplexing realities of life. The African film in general, and specifically the national cinema in Kenya, has been and remains to be seen as playing a critical role in the on-going sociocultural processes of identity contestation and negotiation of new subject domains in the nationhood discourse. This study situates Bob Nyanja in the era of contemporary films, which are grappling with the many contradictions and complexities of identity and belonging in the post-colonial space. Recognizing the myriad contradictions and complexities of identity and belonging in the Kenyan nation, independent contemporary filmmakers like Bob Nyanja attempt to capture all the sharp contrasts and puzzling realities of life through their cinematic representations. Bob Nyanja's *Malooned* is a significant model of contemporary films in Kenya, which are actively engaged in the contestation and negotiation of cultural identities in the Kenyan nation.

## CHAPTER THREE

### IDEALIZED REPRESENTATIONS OF THE NATION IN *MALOONED* (2007)

#### Introduction

This chapter seeks to engage in abroad discussion of Bob Nyanja's film, *Malooned*, that is, to explore its vision of the ideal collective national identity and views regarding the nation. In that case, the chapter interrogates the manner in which cultural differences are represented through the audio-visual discourses of *Malooned* and how the film contests and negotiates cultural identities in imagining and projecting its vision of the ideal collective national identity. However, as a precursor to the analysis of *Malooned*, this chapter also discusses the director, production and reception of the film, as well as the motivation for its selection as a case study in the present study. These discussions eventually culminate into an analysis of the idealized representations of the nation as imagined and projected through the audio-visual discourses of *Malooned*, which forms the core of my overall discussion.

#### About the Director of *Malooned*

Bob Nyanja is one of the few renowned filmmakers in Kenya (Kerongo 2011), having scooped a number of awards and recognition through various works he has completed in his young career as an independent filmmaker. *Malooned* was his first full-length feature story, having previously worked at various production houses and TV stations, where he got the opportunity to direct and produce commercials, TV shows, as well as documentaries and Corporate videos (Nyanja 2011). Apart from *Malooned*, he has two other feature films to his name now, including *The Rugged Priest* (2011), and *Captain of Nakara* (2012).

Bob Nyanja has distinguished himself not only as a filmmaker with wit and creative imagination, but also as an artist who is willing to go against the grain, to bring onto screen the pictures that most filmmakers would dare not, and to tackle themes that most filmmakers have often eschewed. For instance, when he produced *The Rugged Priest* (2011), which

implicated some powerful individuals in the Kenyan government in the unexplained murder of a Catholic Priest, Fr. Anthony Kaisser, he was threatened with a legal suit but he went ahead and released the film nonetheless (Kerongo 2011).

On his personal blog, Bob Nyanja discloses that he always wanted to become a filmmaker. He claims that he developed his interest and passion for the career during his childhood, growing up on a staple of Cowboy Films in Nairobi's Eastlands area (Nyanja 2011). Bob Nyanja went ahead and studied Literature at the University of Nairobi up to the Masters level, after which he got an opportunity to study Film and Video Production in the United States of America. On his return in 1997, Bob Nyanja worked as a TV Commercial producer for a number of production companies in the country (Nyanja 2011), a platform that opened avenues for his many other stunts as a director and producer of commercials, TV shows, documentaries and corporate videos. Bob Nyanja is undoubtedly a significant figure in TV comedy in Kenya as his pioneering comedy show, the "Redykyulass", became an instant sensation after it made its debut in 1999 and is fondly remembered as one of the best comedies up to date (Nyanja 2011). "Redykyulass" greatly altered people's perceptions of both the president and the institution of the presidency in the Kenyan nation through its satirical representation of Kenya's leadership.

Bob Nyanja has also worked with various international film companies filming in Kenya in various capacities ("Bob Nyanja's 'Rugged Priest' Wins Top Movie Award" 2011). For instance, Bob Nyanja was an Assistant Location Manager in the production of Caroline Link's Oscar Award winning film *Nirgendwo in Africa* (2001). He also worked on other large scale international film productions such as Jan de Bont's *Lara Croft Tomb Raider: The Cradle of Life* (2003) as a third Assistant Director and on the *Survivor Series Africa*, among others (Nyanja 2011). Bob Nyanja has also worked with a host of other Kenyan filmmakers such as Njeri Karago, with whom he has collaborated on numerous film projects (Nyanja



2011). Judging from his solid educational background and vast professional experience in production and directing of films, documentaries, TV commercials and other roles on the film set, Bob Nyanja stands out as a brilliant filmmaker in the Kenyan film industry. His successful work that has scooped various awards and positive viewer critics across different quarters is also a living testimony to his outstanding filmmaking skills and abilities.

### **Production and Reception of *Malooned***

Some of the critical roles in the film industry are undoubtedly production and distribution of the film. These are specialized departments that require both technical know-how and experience. Unfortunately, particularly in the so-called “third world” cinemas where filmmakers work with limited budgets, filmmaking roles often overlap and even converge. However, *Malooned* (2007) is one of the few Kenyan films to have been produced as a collaborative effort between a number of industry professionals and crew members, as well as actors and actresses, despite myriad constraints such as limited finances and other resources.

Bob Nyanja’s story was adapted into a screenplay by Mark Mutahi. Many other experienced professionals in the Kenyan film industry such as Muriuki Gitonga and Martin Munyua, the Production Manager and Director of Photography respectively, collaborated on the project transforming the screenplay into a distinctive cinematic experience tailored to the Kenyan audience. The film’s producers were Muriuki Gitonga, Tony Rimwa and Zorro Lukhili, in that order (*Malooned* 2007).

The film was produced at a cost less than a third of the remake budget of \$2.5m it was offered by the France-based production company, Pretty Pictures International and, due to the limited budget, the shoot was packed into a ten-day schedule. The director remarked that Kenyan filmmakers have to devise ingenious ways of beating challenges such as logistics and limited budgets, by continuously seeking out fresh ideas and talent. The whole film was fully financed by Cinematic Solutions (Kahara 2007:4), Kenya’s own production company, and

this makes it stand out from many local films which are often funded by foreign investors. As a result *Malooned* strikes one as a genuinely local film made by ordinary Kenyans for Kenyans, as is often argued in the rhetoric surrounding the authenticity of African films that are funded by foreign funding agencies such as NGOs.

The film was screened to a live audience at the Old Fort's outdoor auditorium (Kahara 2007: 5). Even though it was a last minute entrant, the film received the SIGNIS jury special commendation award and the Silver Dhow from the ZIFF jury (Kahara 2007: 5). Bob Nyanja also took the film to the US where he marketed it alongside Kenya's Redykyulas comedy tour of the US.

Kevin Mwachiro in BBC News on Friday 20<sup>th</sup> July 2014 reports that the film secured a deal for an international release from the French movie company Pretty Pictures after it received the Silver Dhow 2007 Award at the 10<sup>th</sup> edition of *Zanzibar International Film Festival (ZIFF)* (Kahara 2007:4). The French company acquired the global rights for the film as well as the remake rights to its screenplay. Apart from the ZIFF's *Silver Dhow Award 2007* (Wendy 2007), the film also bagged two other highly coveted awards, the *Best Feature Film 2008* and the *Best Kenyan Film 2007*, from the *Verona International Film Festival* and the *Kenya International Film Festival* respectively (Kahara 2007: 5).

