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2015-08-27
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Cultural Specificity and Cinematic Narration

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A dissertation submitted to the Wits School of Arts, Faculty of Humanities, University of the Witwatersrand in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in Dramatic Art (Cinema Studies)

Johannesburg
20 March 2015

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CHAPTER 1

Cinematic Narration: General Conceptions

Introduction

Although there is no single theory of narration accepted by the majority of those who have addressed it (Wallace 1986), cinematic narration has traditionally been approached from two principal perspectives: the mimetic perspective, which conceives of narration as the actual presentation of a story, and the diegetic, which considers narration the linguistic activity of telling a story (Bordwell 1985). Despite their roots in literary studies, both perspectives have crossed over to cinematic narration drawing chiefly upon structural linguistics and semiotics in the traditions of Ferdinand de Saussure and Claude Lévi-Strauss (Braudy & Cohen 2004). Evidence of that crossing over can be found in the widely accepted 'signification model' of narration theory.

Conceptually indebted to classic structuralism, the 'signification model' assumes that the film operates within *a system of codes* that inform spectators' comprehension of films (Bordwell 2010). It is compatible with the African oral storytelling tradition, which evaluates narrative effectiveness based on the correlation of the teller's narrative choices with established communication and reception *codes* (Ukadike 1994). It is relevant to Indian theories of cinematic narration that draw upon Indian cultural terms of reference to explain the extent to which cultural codes enhance the intelligibility of narration in the Hindi film (Prasad 1998; Nandy 1998; Nayar 2008; Mishra 2008). The signification model may also be continuous with earlier theoretical accounts, exemplified by Andre Bazin's (1955) "Film Language", according to which montage and film style constitute the language of film which uses *metaphor* or *association* of ideas to provide the film the characteristics of a language and enable it to reveal something about the reality.

Prevalent in this model are two views of particular importance to this study because of their cultural connotations. The first holds that narration is an act of presenting a story. It places

emphasis on the structural aspects of narration (Chatman 1978; Branigan 1979; Browne 1982; Wilson 1988). The second view, which emphasises the role of the spectator, considers the act of narration as dependent on assumptions about how the narrative content should be presented and how the audience is to respond to or make sense of the narrated content (Chatman 1978; Bordwell 1985; Wilson 1988).

In both views, 'story' is conceived of as the object of narration, where 'spectator' plays a *perceptual* role; 'narrator' acts as the *presenting* agent (Chatman 1990; Wilson 2006; Carroll 2011); and 'character' functions as the agent that *mediates* the presentation between narrator and spectator. Consequently, these views position narration as a signification act in which 'narrator', 'character' and 'spectator' can be deemed functionally correlative within a widespread and common place schema of agency and communication (Livingston 2006).

Within this schema, the narrator-character-spectator triad presupposes human entities because, for an action to occur, the behaviour of a system (e.g. an organism) must be orientated and proximally caused by that system's meaningful attitudes, including its intentions (Mele 1992; Mele & Moser 1994; Livingston 2006). If we bring in 'culture' in the sense of a system of socially delimited patterns of *signifying* practices through which societies respond to and make sense of their conditions of existence (Hall 1994), a number of issues become apparent in many theoretical positions on cinematic narration. Some of these issues pertain to the complicity of Euro-American theories with imperialistic agendas, as continually lamented by film scholars sympathetic to the cinemas of developing countries (Espinoza 1972; Stam & Spence 1983; Gabriel 1985; Diawara 1988; Rocha 1997). Other issues, which are of great importance to this dissertation, are those of the cross-cultural validity of narration theories. These issues stem from that many theories of cinematic narration, ranging from studies of film spectatorship and characterisation to genre studies, point to the relation between culture and cinematic narration but, except Indian theories, the majority do not sufficiently verify the extent and ends to which cultural specificity informs principles of narration, making the cross-cultural transposability of narration theories

problematic. This can be seen in theories of cinematic narration from across a number of geographical-cum-cultural contexts.

Euro-American theories, for example, tend to depict vague concepts of 'character' and 'spectator', which amounts to a trend to universalize narration principles. They also tend to rely on the commonality of *certain* cultural patterns, fluid notions of shared humanity and some loose ideas of globalisation to justify theoretical claims. The failure of Euro-American theory to acknowledge contextual frames of reference as well as the contextual limitations of their theoretical claims is exacerbated by a remarkable shortage of culturally comparative studies of cinematic narration. This tends to homogenize the impact of cultural contexts on narration and its theorization. It also overlooks the cultural specificity of narration principles – an oversight which implies a neutral narration form into which any story from any culture can fit perfectly. This is evident in instances of cognitive theories of narrative comprehension that describe the spectator as 'real' (Bordwell 1985, Plantinga 2009) without delimiting the spectator's 'reality' to any specific cultural context. So, too, are theories that unduly conflate the scientificity of their claims.

In the latter category, we have Joseph and Barbara Anderson's "The Case for an Ecological Metatheory". In this essay, Anderson and Anderson (1996) single out *accessibility* as fundamental to a film's appeal to the audience. They feel that the problem of accessibility in motion picture is not merely a matter of culture but, more fundamentally, a matter of an individual's response to a pattern of light and dark in its interaction with its environment. They borrow from Eleanor Gibson's (1979) theory of perception and Charles Darwin's (1859) theory of Natural Selection to support their claims. Nonetheless, they do not show how an individual's response to a pattern of light and dark in its world is independent of culture; nor do they manage to scientifically disprove the cultural implications of their very perceptual model.

This universalising impetus does indeed raise the question of whether Euro-American theories of narration draw upon culturally specific Euro-American thought patterns in their

theoretical positions. Consequently, this dissertation examines Euro-American theories of cinematic narration to determine the extent to which they are continuous with their corresponding cultural patterns of thoughts. It questions the validity of their universalising tendencies and, *ipso facto*, their transposability to other cultural contexts.