In terms of actors, the film relied on purely 'homegrown' talent, starring Kenyan actor Godfrey Odhiambo as Luther and actress Gabriel Mutia, who made her first debut on the film, as 'Di'. Celebrated comedian Daniel Ndambuki a.k.a 'Churchill' and Charles Bukeko a.k.a Papa Shirandula, household names in the Kenyan entertainment industry, also make cameo appearances in the movie, as street urchin and night-guard respectively (*Malooned* 2007).

### **Reasons for the choice of *Malooned***

Bob Nyanja's *Malooned* (2007) was selected through a rigorous exclusionary criterion. Its inclusion in this study was motivated by several factors. First and foremost, its release in 2007 coincided with a period of profound political unrest and ethnic intolerance in Kenya, and its message could not have come at a more opportune moment. Secondly, the content of the film's material is particularly of interest to this present study since it addresses themes of national unity and national identity, ethnicity and ethnic stereotypes, among others, which are of prime interest to my study. Thirdly, this film addresses itself to an imagined socio-political community, both within and without that geopolitical space called Kenya, whom it targets as its audience. The fourth and probably most critical reason for selecting Nyanja's film is that it loosely fits the criteria for what I consider to be a "Kenyan" film considering that it was purely funded and produced by a Kenyan production house and crew respectively. The fifth and final reason is closely related to the fourth one. The fact that director of the film (Bob Nyanja) was born and raised in Kenya gives the film a somewhat moral ground or standpoint from which it is able to authoritatively speak or comment on matters of national unity and national identity, among other issues of national concern, which are some of the central concerns of the film.

### **Representation of Cultural Diversity in *Malooned***

The film opens by a title sequence that announces the name of the director/producer and its title on superimposed scripts. This sequence is accompanied by an eerie background sound which is immediately interposed by a fusion of blended instrumentation and a voice humming in rhythm. This harmonious melody is also suddenly interrupted by the honking of vehicles as the opening shot of the film comes on screen revealing traffic flow on a highway leading into the city. This establishing shot is important in many ways that relate directly to

the film's key issues but most importantly, it sets both the film's spatial and temporal contexts.

The opening scene of an early morning traffic rush into the heart of a burgeoning commercial hub is particularly significant for revealing the time and location of the action. Nevertheless, the words of the accompanying song, “asubuhi nikiamuka namshukuru mola...” (In the morning when I wake up, I thank God...) also make it clear that it is a busy morning rush to work and business as usual. The types of vehicles on the road in this opening shot include imported cars and a foreign commercial trailer, all rushing to the Central Business District (CBD), and an army truck standing imposingly in the middle of the road. This sequence bears witness to the legacy of globalization in the contemporary Kenyan society, following the subsequent increase in the economy. As noted by Mazrui, “the economic base of African societies” in the post-independence period has expanded significantly, both in complexity and scale (1982:40).

Still in the opening sequence of *Malooned*, the camera pans from the left to the right hand side of the screen, thereby revealing the city infrastructure, paved and marked street lanes, parking spaces, and tall buildings rising menacingly into the open clear blue sky. Juxtaposed with the rest of the surrounding space and right in the middle of at an intersection of streets is a beautifully tended botanic garden with diverse kinds of flowers and a clean water fountain at the centre. This garden conjures Foucault's idea of heterotopias, spaces in which all the other real societal arrangements are simultaneously “represented, challenged and overturned” (1997: 3). According to the third principle of Foucault's heterotopias, a heterotopia has the capacity to juxtapose “different spaces and locations” that are not even compatible, within a “single real space” (1997:5).

The botanic garden is a typical heterotopia since it is a space that brings contradictory places together. Foucault argues that “the garden is the smallest fragment of the world and, at

the same time, represents its totality” (1997:2). The different kinds of flowers and plants in the garden can be regarded as the different kinds of arrangements that exist within society in form of cultural differences and varieties. Other typical heterotopian spaces that the film elucidates through its visual and audio discourses respectively include the city walking park and the theatre. Late in the film, the protagonists imagine themselves as enjoying a quiet walk in a city park, which, just like the garden, is a space of many contrasts and contradictions brought together. Similarly, Luther asks Di whether her boyfriend, Ali, ever takes her to the theatre, which can also be regarded as a perfect heterotopia since it also “alternates a series of places that are alien to each other” on its rectangular stage (Foucault 1997:334).

These particular heterotopian spaces contribute to a discourse of coherence between incompatible arrangements within the Kenyan society, which certainly implies that individuals and different groups of people within the Kenyan nation can and actually do cohere and coexist, despite the myriad cultural diversities and differences that define and distinguish them respectively. In other words, just as the mixed arrangement of flowers and other elements are held together firmly in the garden, in the city park or in the theatre, individuals of multiple cultural identities within the Kenyan society also co-exist and are held together by mutual comradeship, despite their differences.

From the botanic garden, the opening sequence fades quickly into a tracking shot of pedestrians and cars along the busy city streets. This scene further reinforces the discourse of coherence in Kenya, despite the cultural diversities and differences that exist within the Kenyan society. This sequence is accompanied by an ambient background music interposed by the voices of city residents speaking in a wide variety of local dialects including Swahili, some loudly (probably over the phone) and others in low conversational tones. Just within the frame of this mobile shot, one is treated to a spectacle of the rich cultural diversity of city

residents including pedestrians, bystanders, the young/old, disabled/abled, male/female, among others, going about their daily business.

The arrangement of elements emerges vividly as the camera moves in on the architectural planning and structure of the city space. The urban setting of *Malooned* (2007) is very significant, particularly because it is also invested with rich cultural meanings. The image of the urban space is represented through architectural designs, intimidating city skyscrapers, structurally-laid out streets, pavements, pedestrian side-walks and street lights, among other forms of iconography. This image of the city, according to Shaka, bears witness to the retention of colonial separation of the urban space into different sectors for the “colonizers” and for the “natives” (2004: 69). Even though the “other” image of the native urban space—described by Shaka as consisting of “mud houses, make-shift buildings, dusty roads crammed with hawkers, street traders, petty crooks and thieves”—is repressed in the film, it is actually called into mind by its mere absence (Shaka 2004: 69).

The unique blend and arrangement of elements in the urban space also supports the discourse of order and coherence, despite the obvious cultural differences and power asymmetries that exist within Kenya. Specifically, the image of the city reveals not only the rich cultural diversity, but also the hierarchical order that characterizes the Kenyan society in terms of socioeconomic, cultural and political imbalances. In other words, this particular scene highlights that the different cultural groups and/or identities are also hierarchically organized through some sort of “natural selection” that guarantees order and stability. Thus, as Françoise Ptaff observes, the African city, with its “rapid changes” coupled with “demographic explosion” directly attributable to rural-urban migration, not only makes an extra-ordinary setting for interesting stories, but also contains a “wealth of human experiences” (2004:89).

In that case, the city space could be viewed as a “microcosm of the dynamic historical and social forces” whose effects impinge on the whole nation (Ptaff 2004:89). Towering vertical buildings in most cases are used as banks, administrative offices, headquarters for global firms and multinational conglomerates, as well as luxurious hotels, among others. Contrasted with the horizontal dwellings, the vertical tall buildings such as the Teleposta towers in *Malooned* can be seen as the harbingers of power, usually of western capitalistic interests (Ptaff 2004:89).

Significantly, juxtaposed representation of the alienating model of the urban space in contemporary African cities is indicative of the relationship between the spatial and socio-political/economic spheres. To use Ptaff’s words, such “aesthetics of spatial dualism” underscore the social inequalities separating the “oppressed masses and the oppressive elites” both in urban contexts and at the national level (2004:105). Lower socioeconomic classes, usually confined to the horizontal dwellings, can only access such buildings as menial workers, to do the bidding of their neo-colonial masters.

A surveillance video sequence used to introduce the film’s protagonists, Luther and Di, demonstrates the exercise of power in its more diffuse forms as argued by Foucault in the post-structuralist phase (1997:329). This scene highlights the fact that the entire building (Teleposta Towers) is under surveillance and that all movements and happenings in the premises are monitored around the clock. Bentham’s model of the panopticon conjures the idea of a society that is fundamentally established on discipline, where surveillance is critical and, knowledge is inevitably linked to power (1997:329). Thus, the architectural design of Teleposta Towers, where Luther and Di become stranded for the rest of their Easter Holiday, supports the exercise of power, which ultimately influences human behaviour.

When seen through the surveillance footage, the characters seem to be complying with institutional power and authority, by exhibiting positive behaviour responses in some

instances. Take the night guard (Charles Bukeko a.k.a Papa Shirandula) for instance, we see him make security rounds from time to time, through the surveillance footage. These sequences suggest that the night guard is a typical “disciplined” worker on duty, performing his duties as expected of him by his employer. At this point, the most fundamental question becomes, is the character complying on his free volition, or is his behavioural response influenced by an awareness of being watched, or otherwise?

The question of will is particularly significant in this case since, if the guard is not acting on free will, does it then imply that his behaviour is fundamentally motivated by some sort of force? It is particularly tempting to conclude that the guard’s behaviour is motivated by the panopticon, especially bearing in mind that when he is away from the surveillance cameras, he does not continue with the positive behaviour of disciplined bodies that he exhibits when under surveillance. Certainly, the guard literally “lowers his guard” when he is away from the all-seeing eye of the surveillance cameras. As soon as he is in the shadows, he sleeps even though he is on duty, thereby compromising the security of the building. In that case, one can easily say that it is actually the panopticon that influences behaviour of the guard.

However, Foucault revisits the panopticon argument in an interview, *Space, Knowledge and Power*, where he clarifies and qualifies his ideas on the question of liberty and the panopticon (1997:329). Foucault emphasizes that what really regulates behaviour is not necessarily the form of the panopticon itself, but rather the power differential between those being seen and those that are “seeing” (1997:329). In that respect, the surveillance footage reveals the gross socio-economic and political power asymmetries that characterize the Kenyan society as a whole.

The toilet as an “other” space is invested with rich cultural meanings that conjure notions of identity and belonging to the ideal nation as imagined by *Malooned* (2007). For



instance, Foucault's fifth principle of heterotopias states that "heterotopias always presuppose a system of opening and closing that isolates them and makes them penetrable at one and the same time" (1997:335). No wonder when Luther finally finds the Gents, in the case of *Malooned*, they are locked and he cannot enter, yet he must relieve himself. The fact that there are doors on the toilets is a curious phenomenon, and this suggests that whatever goes in behind the closed doors is a private affair and one cannot simply storm in unannounced or uninvited. In relation to nationhood in the Kenyan case, the nation is a site for the struggle and contestation of meanings and, since membership is limited, not everyone can simply be Kenyan by claiming to be one.

Foucault observes that for one to enter a heterotopian location, they must first obtain some sort of special permission after completing a series of gestures (1997:42). In the case of the toilet, Luther has to knock on the toilet door, a gesture that confirms to him that the gents are locked and so he cannot enter, even though he has submitted to the so-called "rites of purification" as expected. Fortunately for Luther, the ladies are still open and, checking that no one is seeing him, he enters quietly and locks the door behind him. However, unbeknown to Luther, Hanna (the wash lady) locks the door to the ladies and heads off home, leaving him and Di, both of whom are now locked in the toilet to find their way out. This marks the beginning of a four day Easter Holiday vacation in the toilet, "malooned", as quipped by the film's title.

Foucault argues that individuals do not enter into heterotopias by choice, thus, one must either be forced into one or they must first of all "submit to rites of purification" (1997:335). In that respect, the toilet in *Malooned* is fundamentally devoted to what Foucault refers to as "practices of purification" that are "solely hygienic" (1997:42). This implies that both Luther and Di find themselves in the toilet by necessity rather than by choice, since each one of them goes in there to relieve themselves. The very act of entering the toilet could thus

be extended as a metaphor for submission to purification rites. Nevertheless, by entering the toilet, Luther and Di submit to purification rites that go beyond the conventional hygiene practices. In the discourse of the nation and nationhood, the act of submission to purification rites could be interpreted as giving up individual and ethnic group allegiances or loyalties and agreeing to form a collective community at the national level.

Ideally, the nation of Kenya, as imagined and projected by *Malooned* (2007), cannot be a cultural homogeneity, since it is comprised of vast cultural diversity and differences, which give rise to potential points of conflict between the different cultural groups. The film clearly depicts the Kenyan nation as a multicultural community whose national culture is made up of many diverse cultural groups and traditions. In view of all the cultural diversities and differences in that geopolitical space called Kenya, how does the Kenyan nation continue to survive as a unified value-sharing community with a significant collective history in the past and a manifest destiny in the unforeseeable future?

### **Negotiating Cultural Identities in *Malooned***

The boundaries of the “nation” can never be ultimately fixed, especially if we regard Hall’s argument, in *The question of cultural identity*, that “national identities are not things we are born with, but are formed and transformed within and in relation to representation” (1996: 612). Hall’s perspective highlights an important point that nations are to be regarded, not only as political entities, but also as “system(s) of cultural representation” (*The question of cultural identity*, 1996: 612). Dilip Gaonkar, in *Towards new Imaginaries*, echoes this point when he argues that societies use various systems of “collectively shared significations” to represent themselves (2002:7). Gaonkar reiterates the idea that language is the “medium par excellence” through which “social imaginary significations become manifest and do their constitutive work” (2002:7). Individuals generally play a significant role in the notion of the nation as it is represented in the culture of the nation, rather than merely being legal subjects.

Homi Bhabha, in *The Location of Culture*, argues that “It is the trope of our times to locate the question of culture in the realm of the beyond” (1994:1). Evidently, this statement succinctly sums up the view that the quest for survival in the contemporary Kenyan society inevitably calls for “living on the borderlines of the ‘present’”, to use Bhabha’s phrase (1994:1). The concept of the “beyond”, according to Bhabha, refers neither to “a new horizon, nor a leaving behind of the past” (1994:1). On the contrary, the ‘beyond’ being referred to in this case is some sort of “space of intervention in the here and now” (Bhabha 1994:10). Thus, Bhabha holds the view that we inhabit a moment of transit “where space and time cross to produce complex figures of difference and identity, past and present, inside and outside, inclusion and exclusion” (1994:1).