Unlike their Euro-American counterparts, Indian theorists of cinematic narration do effectively single out specific patterns of Indian culture which inform aspects of Hindi cinema (Gokulsing & Dissanayake 1998; Prasad 1998; Dudrah 2006; Mishra 2008; Banaji 2012). As cases in point, Vijay Mishra (2008) associates the prestige of the "Mother" character in the Hindi film with a fundamental feature of Indian culture, namely the Indian view of the "Mother" as the origin of all genealogical secrets; it places the category "Mother" as crucial in the transmission of genes, which in itself is very crucial in the maintenance of caste and hierarchy. Lalitha Gopalan (2008) shows how the structure of the 'avenging-women' subgenre of the masala film amounts to a giddy masculine concoction in the sense that, while providing the narrative ruse for revenge and allowing the female star to dominate the screen, a violent assertion of masculine power in the form of rape remains the organising principle of the genre. That, according to Gopalan, aligns narration in Hindi film with a distinctively Indian patriarchal ideology. Similarly, Manjunath Pendakur (2003) associates the centrality of the male character in popular Hindi films with the codifications of 'proper' behaviour drawn from *manusmriti*, a pivotal text of Hindu orthodoxy.

In most instances of Indian theories of cinematic narration, we are shown the extent to which culture-specific inscriptions permeate narration in Hindi films. It is also said that these inscriptions do enhance the distinctiveness of the Hindi film and its intelligibility. Consequently, this study probes the Indian theoretical approach in order to assess the correlation between the contextual limitations of any given theory from any given cultural context and its transposability to other cultural contexts.

As far as African theories of narration are concerned, narration and cinema are best appreciated as a tool for social transformation (Hondo 1979; Gabriel 1985; Diawara 1988).

Premised on denouncing Eurocentric theoretical paradigms, African theories advocate the view that culture should be at the helm of narration and its theorization. These theories suggest that African films draw upon culturally specific modes of address and aesthetics (Gabriel 1985; Enahoro 1998; Ukadike 1994, Ebrahim 1985). Teshome Gabriel's "Towards a Critical Theory of Third World Films" is an example of this: Gabriel (1985, p. 9) posits that Third World films "adhere to structural, aesthetic and thematic patterns drawn out from the Third World 's cultural history". As evidence, he associates the preponderance of wide-angle long shots, in the Third World's films, with a viewer's sense of community.

It must be noted that while African scholars make a strong case for the link between African traditional practices and narration in African films, especially based on the argument that African films employ culturally inspired aesthetics which invoke unspoken values stemming from African norms, very few of their theories establish the link between narration in African films and specific cultural practices at their most local level of cultural expression. It is indeed the limited amount of localized culturally specific evidence in African theories that exposes gaps about the practicability of the culture-based paradigms which African theorists advocate.

We find a similar predicament in Latin-American theories. For example, while arguing that Brazilian filmmakers use the consciousness of what is Brazilian as a frame of reference for filmic narration, Rocha (1997) offers very few details of what is specifically Brazilian to which a Brazilian film can narrationally and aesthetically relate. Other views argue for culturally-based interpretation of Latin-American films (Stam & Xavier 1997; Rocha 1997; Espinosa 1972; Viera 2007; Shaw 2007) but offer very little evidence of what is culturally specific to the Latin-American context upon which theories of cinematic narration can draw.

In light of the differences in approaches, the contentions and the limitations of the theories highlighted above, this dissertation attempts to uncover epistemological intersections that can account for the continuity of cinematic narration and its theorization in specific cultural contexts with corresponding cultural patterns of thoughts.

For the sake of this research, I will borrow Stuart Hall's (1994) definition of culture as a system of socially delimited patterns of values or of meaning formation through which given societies reflect, respond to and make sense of their conditions of existence. Consequently, cultural specificity will be taken to refer to the most local level of cultural expression collectively characteristic of individuals belonging to a particular social delimitation. Narration is here defined as a process of presenting a story, while narrative is defined as the realized construct of narration. In this sense, of course, because mine is not the study of narratives but of theories of narration, I prefer the phrase 'narration theory' to 'narrative theory'. However, I will maintain the use of 'narrative theory' in citations that contain the phrase as such. In other instances, 'narrative' will be limited to its adjectival function. My definition of film theory is borrowed from David Bordwell (1991) who defines it as a system of propositions that claims to explain the nature and the functions of cinema. Because of the broad nature of cinema, this dissertation is limited in scope to three aspects of cinematic narration: characterisation, spectatorship and genre theory.

This dissertation consists of five chapters that explore various conceptions of the field of narration theory vis-à-vis cultural contexts. Many of these conceptions are highlighted in the next section, which reviews popular theories of narration from different cultural-cum-geographical contexts. To mitigate for cultural contextualisation of cinematic narration, selected theoretical positions are reviewed to find their embedded cultural inscriptions.

In Chapter 2, I question the pervasive universalising tendencies of Euro-American theories. Premised on evaluating their contextual relevance, this chapter highlights the conceptions that perpetuate the dominance of Euro-American theories and models in African institutions of higher learning. It chronicles the historical and institutional bases that justify their dominance. The chapter proceeds to identify cultural foundations of Euro-American theories that problematize their universalizing tendencies.

Chapter 3 focuses on African and Latin-American theories. In the form of an overview of theoretical developments and their influences on cinematic narration, it briefly chronicles the current state of cinematic narration in both regions with regard to these influences and draws upon their ideas that culture should underpin the conceptualization and theorising of cinemas to assess the strengths and/or weaknesses of their advocated culture-based paradigms. The focus of this chapter is therefore to establish the extent to which African and Latin-American theories demonstrate the utility of cultural inscriptions of cinematic narration in their respective cultural contexts.

In Chapter 4, I probe the distinctive theoretical processes and accounts by Indian film scholars. The chapter draws upon particular links between cultural patterns and principles of narration in the Indian cultural context in order to establish the factors in intellectual approaches employed by Indian theorists that enable Indian theorists and filmmakers to successfully subvert Western theoretical paradigms and displace Hollywood domination respectively. Unlike African and Latin-American theories, I show how most Indian theories distance themselves from too much opposition to Euro-American theories, but without also subscribing to their models.

Chapter 5 identifies *epistemological intersections* of the explored theories that can translate into opportunities and challenges for basing cinematic narration and its theorization in specific cultural contexts. It then draws upon these opportunities/challenges to define the nature of the relation between cultural specificity and cinematic narration and to identify ways in which, and ends to which, such a relation can inform principles of cinematic narration in particular and further research in general.

It is important to note that this dissertation goes against the background of prevailing Western institutionalised discursive paradigms that continually perpetuate reliance on Eurocentric definitions of cinematic value and success. The dissertation questions the transposability of narration, challenging the fact that many leading African academic institutions continue to align the core of their instructions predominantly with Euro-American canons.

As I write this, the institutional discourse of the West, which, according to Melissa Thackway (2003), places Western paradigms as the normative points of reference, remains a predominant practice within both the film industry and academia in non-Western countries. Hence, in order to justify the structural importance of cultural context in cinematic narration and to assess the extent to which Indian theoretical approaches and the culture-based theoretical paradigms advocated in African and Latin-American theories can subvert the more universalising Western models, this dissertation seeks to demonstrate the extent and ends to which specific cultural mechanisms influence the structure of cinematic narration and its theorization in a specific cultural context.

Deconstruction as a Methodology

I have borrowed Hall's (1994) definition of culture as a system of socially delimited patterns of values or of meanings formation because this definition is relevant to my methodology and my theoretical framework which are, respectively, deconstruction and post-structuralism. Post-structuralism is useful to this research because of its rejection of unified subjectivity and its denial of a unified truth, especially the view that no shared meanings are possible as everything is understood only through difference (Branston 2000). This view will serve as a frame of reference for interrogating theories of cinematic narration primarily for their cultural inscriptions so as to understand whether or not theoretical positions on narration in a given context can be faithfully applicable to narration in a different cultural context.

Instigated by my doubts about the universality of Euro-American narration theories, especially in the light of their continued institutional dominance which, in Haseenah Ebrahim's view, exacerbates the epistemological imbalance between Africa and the West in the circulation and production of knowledge (Ebrahim, 2013, pers. comm., 3 September), I will employ deconstruction within an interpretive approach of a qualitative nature. I have chosen this method because of its inherent bias towards data's subjectivity rather than its quantity, which will be very useful to my research because of its ability to reveal contradictions in generally accepted truths, to highlight the symptomatic nature of omissions,

language slips and silences, and to reveal the ideological biases of many texts. For this research, deconstruction proves therefore more effective to establish the continuity (or lack thereof) of theoretical positions on cinematic narration with contextually inflected cultural patterns of thoughts.

I wish to acknowledge both Walliman's (2011) view that no one can be a neutral observer in a research activity and the new historicist view that our interpretations of what we observe are subjective products of our time and our culture (Brizee & Tomkins 2013). As an African, I hereby acknowledge my bias against the Eurocentricity of many contemporary narration theories. I do not, however, intend to dispute their validity within their originating cultural contexts. Instead, I am concerned with the cross-cultural validity of theories in different cultural contexts.

My position (bias) is continuous with Mikhail Bakhtin's (1981) concept of *heteroglossia* which conceives of meaning formation as dependent more on context than on text, or on the conflict between multiple voices within a text. My position is aligned with existing concerns against Eurocentric cultural imperialism. It invokes Homi K. Bhabha's (1989) concept of 'necessity of heterogeneity' which considers the event of theory to be the negotiation of contradictory and antagonistic instances; it re-contextualises Fernando Solanas and Octavio Getino's call for the intellectual's independence from models that promote imperialist expansion and it can find relevance in numerous scholars who lament the intellectually debilitating nature of Eurocentrism (Pop 2007; Shohat & Stam 1994). At the core of my position is a recast of Frantz Fanon's (1963) call for subversion of the inferior situation to which colonial institutions *continue* to condemn post-colonial nations.

As far as cinematic narration is concerned, my position is sympathetic with anti-colonialist thoughts that refute Euro-American theoretical paradigms as cannons to conceptualize African cinemas (Gabriel 1985; Enahoro 1998; Ukadike 1994) and it amplifies Soyinka-Airewele's (2010) dismissing of Eurocentric demands for post-independent Africa

to fall in line with Western canons that erase Africans as autonomous agents in, among others, intellectual pursuits.

Literature Review

In his specificity thesis about film, Rudolf Arnheim (1933) stresses that, in creating works of art, it is important that film artists consciously stress the peculiarity of their medium. In his critique of the specificity thesis of art forms, particularly of film, Noël Carroll (1988) acknowledges the usefulness of Arnheim's thesis for correcting the vagueness of the tendency to reduce all the arts to a common denominator. He commends it for influencing theorists to look more rigorously at various art forms.

With regard to such rigour, this review dialectically engages theories of narrative comprehension, characterisation and film genre from a culturally specific perspective. The review hinges particularly on ways in which theoretical approaches *represent* the relation between cinematic narration and cultural mechanisms in specific cultural contexts. It focuses on contextual/cultural inflections that characterise propositions about the workings of cinematic narration in any given context. My interpretation will be limited to theoretical approaches in Euro-American, Indian, African and Latin American contexts.

On Narrative Comprehension

Describing the effects of film narrative on spectators, three Euro-American trends have evolved over time: screen theory, cultural studies and cognitive film theory. Credited to Jean-Louis Baudry and Christian Metz as its most influential theorists (Coplan 2009; Wojcik 2007; Plantinga 2011), screen theory, also known as subject-position theory, conceives of the film spectator as a passive, unwitting victim of a system (the film apparatus) built to obtain a precise ideological effect necessary to the dominant ideology. According to Baudry (1970), the cinematic apparatus creates a "phantasmatisation of the subject" and, by that, collaborates in the maintaining of Idealism. As described by Stephen Prince (1996), screen

theory postulates viewers as dupes of the "transparency effects" produced by realist, perspective-based imagery. This theory draws mainly on psychoanalysis to explain the spectator's approach to film perception. Hence the predominant approach to studies of spectatorship entails primarily reading of the spectator's activity in relation to unconscious processes (Wayne; referenced in Prince 1996).