Significantly, every identity claim, especially in the contemporary world, is often accompanied by multiple subject domains including, but not limited to “race, gender, generation, institutional location, geopolitical locale, sexual orientation” (Bhabha 1994: 1), among others. In light of the above, Bhabha argues that it is imperative to look over the so-called “narratives of originary and initial subjectivities” to the particular “moments or processes” that emerge out of the “articulation of cultural differences” (1994:1). Consequently, Bhabha argues that, within these “‘in-between’ spaces,” it is possible to elaborate “strategies of selfhood” both at the individual and at the group level (1994:1). Eventually, these strategies of the -self aid in the creation of “new signs of identity, and innovative sites of collaboration, and contestation,” thereby contributing to new ideas of being and belonging to the collective society (1994:1). It is precisely within this framework that *Malooned* (2007) determinedly pursues and projects notions of the ideal collective national identity, by contesting traditionally entrenched cultural boundaries and negotiating new cultural identities.

At the core of the constructionist theory of meaning and representation is the view that physical things exist but can only be meaningful thereby becoming objects of our knowledge within discourse (Hall 1997:45). This implies that all cultural meanings attributable to particular groups and cultural symbols are constructed within their specific correlative discourses. Closure in representation naturalizes the meanings of images to the point that it thoroughly obscures the fact of their constitution or the very process of representation through which they came into being (*Representation and the Media* 2011). A potential pitfall in this established closure is that stereotypical representations tend to settle, thereby limiting the way in which individuals and groups can define themselves. In view of the above, how does *Malooned* set out to contest and negotiate rigid cultural boundaries, which are enforced and sustained by deeply entrenched cultural stereotypes within the Kenyan society?

According to Hall, countering a stereotype does not necessarily imply reversing or subverting it, particularly because, eschewing “the grip of one stereotypical extreme” inevitably implies “being trapped in its stereotypical other” (1997: 272). One of the most effective stereotype counter-strategies intervenes within the stereotypes and, attempts to dismantle them from within. In other words, this counter-strategy situates itself “within the complexities and ambivalences of representation itself, and tries to contest it from within” (Hall 1997:274). Opening up the practice by which these closures have been presented requires one to enter into the power of the stereotype itself to try and subvert it from inside (*Representation and the Media* 2011).

Consistent with Hall’s argument that images “accumulate meanings, or play off their meanings against one another, across a variety of texts and media” (1997:232), *Malooned* juxtaposes a wide range of visual imagery in its interrogation of cultural stereotypes that entrench cultural meanings and identities. The audio-visual discourses of *Malooned* are

particularly significant in destabilising the often taken-for-granted entrenched representations of cultural difference and identities in the Kenyan society.

As a significant signifying practice in the representation of difference, stereotyping works through a strategy of splitting, which entails separating the “normal and acceptable from the abnormal and unacceptable” (Hall 1997: 258). Eventually, stereotyping seeks to exclude or expel everything else, that which is deemed to be different and therefore not fitting. The system of “social- and stereo-types” distinguishes both what society accepts as falling within the realm of normalcy and what it rejects as abnormal respectively (Hall 1997: 258). The social-types designate individuals that are defined as abiding by social codes and conventions while the stereotypes are those that the rules target for exclusion.

Hall argues that stereotypes are more rigid and enduring than social types, and especially so because they serve as one of the primary mechanisms through which boundaries are maintained and ultimately fixed. Thus, the practice of closure and exclusion is an integral function of stereotyping, which symbolically attempts to designate boundaries thereby leaving out everything else that does not belong (Hall 1997:258). Stereotyping is, therefore, part of the grand process of maintaining the social and symbolic order. In the context of multiculturalism, such ‘old-fashioned stereotyping’ denies the recognition of the richness and diversity of today’s plural societies. It is nearly impossible to prevent stereotypes from sliding back into their very stereotypical representations (1997:274). Nonetheless, by interrogating them, *Malooned* makes them uninhabitable for long, thereby destroying their naturalness and normativity.

The unconventional setting of *Malooned* in a toilet, away from the ordinary everyday cultural spaces with their conventional entrapments of power, provides a new site within which it is possible for the film to engage in a discourse of national identity and belonging. At this instance, it is important to consider the significance of the toilet as an “other” location

for the final confrontation between Luther and Di. Significantly, the overwhelming solitary space of the toilet completely shuts Luther and Di off from the rest of the world, where civil people who exhibit the acceptable social behaviour are to be found. In that respect, Luther and Di can equally be described as being in a state of crisis, in relation to the rest of the people in the Kenyan society.

For that matter, Luther and Di must remain locked up away from society, in this heterotopian space of the toilet, where norms of the acceptable conduct of behaviour are always in perpetual suspension. Unless they are literally “purged”, Luther and Di will still be incapable of transcending cultural boundaries and co-existing in mutual comradeship with the rest of the members in the wider Kenyan society. Extending this metaphor even further, the troubled relationship between Luther and Di is indicative of the conflicting relationship between different cultural groups in Kenya. Consequently, the perceived notions of rigid cultural boundaries separating Kenya’s diverse cultural groups must equally be expunged for individuals in Kenya to attain a profound sense of collective nationhood.

That said, it is also important to interrogate the nature of the power in the question of the socioeconomic and political hierarchies that define the Kenyan society as a whole, that is, is it merely top-down and oppressive, or otherwise? To explore this phenomenon, I consider the relationship between the so-called neo-colonial masters and the workforce, comprised of the masses, in disciplined society. If it is true that the workers are most productive when they are working with a conscience of being under surveillance, it means that the kind of power operating on them is not necessarily oppressive but productive because it extracts labour from them. In the case of *Malooned* (2007), the guard undertakes all his security rounds under surveillance, which qualifies the view that the power operating on him is certainly productive rather than oppressive. Taking this stance, it is easier to conclude that the power operating in this seen/being seen dyad is unidirectional, and that is, from top-down.

However, there are many instances when the guard exhibits behaviours of resistance to this form of power. For instance, in a scene where the guard notices there is a leakage of water in the building, he refuses to fix the leakage claiming it was not his responsibility. He demonstrates laxity and defiance in the full glare of the surveillance cameras, which are directly angled above his head. In fact, he speaks looking up directly into the security cameras, without any fear for the consequences of his insubordination. By refusing to yield to the power operating on him, the guard confirms that power is diffuse and not necessarily top-down. In both instances, the guard subverts the taken-for-granted notions of power that is always oppressive and operates in one direction only, from the top leadership to the workers.

The brief encounter between Luther and Di in the corridor sets the mood for the conflict that will unfold as the two confront each other later on in the washroom. While Luther is generally civil and friendly, Di is absolutely aloof and impolite, exposing her deep scorn and resentment of Luther. She coldly dismisses him and walks away without caring to show him the directions he was seeking. The camera lingers on Luther looking on, disappointedly and bewildered.

In the toilet, Di tries to open the door in vain, when Luther appears, and suddenly a confrontation ensues between the two. The bitter exchange and struggle between Luther and Di in the toilet bears all the features of the cultural rivalries and tensions that often characterize the Kenyan society in general, thereby adding strength to the discourse of incoherence between Kenya's diverse cultural communities. Perhaps at this point, it is important to consider whether, the disagreements and the conflicts that are highlighted in this scene are indicative of inherent and irreconcilable differences between the diverse cultural groups in Kenya. For instance, differences between men and women specifically or between Kikuyus and Luos generally. To explore this question, I will consider the discourse of incoherence that characterizes relationships between the Kikuyu and the Luo communities.

Generally, one important question to speculate on inevitably becomes whether or not it is true that the two communities are inherently incompatible and can never agree on anything, let alone co-exist.