This particular aspect of screen theory has been roundly criticised. Stephen Prince (1996) dismisses the analogy between Freud's beating fantasies and cinematic apparatus in playing off sexual oedipal conflicts on the ground that psychoanalysis is a discipline without data and lacks established standards for interpretation that can ensure inter-analyst reliability. He goes on to condemn psychoanalysis for paying little to no attention to empirical evidence of spectatorship and posits that any such theory may be suspected of being insufficiently grounded. Referring to Metz's concept of 'scopic drive' – a sexually based urge to view films voyeuristically – Prince lambasts psychoanalytically inclined theories for failing to model a sophisticated perceptual process and for making claims that do not fit the available evidence on how actual viewers watch film and television. According to Prince, that amounts to disdain for empirical methods, leading to the construction of theories that posit ideal spectators without flesh-and-blood counterparts.

Noel Carroll (1988) critiques screen theory's reasoning methodologies. Singling out the analogy between the cinematic apparatus of Baudry and the dream, Carroll refutes the 'inhibition of movement' as a feature shared by the cinematic apparatus and the dream because, he argues, unlike in cinema viewing, the inhibition of movement in sleep is involuntary. Thus, he deplores the tendency of screen theory to use superficial analogies which ignore significant dis-analogies. Screen theory has also been critiqued for ignoring differences between spectators (Plantinga 2009). Post-modernists attack the *unified self* purportedly produced by the apparatus as a fiction that ignores multiple subjectivities.

In comparison with screen theory, cultural studies is said to offer a much more open and diverse account of the film-spectator relationship (Plantinga 2009). Cultural studies holds

that the film text does not uniquely determine the spectator's response. Instead, contextual factors strongly support textual influence (Stager 1992; Altman 1992). This would mean that the meaning which the audience members make of textual cues can only sufficiently be validated in terms of contextual factors that guide meaning formation in the audience members' habitual interaction with texts. From this perspective, screen theory is critiqued for overlooking the contexts of film viewing, for minimising history, and for undermining the spectator's agency and free will. Despite that, cultural studies does not categorically dismiss the assumption that spectators are constituted in film discourse. That, according to David Bordwell (1996), aligns cultural studies with the subject-position view of screen theory.

Bordwell's position conforms to the cognitive, post-theoretical view of film spectatorship originally advanced by Hugo Munsterberg in 1916 (Anderson & Anderson 1996; Barrat 2007). Revived by recent scholars, cognitive film theory is advanced as a productive revolution against the oversimplification of screen theory and as a much more rational theory of spectatorship than cultural studies. From a cognitive perspective, the spectator is an active, hypothetical entity who processes films using psychological faculties such as making assumptions and drawing inferences (Prince 1996; Gaut 2006; Coplan 2009; Bordwell 2010; Plantinga 2011).

Despite their differences, these theories all commonly allude to culture but provide scant detail of how culture affects film perception. Furthermore, they neither acknowledge the contextual limitations of their assumptions, nor engage non-Euro-American perspectives significantly. This begs a number of questions which I hope to substantiate by drawing attention to a few cases in the cognitive tradition.

In "Identification and Emotion in Narrative Film", Berys Gaut (2006) proposes the concept of 'imaginative identification'. Gaut's concept gives primacy to the notion of 'identification' which must take into account various aspects of the character's psychological perspectives. He writes:

> To identify with character perceptually is to imagine seeing what the character sees. To identify with him affectively is to imagine feeling what he feels. To identify with him motivationally is to imagine wanting what the character wants; and to identify with the character epistemically is to imagine believing what the character believes. (Gaut 2006, p. 263)

In the worlds of fiction, he adds, viewers' imaginings are shaped by the demands of the context of the narrative. In similar vein, Amy Coplan (2009) posits that, through empathy or simulation, we can gain a unique kind of experiential understanding of characters – an understanding which provides a representation, however partial, of another person's subjective experience, a representation of what it is like to be another person.

Both Coplan and Gaut imply a contextual essence which unfortunately is diminished by lack of depth and detail. Consequently, these views elicit questions to which they offer no answers. For example, Gaut's view that "our imaginings are shaped by the demands of the context" echoes Bakhtin's view that meaning depends more on context than on text; but Gaut elaborates no further on his 'demands of the context'. He speaks of 'context' yet he fails to place it epistemologically or specify *the* context in which he uses this very concept. This tends to allude to *fait accompli* especially because of his persistent use of the plural nominative 'we' and 'us' which also begs the question of whether it implies mere generalising or an attempt to make of a view more than what it is - a singular view which presents itself as having an all-encompassing plurality. With regard to Coplan's 'representation of what it is like to be another person', one can ask: does empathy presuppose unity of subjectivities? How, for example, could an American man represent what it is like to be an African woman? Or perhaps, is such a representation possible in isolation of its cultural context? Assuredly, I do not question the validity of such claim in clearly defined contexts. What I question is the lack of contextual detail to support its claims. The omission of such detail betrays an unwarranted universality.

Arguing against the narrow disciplinarity of film theory, psychoanalytically-based theory in particular, Prince (1996) submits that spectatorship is an area of empirical inquiry and

therefore condemns theories that proceed without an empirical aspect to their support. He advocates ‘attention and attentiveness’ and ‘correspondence’ as two important constructs that can enable theorists to make meaningful progress in modelling the spectator’s viewing behaviour. Prince argues that 'attention and attentiveness' facilitate the conceptualization of film viewing processes in terms of levels of information processing and emotional response. He contends that this information processing is systematically patterned within cultures and situationally articulated as a communicational form in daily life. Consequently, he submits, the viewer easily comprehends cinematic images by rationally processing narrative features that facilitate attentiveness because of their similarities to the viewers’ extra-filmic life experience. An empirical inquiry in such rational processing, he recommends, should be central to studies of spectatorship.

Prince’s concept of ‘correspondence’ similarly calls for spectatorship theories to be grounded in careful study of the points of correspondence between moving picture images and real-world visual experiences available to viewers. Here, he advances the concept of ‘iconic isomorphism’ which recognises cinematic images as iconic rather than as symbolic signs, depending on their similarity to, rather than difference from, what they resemble. On the basis of this resemblance, spectators use inter-personal cues and behavioural assumptions about motive, intent and role-based behaviour derived from social experiences to judge the personality and actions of characters on screen. Prince’s thesis is that

> The spectator judges information with respect to its discursive topic, its membership in possible worlds, the actors or agents in causal sequence, point of view understood in terms of mode of address and position of sight, narrative structure, ideological organisation, and the relation of all of these issues to the viewer’s own self-identity. (Prince 1996, p. 79)

Although Prince’s point about the empirical focus of spectatorship theory provides fecund grounds for a culturally-specific perspective to narration theory, it is nevertheless undermined by the lack of a contextual frame of reference. Nowhere does Prince specify the contextual implications of his theory. He blankets film viewers under a pell-mell generality instead.

Although he maintains that the constructs of attention and attentiveness depend on information processing systematically patterned within cultures, Prince's theory is far from culture-based: indeed, it is very close to universal. This is better illustrated in his unlimited use of the term 'real-world experiences' without any specific cultural context. Even as he refers to some empirical findings about the ways in which children interpret film images, he neither assigns these children any cultural identity nor specifies their universality. He speaks of spectators' use of inter-personal cues and behavioural assumptions derived from social experiences but does not spell out the cultural intricacies of these experiences. We are thus left with questions (but no answers) about the uniformity, if not the universality, of his 'real-world experiences'. These questions become even more pertinent when we contrast Prince's approach with Shakuntala Banaji's (2012) in her study of Hindi film audiences.

The most observable difference is that Prince proposes, in abstract terms, an empirical approach to the study of spectatorship, whereas Banaji actually concretely employs an empirical approach in her study. Most of Banaji's claims are backed by empirical evidence; throughout her book, she makes sure the reader is aware that hers is the study of young *Indian* audiences *of* Hindi cinema. Even more distinctive is her concept of 'contextual infections' according to which disjunctions in personal experience lead to radically different perceptions of a film by the same viewer in different contexts and at different times in their lives (Banaji 2012). Unlike Prince, Gaut and Coplan, Banaji supports her theory with evidence from field notes as well as an analysis of contemporary studies of Indian film audiences. Moreover, she grounds her analysis within a distinctive socio-cultural context (South Indian) and acknowledges the same context to be central to the viewer's perception of the film and to her chosen theoretical method. Banaji's approach does more than to render Prince's approach questionable: it provides a strong background against which to interrogate the contextual relevance of other theories of spectatorship.

In "Trauma, pleasure and emotion in the viewing of *Titanic*", Carl Plantinga (2009) uses *Titanic* as an example to examine affective and emotional responses generated by a film through what he calls a 'cognitive-perceptual' theory of narrative comprehension. According

to this theory, spectators respond to a narrative film by mimicking real-world responses. That, in Plantinga's view, lends realism to responses elicited by a narrative film. Elsewhere, he posits that the study of spectatorship cannot proceed without a model of the hypothetical spectator – a spectator capable of executing operations necessary for the perception of the film (Plantinga 2011).

What is striking about his view is the analogy between the spectators' response and *real-world* responses. Since Plantinga does not clarify the context in which he makes his claims, the term 'real-world' appears so vague as to presuppose universality. This is more apparent in his statement that "the qualities of character that elicit our admiration for a friend or a public figure might also elicit admiration for a filmic character such as Jack or young Rose in *Titanic*." Talent, good looks and accomplishments are some of the qualities of character he cites.

Paul Morrison (1994) states that "Even a universal fact like death is meaningless in isolation from its cultural distribution and regulation." Considering Plantinga's claim in the light of this culturalist view, it would seem reasonable to assume that qualities such as talent or accomplishment will have little significance in isolation from their cultural contexts. Thus, one should expect Plantinga's notion of 'real-world' or 'qualities of character' to be presented as a particular view from a particular perspective held by a particular individual. On the contrary: while Plantinga's claims are based on *his* analysis of *Titanic* (not on empirical research of spectatorship), he still presents them as if applicable to all spectators irrespective of cultural background.

This brings to mind Enahoro's (1998) criticism of Western critical theories for laying too much emphasis on abstract speculative constructions with no corroborating empirical data. Take Plantinga's view, for example: "Because they understand or perceive that the film narrative is a mediated construct, viewers may be willing to experience unpleasant or negative emotions, hoping that some fortuitous outcome [...] will compensate for the experienced negative emotions."(Plantinga 2009, p. 240) Notice the use of the indefinite

plural in ‘viewers’. Are we thus expected to accept this to be true of all the viewers of *Titanic* around the world?

In his failure to specify the context of these ‘viewers’, Plantinga leaves us uncertain whether he implies unity of subjectivity or uniformity of meaning formation routines for all the viewers. Given such uncertainty, one can question the universality of his claims when he describes *Titanic* as “an instance of a universal narrative structure [...] which mines a vein of common and deeply felt-human concerns” (Plantinga 2009, p. 248). Plantinga does not explicitly acknowledge the partiality of his own assumptions; nor does he elaborate the cultural specificity which would warrant the validity of his claims. Furthermore, he says very little about the impact of culture on the perceptual ability of this spectator model. In fact, he only alludes to culture when he states that “the spectator’s construal of narrative events is often influenced by extra-filmic scenarios prevalent in culture.” Even so, his use of ‘culture’ still connotes undue generality – a predicament which is also observable in David Bordwell’s theory.

As he introduces “The Viewer’s Activity”, David Bordwell (1985) points at the usefulness of Screen Theory but argues that film does not position anybody: instead, it cues the spectator to execute a variety of operations. Consistent with Prince’s and Plantinga’s, Bordwell’s spectators are hypothetical and ‘real’ because they possess certain psychological limitations which real spectators also possess. They are active because they are required to think in order to interpret cues provided by the narration. Accordingly, spectators use problem-solving processes and other cognitive activities pertinent to information processing in their real-world experiences.