Generally, Di's initial cold responses to Luther nuance the bitter rivalries between the Kikuyus and the Luos. This antagonistic relationship and bitter rivalry can be traced back to the political history and realities that helped to shape the Kenyan nation in the post-independence era. Mazrui observes that in the colonial society, the Kikuyus were classified among the "untouchables" since they performed the filthiest menial jobs including emptying "latrine buckets" and cleaning toilets (1982:41). However, fortunes reversed for the Kikuyus of Kenya soon after independence as they were immediately "reclassified by the political history and political realities" (Mazrui 1982:41) that pitted them against other ethnic communities.

Consequently, Mazrui argues that the Kikuyus of Kenya, unlike other ethnic communities, can easily access certain opportunities, particularly in urban areas and in government (1982:41). Luther highlights this notion of the perceived self-entitlement attitude of the Kikuyus as an ethnic community in general when he tells Di, "...some people think that you have this superiority complex, the sense of exceptionalism..." (*Malooned* 2007). Di confirms this notion in her response when she says, "What do you expect? We fought for independence" (*Malooned* 2007). In refutation, Luther tells her, "...that is where you go wrong; the people who fought for independence did it for their land, our land, this nation..." (*Malooned* 2007).

Certainly, it is easier to see how the Kikuyus of Kenya came to be perceived as being disproportionately advantaged, as is often the case in the discourse of ethnic inequalities in the Kenyan society. However, does that necessarily imply that all the Kikuyus, unlike all other ethnic communities, have easier or increased access to opportunities in the



contemporary Kenyan society? As far as Mazrui is concerned, there are just as many rich Kikuyus as there are poor ones (1982:41). This implies that in as much as the entire ethnic group may be classified among the most successful ethnic groups, not every member of the group is successful as is assumed. In the case of *Malooned* (2007), Di is a Kikuyu but she works as a secretary, one of the lowest ranks in the administration hierarchy. In that case, despite the so-called exceptional status of the Kikuyus as an ethnic group, Di is a Kikuyu of a lower rank and is just another “indigent proletarian in an alien economy” to borrow Mazrui’s words (1982:41).

Certainly, the so-called exceptional status of the Kikuyus of Kenya is one of the pervasive stereotypes about the ethnic community as a whole and by entering the very constitution of this stereotype, *Malooned* (2007) is able to subvert it from within, by proving that not all Kikuyus are successful or disproportionately advantaged. For instance, Di’s attitude and mannerisms are immediately at odds with her real position as an individual in the social hierarchy. It is clear that she is taking the whole issue of the so-called “special status” of the Kikuyus of Kenya to a whole new level, despite the fact that she is merely a secretary who attended some nondescript high school (Gashororo Girls).

Di’s pretentious self-importance attitude and pride manifest through her body language, utterances and mannerisms, from how she walks and bears herself gracefully. Initially, she declines the offer of biscuits from Luther, even though she is starving, claiming it is unhygienic to eat in the toilet. She even declines drinking water from the cisterns of the toilet, even though it was the only water available for drinking. It is not long until she drops her guard and gives into the pangs of hunger, realizing that it was neither the time nor the place to mind about hygiene. She accepts the offer of biscuits after all and even drinks water from the cisterns.

In terms of gender, the rivalry between Luther and Di can be viewed in terms of a struggle between men and women. What is significant in this case is the fact that Luther, by entering the ladies, has trespassed to a space where he does not belong as a man. For that matter, Luther conveniently blurs the sharp contrast between masculinity and femininity, by entering a space that is conventionally reserved for women. Similarly, the street urchin (Churchill) destabilizes the traditional notion of a clear-cut distinction between men and women by putting on Di's shoes, when she throws them out in the streets through the window, to gain his attention. Consequently, since the resultant meaning of their actions is ambiguous, both Luther and Churchill engender an alternative form of identity and belonging for both men and women, which can only be located in the in-between space of gender.

When she encounters Luther in the toilet, Di becomes edgy and furious, wields a broomstick and brandishes it at Luther instinctively, accusing him of stalking and following her to the ladies. The dialogue in this sequence also complements the preceding visual discourse of incoherence, fear and mistrust between the two characters as man and woman or between Luos and Kikuyus in general. Di tells Luther, "just admit it, you were out to get me" (*Malooned* 2007). Luther struggles really hard to remain calm, in spite of the situation. He tells her, "just hit me...you think that you are the only one with rights? ...I have a lawyer too, and this will not be the first time that I will be dealing with an assault" (*Malooned* 2007). This dialogue is also important in highlighting the discourse of incoherence, not only between man and woman, but also between the kikuyus and Luos in general.

Luther's statement suggests that he has been a victim of assault before, both as a man and as a Luo, living in the Kenyan society. Insofar as the relationship between genders is concerned, Luther's words should be read in the context of the discourse of the battle of the sexes within the Kenyan judicial system. Thus, Luther subverts the view that females generally enjoy more legal protections under the constitution, at the expense of their male

counterparts. In terms of the relationship between the Kikuyu and the Luo communities in Kenya, Luther also overturns the notion of exceptionalism of the Kikuyus of Kenya.

Engrossed in their tussle, Luther and Di seem oblivious of the predicament facing them. Whatever their disagreement is, the fact remains that they are locked inside the toilet and it is certainly in their best interest to figure out a way of getting the door opened. Unbeknown to either of them, Luther and Di are bound to spend the rest of their Easter Holiday trapped in that tiny space of the toilet, which is certainly too small to accommodate both of them. Each one of them independently makes desperate attempts to open the door but all is in vain. Consequently, the struggle between Luther and Di could potentially be indicative of the struggle for survival on the backdrop of limited resources in the wider social sphere in the Kenyan nation.

Most significantly, particularly in relation to the identity question, the struggle between Luther and Di can be extended as a metaphor for the struggle for identity and belonging in the Kenyan society. As shown in *Malooned*, the fact that individual attempts to open the door amounts to nothing have more implications for the question of nationhood in the Kenyan society in general. Furthermore, failure of individual efforts also implies that individualism, and by extension capitalism, can only but takes Kenya so far, in terms of socioeconomic and political liberation. In that case, *Malooned* questions and subverts any simple straight-forward notions of identity, socioeconomic and political development as individual rather than cooperative achievements, between many forces pulling together for common good and purposes.

Resigned to their fate after battling with the locked door unsuccessfully, Luther and Di settle down, each finding a tiny resting spot in which to spend the rest of the night away from the other. Di sleeps on the toilet seat while Luther takes the bench. The following morning they wake up to a bright new day, still locked up. Di wakes up to wash her face

quietly while Luther is still asleep. Later on, the two exchange amiable looks for a record first time. Luther gazes at Di through her reflection in the mirror, and Di also sustains his gaze with hers for a while. Both their gazes are sensual and highly suggestive, yet also ambiguous at the same time. The mirror in this case acts like yet an “other” location or space of mixed experiences, since it poses both the qualities of utopias and heterotopias in Foucault’s terms (1997:332).

As a utopia, the mirror can be regarded as a place without a place, especially because it presents an illusion of a space that “opens up beyond its surface” (Foucault 1997:332). In the context of *Malooned*, the utopia of the mirror functions effectively as an illusory space that allows both Luther and Di to look at images of ‘themselves’, and to be where they do not exist, in the virtual space of the mirror. Nevertheless, the mirror is also a heterotopia since it has physical existence in the toilet where it is placed. Foucault argues that the mirror has a sort of “come-back effect” on the surrounding space (Foucault 1997:332).