In Bordwell’s account, an implicit cultural specificity holds sway beneath a universalising veil. Let us consider his assumption that the spectator is ‘real’ and pit it against Jean-Luc Comoli and Jean Narboni’s (1969, p. 815) view that “reality is nothing but an expression of the prevailing ideology”. It can be argued that an assumption of the reality of the spectator can only have an accurate meaning in specific cultural contexts. That would make Bordwell’s

assumptions more meaningful in a specific cultural context because in 'comparing story information with pertinent experiences of the world' spectators are most likely to make meaning of the film with reference to their specific experience of a specific, familiar world – one that presupposes a specific culture. Even though spectators may develop an awareness of cultural values other than their own, even though they may learn conventions and codes of different cinemas from other cultural contexts, such awareness or mastery of codes that does not effectively displace cultural mechanisms that govern the interpretation of film texts.

Bordwell's theory points to such cultural mechanisms when he refers to Western culture to explain how the Western spectator perceives the story. Bordwell's claims do, however, remain superficial enough to negate the cultural specificity of his spectator model and his theory. We can find this in two instances. The first appears in his claim that the spectator's film perception draws on schemata derived from transactions with the *everyday world*. Without explanations of the specificity of his 'everyday world', Bordwell's use of it is as vague and loose as is Plantinga and Prince's 'real-world'. The second instance is in the assumption of a singular Western culture. Throughout his theorising, Bordwell does not give any account of what constitutes *the* Western culture to which he alludes. Rather, he presents it as if to imply that all the Western nations, with their various ethnicities and religions, fall under one culture. Arguably, presenting culture in such a broad fashion might be the core of an apparent contradiction in the cognitive theory of spectatorship. This will become more evident after a comparison with some views of Third-Cinema spectatorship.

In "Towards a Third Cinema", Fernando Solanas and Octavio Gettino (1969) elevate the viewer's role from that of a spectator to that of an actor. According to them, because the militant film is an act of intervention in a situation aiming at social transformation/decolonisation, those who opt to view such a film do so with full awareness that they are exposing themselves to eventual repression by forces that oppose transformation/decolonisation. This then turns the viewers into accomplices of the revolutionary act unfolding in the film. The viewer's participation is heightened by the debates that arise spontaneously during the viewing of the militant film. These debates are

instigated by both filmic and extra-filmic elements such as poems, posters and a programme director who chairs the debates.

In both the cognitive and Third cinema contexts, the viewer is far from being positioned in the Screen Theory sense. All the while, the viewer is cued (notice the passive voice) to perform certain operations. Consequently, if the viewer is cued, the question becomes: does the cuing agent (the narrator) have the ability to impose some limits to the parameters of perception? More pressing, then, will be the question of whether this cuing has any intended ends and whether such ends are attainable without correlation between the narrator's cues and the spectator's cultural means of uncovering the cues in question. One could also ask what happens to film perception when there is no correlation between the narrator's cues and the viewer's cultural context. That, I submit, is an important question that also renders questionable theoretical accounts of spectatorship that denigrate a cultural approach and purport scientificity to back their claims.

In that tradition, I wish to draw attention to a study by Joseph and Barbara Anderson (1996) who maintain that accessibility in motion picture is not merely a matter of culture. In "The Case for an Ecological Metatheory", Anderson and Anderson adopt an ecological framework to explain film perception. For them, biological organisms exist in rapidly changing environments to which they respond through the basic ecologically driven act of perception by way of inferences, deduction, abstraction, etc. As such, the problem of accessibility in motion pictures, and making meaning for that matter, is more fundamentally a matter of perception, that is, a matter of an organism responding to a series of sensory stimuli. It is not merely a matter of culture. According to Anderson and Anderson, this view is consistent with Charles's Darwin's evolutionary theory of natural selection; it is resonant with classical perceptual psychology; and it is continuous with Gibson's ecological optics. Unfortunately, this thesis confuses perception, the reception of sensory stimuli, with the mental processes that lead to signification and response. It fails to link them scientifically and *ipso facto* erroneously equates, albeit implicitly, response with meaning. If one takes socially delimited patterns of values or meaning formation which people use to make sense of their conditions

of existence to be a matter of culture, then one can contend that the translation of any sensory stimulus into some *meaningful* response depends, to a great extent, on the cultural context of the perceiver. That alone should render Anderson and Anderson's notion of motion picture accessibility a typical instance of the manner in which culture governs meaning formation. In consequence, not only does this contradict their view that accessibility in motion picture is not a matter of culture, it also problematizes their claim that "film perception is informed by [...] our cultural knowledge, our specific background and our education." (Anderson & Anderson 1996, p. 365)

Recall that Anderson and Anderson's thesis maintains that accessibility in motion picture is not a matter of culture but, more fundamentally a matter of an organism responding to a series of sensory stimuli. At no convincing level of scientificity can one present film accessibility as not a problem of culture when one bring one's cultural knowledge or one's specific background to the viewing of a movie. This impossibility is supported by Anderson and Anderson's (1996, p. 365) concluding remark: "The perceptual basis of the film-viewing experience allows intellectual and cultural abstractions to be incorporated into our understanding and our emotions."

For Anderson and Anderson to submit that the cultural abstractions incorporated in the perceptual basis of film viewing are 'not a matter of culture", they must convincingly show that understanding, which is essentially informed by cultural abstractions, does not mediate between perception and accessibility. On the contrary: nowhere in their essay do they present evidence to disprove the role of culture in film perception. In contrast, they align themselves with scientific theories which presuppose universality, only to undermine the universality of their own theory all together. In light of that, it can be argued that their taking accessibility as 'not a problem of culture' amounts to questionable scientificity.

On Character and Characterisation

Within the communication model, it would seem inconceivable to separate the meanings of a narrative film from the actions and attributes of its characters. Consequently, characterisation

could be expected to adhere to specific codes of signification which, in turn, would warrant solid cultural foundations. However, the strands of theory reviewed here offer differing views in that regard.

Many theoretical accounts of Hindi Cinema are permeated by elaborate views that link character and culture (see Mishra 1985; Dudrah 2006; Valicha 1988; Chakravarty 1998; Prasad 1998). Here, for example, we find theories that trace the moral codes of characters in Hindi cinema to the mythic values of two most famous Hindu epics, the *Mahabharata* and the *Ramayana* (Mishra 1985; Dudrah 2006; Valicha 1988). Also notable is Prasad's (1998) association of the ban on kissing in popular Hindi cinema with the ruling elite's impetus to preserve their scopic privileges. While acknowledging the merit of each one of these theories, I wish to focus on Manjunath Pendakur's theory because of its cultural details.