In that case, to examine how the mirror in *Malooned* (2007) functions as a heterotopia, it is vital to explore its function in relation to the surrounding space. As argued by Foucault, the function of heterotopias, in relation to the rest of the conventional cultural spaces, oscillates between two conflicting extremes (1997:335). In that regard, Foucault differentiates between two types of heterotopias, heterotopias of illusion and those of compensation (1997:335).

Heterotopias of illusion have the function of creating an “other” space that reveals the manner in which all the real space is even more illusory. Contrariwise, heterotopias of compensation create other real spaces that are “meticulous and well-arranged as ours (are) disordered, ill-conceived and in a sketchy state” (Foucault 1997:335). In this case, the mirror functions in the sense of a “heterotopia of compensation”, particularly because it presents both Luther and Di at the height of perfection, happy and cordial.

Indeed, everything looks perfect for the brief moment that both Luther and Di gaze at each other in that mirror. Their subtle smiles and “dancing eyes” signal an impending fatal attraction that is about to unfold between the two characters, despite their earlier disagreements and bitter exchange of words. Eventually, exiting that illusory virtual space of the mirror, where everything looks perfect and meticulously ordered, both Luther and Di become aware of the real space of the toilet where they are located in reality. Consequently, turning away from the gaze in the mirror enables the characters to perceive themselves as individuals and begin to reconstitute themselves in reality.

For instance, despite her earlier misgivings and aloofness, it soon dawns on Di that she cannot avoid talking to Luther forever, especially when they are in such close proximity. They begin on a small conversation about their “messed up” plans for the Easter weekend, and soon they are chatting happily (*Malooned* 2007). Nevertheless, their conversations are not without hiccups either, as memories of their embattled bitter past, ghosts that have haunted them for years, always come in the way. Luther and Di are taken through a whole journey of personal transformation and rediscovery through which they wrestle with their own inner thoughts and memories of the bitter rivalry between their ethnic communities, as well as the historical misdeeds perpetrated by either group against the other.

In these outbursts, each of the protagonists accuses the other’s ethnic community of wrongdoing. On one hand, Luther claims that the Kikuyu’s are thankless, selfish schemers that have conspired to deny the Luos leadership of the nation. Luther cites historical misdeeds— including political assassinations of prominent Luo politicians such as Tom Mboya— allegedly perpetrated by Kikuyus against the Luos. These recollections take a toll on both characters, pushing them in a spirited struggle to reconcile their embattled and embittered past with their present circumstances, something that is not even remotely conceivable.

For that matter, one cannot help but wonder, with all the wrongdoings, all the unresolved murders, and so much bitterness in their hearts, how could their differences be ever resolved? In view of all these misdeeds, one easily gets a sense of the perceived irrevocable differences and incoherence between Luther and Di and between the Luos and the Kikuyus in general. Nevertheless, the two have a critical choice to make, and that is to come to terms with what has happened, to bear their losses with grace and to address what confronts them in the present, which is the resentment that is nearly tearing them apart.

The character of Luther is fundamentally significant in the nationhood discourse of the film because he is certainly portrayed as the voice of reason, unlike Di, whose somewhat illogical arguments and vile attitude towards Luther make her unsympathetic from the beginning. Luther attempts to get through to her by remaining level-headed throughout their arguments and being friendly through small acts of kindness. Luther continually demonstrates how much he cares; for instance, by giving Di his Jacket to cover herself with, and by giving up the only bench in the toilet for her to sleep on, actions that clearly reveal his humanness and gentleman's creed. Perhaps one of the most elaborate displays of kindness and affection is when Luther gives up his only pair of socks so that Di would wear them instead of stepping on the cold toilet floor. When Di accidentally steps on broken glass, Luther quickly fixes her wound to stop the bleeding and in that particular moment, their proximity betrays his affection towards Di.

In the fire scene, Luther collapses due to suffocation from the smoke because he is asthmatic. Roles are reversed and it is up to Di to save his life or to let him die. This scene significantly highlights how much she cares not to let him die too, despite all their misunderstandings and disagreements. However, through the dialogue, the film reveals her primary motivation for saving his life was more out of fear than out of love. She tells him, "I was so scared Luther/if anything had happened to you I would have been blamed/just because

of where I come from/I can just see the headlines/gold-digging Kikuyu woman kills Luo man...rich Luo man in a toilet” (*Malooned* 2007).

Reading this scene in the context of the discourse of fear and mistrust that characterizes relationships between the Luos and Kikuyus is helpful for augmenting this interpretation. Interestingly, this fear and mistrust is not necessarily real. On the contrary, it is constructed through stereotypical representational practices, which eventually enforce the discourse of incoherence between the two communities. What comes out most profoundly is the fact that Luther and Di keep saving each other, no matter how much they disagree or differ in opinions. The film makes it clear that their lives are in each other’s care, and being dependent on each other as such, whether either one of them lives or dies solely depends on the other. This has implications for wider social groups as well, in this case the Luo and Kikuyu ethnic communities, which must either, continue saving each other or let each other die.

Nevertheless, soon after the fire incidence, Luther tells Di that his people (the Luo) would never vote for her people (Kikuyus) (*Malooned* 2007). This conversation highlights the deeply entrenched ethnic hate and resentment that nearly engulfs Kikuyus and Luos in Kenya, as well as the ethnic basis of Kenya’s national politics. Di, on the other hand, is on the defensive, claiming that the Luos are uncircumcised, therefore not fit for leadership of the country. To quote her exact words, Di tells Luther, “...so you think you are perfect? ...you people don’t do ...the manhood thing...the cut” (*Malooned* 2007). To fully comprehend the cultural load implied by this statement, in relation to leadership and power in the Kenyan nation, one must first of all place it in the context of pervasive cultural stereotypes that persist in Kenya.

An interesting question at this point certainly becomes, why must Di invoke the issue of circumcision and the perceived violence of Luos in a conversation about national

leadership? Luther responds by asking exactly the same question, “How does being uncircumcised prevent someone from leading? Your brain is not covered by your foreskin” (*Malooned* 2007). In her response, Di tells him, “no one will follow an uncircumcised man, you are still a boy...” (*Malooned* 2007). This statement evinces what Hall refers to as ‘Infantilization’ of difference, a dominant representational strategy, not only for men alone, but also for women. Reducing a full grown woman or man to a mere ‘girl’ or ‘boy’ respectively is equivalent to some kind of “symbolic castration” (Hall 1997: 262), which implies denying the man his masculinity and the woman her femininity.

As if that is not enough, Di claims that the Luos are so violent. She says, “...you people are so violent, this country will go into war” (*Malooned* 2007). Notably, Luther’s action of smashing the glass mirror is projected as an expression of violence, thereby supporting the discourse that Luos are violent people. However, Luther demonstrates that he is gentle and caring enough to nurse Di’s wound, a gesture that is at odds with the notion that he is violent. Furthermore, Luther says, “...when we stand up for what we believe in we’re labelled so ...you would rather have an idiot from your village in leadership, other than someone else who is more qualified from elsewhere” (*Malooned* 2007). This utterance belongs to a counter-discourse of the entrenched notion that Luos are violent people. Luther reveals how the Luos as a whole community are predominantly represented as violent, to disqualify them from leadership of the country.