For Pendakur (2012), characterisation in Hindi cinema subscribes to a code of proper behaviour drawn from *manusmriti*, a pivotal text of Hindu orthodoxy which affords women no autonomy. Accordingly, he suggests, the whole narrative structure of Hindi cinema, especially the centrality of the male character, conforms to the *manusmriti* prescription that what happens outside the home is the man's domain while what happens in the household is the woman's. He also associates the parodying of non-heterosexual relations with the *manusmriti* code according to which only heterosexual marriage is acceptable. Using textual evidence from Hindi films, he goes on to describe the punishment by death for the 'vamp' characters as a manifestation of the *manusmriti* fear of, and urge to control, women. He corroborates this view with evidence from modern Hindi films portraying independent female characters willing to fight for their place but nonetheless succumbing to the male force or getting married and eventually conforming to the *manusmriti* code. In the views of Pendakur and other Indian theorists, there is considerable evidence to suggest that the functionality of film characters may have deep roots in culture. This is antithetical to theories by leading Euro-American scholars and teachers.

Although, in common with their Indian counterparts, Euro-American theorists do emphasize the importance of character in the narrative film, they give much less evidence of the relation between culture and characterisation. Their common view is that empathy for the screen character is better generated when a writer gives the character a moment of revelation – a moment when the character is vulnerable enough to reveal his/her private self (Field 2003; McKee 1997). They do not speak about specific principles on the basis of which spectators define, justify or disapprove of empathy. In fact, these scholars tend to be more inclined to a universalising approach which, on closer scrutiny, appears unjustifiable.

In her "Inside Story", Dara Marks (2009) holds that conflict in a character stems from emotional imbalance resulting from the character's socio-cultural conditioning, but she elaborates no further than that. For Stanley Williams (2006, p. 88), "If the moral premise is true to the natural order of things with which the audience is acquainted, then the audience members will be sutured into the story on a psychological level." He too goes only that far. Nowhere does he attempt to forge a link between the 'natural order of things' and their respective cultural contexts. In a similar vein, William Indick (2004) emphasises the theory of neurotic conflict, an internal psychological conflict between what one desires and the rigid constraints of civilised society. He suggests taking conflict in personal life and rooting it in a social context – a position similar to Alex Neil's (1996) view that imagining a state of affairs from another's point of view demands a sense of the other person's beliefs, needs and fears. He also endorses Noel Carroll's view that we readily discern the features that make horror fiction horrifying because the audience and the protagonists of horror fictions share the same culture. Also echoing a culturalist voice, Michael Helperin (1996, p. 68) postulates that "Along other pieces of emotional baggage, characters carry with them [from the past] their cultural legacy."

In the given instances, there is little mention of specific cultural reference; the uses of the terms 'culture' and 'society' are so detached from specific socio-cultural dynamics as to imply undue universalization. For example, to explain character dimensions, McKee (1997) states that a counterpoint of the physical and social world of character can lead to an aspect of

character dimension when a *conventional* personality is placed against an *exotic* background but he makes no mention of any contextual limitations pertaining to the 'social world' of the film character. Instead, he posits it as an aspect of archetypal story-telling which, in his words, "illuminates conflicts so true to human kind that it journeys from culture to culture" (McKee 1997, p. 4).

On an exceptional note, Neil D. Hicks (2002) explicitly demonstrates the cultural specificity of characters in American action-adventure films. Excoriating a myopic support of an *every-culture* paradigm of narration, Hicks argues that we need to look not so much at the step-by-step structural outline of a tale. Instead he suggests looking at a story's values as they affect the spirit of a particular society and reaffirm its cultural values. He goes on to show how characters in American action-adventure films reaffirm "the very essence of the American character: that man of principle, stamina and strong heart can carve his own way through life, beholden to no one, answerable only to the laws of his God"(Hicks 2002, p. 43). He accounts for this in the classical Hollywood tradition of a single larger-than-life protagonist whose choices are driven by the character's self-concept and by a personal code of behaviour marked by, among other traits, independent action. For that reason, Hicks observes that European filmmakers find it awkward to make American-style action-adventure films about European cultures, not only because of the differences in cultural and narrative conventions but also because the values required for an "American-style" action adventure do not seem plausible to a European mind set.

Consistent with Indian theories, Hicks' view is indeed insightful regarding the *nature* of the relation between narration and culture, indicating that this can be so in other cultures by highlighting the cultural imprints of Hong Kong films. Hicks points to the choreographed tango of stylized violence in Hong Kong action films as suffused with straightforward moral parables of right and wrong. In keeping with the nature of parables, no character is ever accountable for his/her own behaviour. As such, Hicks singles out the treatment of antagonists in Hong Kong action films. He asserts that in these films, antagonists are not portrayed as outright evil. Instead, they are portrayed as having been corrupted by some

malignant force into abandoning the essential good of their natures, consequently requiring only an intermittent 'cure' delivered by someone on a higher spiritual plane – the protagonist.

It is commonly accepted that theories focusing substantially on detailing the relation between culture and screen characters are rare. It can also be seen that many theories attempt this only in a cursory way. Regardless, the frequency of allusion to culture in the majority of these theories points to an undeniable relation between cultural patterns of thoughts and characterisation in narrative films. Hence, to elaborate further on this relation, it becomes important to consider genre theory since characterisation, like any other feature of the narrative film, is conceived as embedding meaningful elements specific to certain film genres.