It is ironical for Di to accuse the Luos of being so violent, especially if we recall her initial attacks on Luther, when she threatens to hit him with a broomstick. This incidence confirms that anyone is capable of violence, the Kikuyus included. As a matter of fact, Di perpetrates the worst form of violence through her stereotypical sentiments towards Luther and the Luos as a whole. To comprehend the nature of this violence, it helps to think of power in broad cultural as well as symbolic terms. According to Hall, “symbolic power” is



exercised through “representational practices” (1997:259). Since representational strategies entail marking, assigning, and classification, the exercise of symbolic power in cultural representations inevitably entails expulsion of the “other”. Given that stereotyping is one of the most critical forces in the “exercise of symbolic violence” (Hall 1997:259), Di perpetrates the worst kinds of violence, unlike Luther.

Examining all these statements reveals how stereotyping often co-occurs with gross power asymmetries (Hall 1997: 258). Generally, the effects of power are adversely felt by the subordinate or the excluded group. Certainly, binary oppositions such as Us/Them often engender a violent hierarchy that implies domination of one element over the other, in this case, the Kikuyus over the Luos or vice versa. In other words, stereotyping is the sort of game implied by Foucault’s fatal power/knowledge couplet. Through the system of social- and stereo-typing, the dominant cultural groups attempt to influence the entire society through their own particularistic “world view, value system, sensibility and ideology” (Hall 1997: 259). This is what is sometimes referred to as ‘ethnocentrism’, the “application of the norms of one’s own culture to that of others” (Hall 1997: 257). The dominant group, therefore, attempts to project its own world view as the universal, generally accepted, natural and inevitable order that must be adhered to by everybody else.

As if suddenly enlightened, Di challenges Luther to a battle of wits when she asks, “What about now Luther...you and me in this toilet, on Easter Sunday? ... I am not just ‘you people’...I am Dianna Wanjiru Mwangi, and I just saved your (life)” (*Malooned* 2007). When Luther notices that he has been outwitted, he gives up the argument and apologizes. He says, “...you are right, it is about you and me in this toilet...” (*Malooned* 2007). This is a significant turning point in the development and transformation of the characters, as they both come to realize their short-sightedness, and to acknowledge that each one of them is at fault. This is indeed the climax of the transformation process that had begun as soon as the

characters entered the toilet and confronted one another. From there hence forth, both Luther and Di have effectively resolved their differences, agreeably willing and ready to regard each other with mutual respect and trust while at the same time recognizing and acknowledging the existence of some genuine differences between them.

Having undergone through personal transformation after successfully accomplishing the cleansing ritual and the maturation process, the reconciled protagonists are now ready to literally exit the “toilet” and to re-enter the mundane socio-political space, where they are expected to collaborate in nation-building. The film ends with the protagonists having exited the toilet and standing on the stairs, a very significant sign for the transitional sphere within which both their personal identities as individuals and the broader cultural group identities are located.

In that liminal space, cultural boundaries that have traditionally been firmly entrenched are significantly slackened, thereby not only becoming flexible, but also crossable. In that case, the protagonist can be described as being in a perpetual state of becoming, where it is possible to forge new subject domains and new identities thereby achieving a truly unified national culture, identity and belonging with which all the different and diverse cultural groups can identify with. The newly found romantic relationship between Luther and Di is a particularly significant symbol representing the break of a new dawn with hope of regeneration and unity for the future of the nation.

As noted by Ogude, Ngugi uses his “female archetypes” as “sites for contesting the desired nation” (109). Romantic relationships symbolize happenings in the wider society. According to Ogude, Ngugi’s portrayal of women is akin to the now common “iconography of women in the nationalist literature...as a metaphor for the nation” (109). Romance is a figure of the ideal nationhood. Women stand for a state of the nation...state of degradation....” Romantic relationship could also be “a symbol of regeneration, hope and

reconciliation... self-rediscovery in forgiveness and reconciliation lifts the burden of guilt from their hearts and shoulders and they are used to point to the possibility of renewal and the birth of a new nation” (Ogude 112) .

### **Overall Discussion**

Ultimately, an analysis of Bob Nyanja’s *Malooned* (2007) reveals that the film represents the nation as a complex medley of diverse cultures and vast differences rather than a cultural homogeneity. Consequently, the national culture of Kenyans is characterized by anything but a single, unified, stable or fixed identity. Rather than a cultural homogeneity, the ideal collective national identity imagined and projected by the film consists of many identities blended together to form a complex montage. Furthermore, the film imagines that the different cultural groups that live in that geo-political space called Kenya can coexist in peaceful interaction with one another without any notions of rigid cultural boundaries between them.

The image of the ideal collective national identity imagined and projected by *Malooned* is not necessarily unique to the film, or to Bob Nyanja, for that matter; it is what Kenyan nationalists had in mind, and is what elites like Ngugi envisioned for the nation. For instance, Ngugi argues that Kenya is a “potentially great country” and declares that the “contrasts which are the basis of conflict could be the basis of strength, beauty and progress. Indeed, as posited by Ngugi, different people possess “virtues and energies” that can be “harmonized to work for a national ideal” rather than for “political struggles within the society” (1978: 4).

However, that is not to say that the myriad cultural groups can and must unite to form a homogenous cultural block as in the case of a culturally-derived nation. As imagined by *Malooned*, the idealized image of the nation is comprised of a mixture of cultural differences on the basis of many identity categories including gender, generational, class, and ethnicity,

among others. Nevertheless, this ideal image of the nation, where diverse cultural groups co-exist in mutual harmony is not necessarily within the grasp of the nation as the film has rightfully indicated. In other words, it is an ideal that the Kenyan nation as a whole, comprised of multiple cultural groups, aspires towards. The fact that it is an ideal image implies that identity and identity formation are processes that are always on-going as opposed to self-fulfilling prophecies.

In the case of *Malooned*, the occasional quarrels, fights, disagreements, and tension that characterizes the interactions between Luther and Di do not necessarily imply that the two characters (either as man and woman or as Luo and Kikuyu) are incompatible or incoherent. These moments indicate that the nation will often experience moments of tension from time to time, but that does not necessarily imply that the different cultural groups that comprise the nation are incoherent or at war. Contrariwise, these moments of tension are also effectively counterpoised by moments of peace and stability, when individuals feel and even exhibit a profound sense of national consciousness.

There are certainly many occasions when Kenyans have demonstrated great pride and willingness to identify with the nation. For instance, whenever disaster strikes, like in the case of the West Gate Shopping Mall terror attack on the 21st of September 2013, Kenyans demonstrated immense love for the country by turning up in massive numbers to support a collective drive dubbed “We Are One” to help raise money for the victims of the attack and their families. Such overwhelming responses to humanitarian calls such as these ones, in solidarity with fellow Kenyans, have indeed proven that Kenyans are capable of agreeing on common values, despite their vast differences and diversities. However, this momentary peace and stability does not automatically rule out future disagreements and tensions as there are innumerable potential points of conflict within the nation.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### CONCLUSION

Evidently, the Kenyan nation has witnessed innumerable disruptive changes following years of domination by the British colonial imperialism, as observed by Hornsby (2013). In that regard, the story of the Kenyan nation is living proof of the endurance of the Kenyan people as a collective community, in their collective endeavour to build a social life together. However, that does not necessarily imply that the Kenyan nation is a homogenous cultural block. Indeed, Hornsby highlights that within the geopolitical boundaries of the Kenyan nation, there are inestimable points of conflict, based on certain acknowledgeable cultural or ideological differences and diversities. Specifically, ethnic-based political unrest has been witnessed in Kenya since independence, and it seems to get worse with time. In fact, it is even a miracle that Kenya has been able to evade the fate of civil and military coups that befell most African countries in the wake of independence.

In that case, representation of the national identity is a particularly significant question in the Kenyan nation, where diverse cultural groups on the basis of many identity categories such as ethnicity, class, gender, among others, have been forced to live together within the same geopolitical boundaries. As pointed out by Bhabha (1994), identity claims in the contemporary world are invested with multiple if not infinite subject domains and the so-called “narratives of originary and initial subjectivities” can no longer hold as true. For that matter, there is need to locate the question of cultural identity within the specific “moments or processes” that arise in the course of articulating cultural differences in the discourse of the nation. It is possible to imagine infinite alternative ways of being and belonging to the nation as an imagined community, within the liminal space of the national culture.

In concurrence with Stam and Shohat (2000), mass culture has inevitably become the battleground for social struggle in the postmodern era. This explains why the media has

increasingly taken the centre stage in any discussions of multiculturalism, transnationalism as well as globalization. In today's highly mediated transnational world, images, sounds, populations, and even goods circulate globally; thus, media spectatorship is undoubtedly one of the greatest influences on national identity, political affiliation as well as communal belonging. Nevertheless, as argued by Stam and Shohat (2000), the process of imagining the nation is not necessarily limited within nation-states as media like films often circulate beyond national frontiers, thereby enabling a mediated interaction with people in far off places.

The analysis of *Malooned* confirms that indeed film can play a role in nation-building. Cultural products like film can indeed help in establishing and sustaining the idea of the nation as a unified collective society of shared values and common destiny in the unforeseeable future, despite the fragmentation of the population. The analysis of the ideal collective national identity imagined and projected by *Malooned* pursues the logic expressed by Hall in *Who Needs Identity* (1996), that identity is not that stable concept of the self, which remains unaltered through historical transmutations. Contrariwise, identities keep shifting since they are constructed through representations, whose meanings and/or interpretations can neither be fixed nor secured, except momentarily, through a constructed sense of discursive closure.

As Hall puts it in *Who Needs Identity* (1996), identity should be understood as operating in specific socio-historical and political contexts or within precise institutional formations and modalities of power. This implies that the national identity in that geopolitical space known as the Kenyan nation is more of a result of the deliberate marking of difference and exclusion. Consequently, the process of identity formation in Kenya is a contestation between various opposed forces, particularly because the nation as imagined by *Malooned* is not a naturally constituted cultural homogeny. In that regard, individuals' identity is also

dependent on what they deem themselves not to be, or what Hall refers to as the ‘constitutive outside’ or more precisely, ‘the other’. The constant struggles between diverse cultural groups within the Kenyan nation as imagined by *Malooned* are indicative of the process of identity formation, which enables individuals to be sutured within the discourse or narrative of the nation.

Evidently, identity becomes the focus point for ‘identification and attachment’ with the nation, particularly because it has the power to determine who is included or excluded from the nation as it is imagined in the audio-visual discourses of *Malooned*. This implies that identity will always have something more beyond the constructed sense of internal closure, that which is described simply as “the other”. In the case of *Malooned*, this is highlighted through the specific discourses that seek to exclude particular cultural groups or individuals through stereotypical representations of difference.

This notion of cultural identity as constituting of mutual historical experiences and cultural codes not only guarantees stability, but also permanency and continuity, even on the backdrop of an ever shifting history. Eventually, this view of cultural identity seeks to perpetuate that discursive closure in representation. What this implies, in the context of the Kenyan film industry, is that there is a specific ‘essence’ or ‘oneness’ of being, the absolute truth that is concealed beneath superficial differences, which must be discovered, unearthed and projected through cinematic representation such as *Malooned*. Indeed, as Hall (2004) remarks, post-colonial struggles in the previously colonized nations largely perceived cultural or national identity in the same manner. Consequently, this view of cultural identity has continued to play a prominent and creative role in a wide variety of forms of representations within marginalized groups.

However, cultural identity in the Kenyan nation is not something that is already established with finality, gliding through time and unaffected by history, location or culture.

In that case, there is nothing like a hidden, eternally fixed, and essential past to be discovered, which should be captured and projected in contemporary Kenyan cinematic representations such as *Malooned*. Rather than trying to discover some sort of mythical essence of identity in the past, individuals in the Kenyan nation loosely position themselves within the narratives of the past in the process of negotiating their cultural identities in the present time. This implies that the ideal collective national identity in the Kenyan nation, as imagined by *Malooned*, is more of a matter of becoming than of being, as individuals have to constantly contest and negotiate their position within the discourse of the nation.

The spatial dislocation of the action of *Malooned* from the everyday socio-political context where its protagonists do not often relate so well is very significant for the discussion of nationhood in *Malooned*. Most importantly, this shift in location offers a brand new sphere within which it is possible to challenge and negotiate ethnic and other cultural boundaries, thereby creating new subject domains. The significance of the toilet as an “other space” in this context cannot be overestimated, since it not only induces, but also facilitates the needed individual transformation and subsequent re-invention of the protagonists respectively.

Significantly, the film negotiates cultural identities by contesting the entrenched cultural meanings and rigid notions of cultural identities as comprising of a homogenous cultural block living within rigid and static cultural boundaries. Evidently, cultural stereotypes are playing a significant role in the representation of cultural identities and difference that characterizes both groups and individuals in the contemporary Kenyan society. Given that cultural stereotypes attempt to fix and secure a discursive closure that confines people within fixed categories, interrogating, contesting and subverting these pervasive cultural stereotypes is a significant first step in fostering the beginnings of a truly national culture that embraces difference and/or diversity in Kenya, like in the case of *Malooned*.



Within the tiny space of the toilet, sharp binaries such as man/woman, Kikuyu/Luo, among other identity categories, as well as relationships between the protagonists can be negotiated leading to hybrid identities and reconciliation. In that case, the film can be regarded as playing a significant role in bridging cultural differences in a manner that promotes the formation of an ideal collective national identity that both embraces difference and diversity. In that respect, the different and diverse cultures of the nation are sutured together through a unified symbol of the nation in a collective national culture. In that case, the rigidity of identity categories including sexual, gender, class, generational, geographical, and ideological are also effectively contested and negotiated in the process. This radical reconstitution of identities results to a significant positive transformation that is essential for fostering collective national identity and belonging since it creates new domains where new subjectivities can be formed.

Finally, to move towards the beyond, the intervening space within which it is possible for individuals to explore alternative ways of being and belonging to the nation, is to acknowledge and respect both the possibility of, and the actual existence of cultural diversities and difference within the geopolitical boundaries of the Kenyan nation. This necessitates transcending cultural boundaries, or going beyond the so-called narratives of originary and initial subjectivities spoken of by Bhabha (1994), which tend to define individuals so narrowly, within closed identity categories, thereby entrenching notions of rigid cultural boundaries. Transcending cultural boundaries, therefore, is to move towards the “beyond”, to inhabit that intervening space within which the ideal collective national identity is continually suspended, which implies that nationhood is always a matter of becoming or a process towards which both individuals and groups must continually aspire.

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