Genre Theory

As early as the eighteenth century, narrative genre conventions in literature had attained so broad a level of familiarity as no longer to be considered criteria for creative greatness. In the late eighteen century, for example, Romantic Art justified its disdain for poetic imitation by asserting that Art could owe nothing to tradition or the past because the building of creativity on the achievement of the past doomed the work of art to secondary value (Braudy 1976). In the early 20th century, through cinematic borrowing, the narrative genre saw a new life in films. With the economic success of many cycles of genre films, generic conventions attained very stable identities of their own and received the attention of film historians, theorists and academics as well as thinkers in related fields. As a result, film genre theory fell into two broad categories: aesthetic and socio-cultural theories. While aesthetic theories focus on the repetition, variation, similarity and differences of generic elements, socio-cultural theories conceive of genres as important socio-cultural phenomena that perform important ideological and/or socio-cultural functions (Neale 2000). In both regards, it is genre that guides the style, form and content of a particular category of film. Genre conventions therefore become essential in framing the storyteller's narrative assumptions.

However, regarding the plausibility of genre conventions in a variety of cultural contexts, many strands of genre studies become silent while others remain very sketchy.

In the African and Latin-American camps of film theorization, rigorous genre studies are rare. In fact, mentions of film genres are made often to refute the relevance of Euro-American genre conventions to African and/or Latin-American cinemas. Such is Glauber Rocha's (1997) condemnation of Brazilian filmmakers continually imitate American genre conventions for their practices. For Rocha, an uncritical adoption of Euro-American genre conventions amounts to nothing more than propagation of forms of communications that reinvigorate colonial instruments of alienation. He goes as far as to apportion the blame for this imitative trend to intellectuals who import theory after theory from the developed world, without disinfecting them of their Eurocentric customs. African filmmaker Cheick Camara (2010, p. 213) echoes that sentiment when he says that Africans themselves provide the material for the West's negative portrayal of Africans by far too often showing images of poverty and suffering –"just as if there was no poverty in the West". In Manthia Diawara's (2010) view, this is exacerbated by a lack of local funding which leaves some African filmmakers with no choice but to make films as prescribed by Western conventions. Generally, though, these scholars offer very little substance to justify their peripheral approach to genre studies. Although Teshome Gabriel (1998), for instance, offers a detailed classification of 'third-world' films, there still persist questions as to whether the categories he describes as phases can pass for genres. The major question, which such oversight triggers, will therefore be whether or not films in the African and Latin-American traditions lend themselves to any generic classification or conventions at all. If that were to be the case, there would be even a greater need for more rigorous genre studies to prove it to be so. Because there are no such studies, the question remains.

Unlike the African and Latin-Americans, Euro-American and Indian theorists offer a plethora of genre studies. However, most Euro-American theories tend to observe silences about the cultural specificity of genre conventions. In this position, we can find Jean-Loup Bourget (1973), who categorises films on the basis of the way a genre deals with a given

social structure; Judith Hess Wright (1974), who traces the survival and proliferation of genre films to their function of serving the interests of the ruling class; Robin Wood (1977), who reasons that genres represent different strategies for dealing with ideological tensions; and Linda Williams (1991), who posits that all popular genres address persistent problems in people's culture, sensualities and identities.

To a great extent, these scholars do acknowledge the cultural essence of film genres, but they remain silent about the utility, relevance or transposability of genre conventions in different cultural contexts. This elicits the question of whether there can be elements of genre conventions universally relevant to all films irrespective of cultural contexts. However, an elaborate look at Manjunath Pendakur's (2003) and Edward Mitchell's (1976) genre studies problematizes such a possibility by pointing to a strong relation between film genres and their respective cultural contexts.

In his study of the snake genre in Indian cinema, a sub-genre of the mythological film that recounts earthly adventures of powerful inhabitants of supernatural worlds, Pendakur (2003) shows how the structure of these films conforms to the conservative Hindu code of behaviour stipulated in *manusmriti.* Reading two such films, *Nagina* (Harmesh Malhotra 1985) and *Nagamandala* (T.S. Nagabharana 1997), he shows that in spite of these films often featuring powerful central female characters in the narrative, they still conform to the *manusmriti* code.

In *Nagina,* the female snake character (in human form) pursues the male character but after marriage, she begins to act like a regular daughter-in-law: she rejects her past and gives herself to the husband's family. For Pendakur, this behaviour complies with the *manusmriti* code of family honour according to which a daughter-in-law is expected to put her husband's priorities over her own. In a close analysis of *Nagamandala*, Pendakur points out that, although the film appears to be female-centred, the film's privileges the male by putting the central female character through a purity test to prove she has not committed adultery. The test is administered by the men of the village under the passive watch of the village women. Pendakur goes on to corroborate these cultural inscriptions by citing *Nagamandala's* music

director as stating that the film's female protagonist has power because she conforms to tradition (Ashwash 1997, referenced in Pendakur 2003).

Pendakur's evidence confirms the view of other Indian theorists that Hindi film genres are endowed with cultural inscriptions that give Hindi cinema its characteristically Indian outlook, its distinctive appeal and its attachment to its audiences (Dudrah 2006; Gokulsing & Dissanayake 1998).

Likewise, but in a different cultural context, Edward Mitchell (1976) shows how the structure of the American gangster film reflects three cultural patterns of thoughts particular to the American society: secular Puritanism, Social Darwinism and the Horatio Alger myth.

In Mitchell's account, Puritanism holds that people were conceived and born in sin, hopelessly depraved and without any hope of redemption except for those few whom God elected to save. According to Mitchell, that frames the meaning of good and evil under three assumptions. First, that in Adam's fall, we sinned all; we are all guilty and nothing alters. Second, we are helpless: salvation is an action initiated by God over which we have no influence. Third, we are all moral agents: we cannot escape the onus of choice even if that choice is ontologically meaningless. Mitchell (1976, p. 222) finds these aspects of Puritanism manifested in the form of the taint and corruption which pervade the American gangster film with inevitable consequences for the gangster character: death. "Even if the law may serve as the instrument of the gangster's demise," he emphasizes, "its cause is that he has sinned."

Similarly constructed to Puritanism, social Darwinism advances the idea that human beings are a product of the environment and only the fittest survive to exploit the environment. The manifestations of social Darwinism which Mitchell identifies in the gangster film are the gangster's hostile environment in which the gangster must survive by all means. Even if it is not a determinant, the environment moulds and motivates the gangster. Thus, energy, bravura and cunning are construed as adaptive, self-justifying survival strategies characteristic of social Darwinism.

With regard to the Horatio Alger myth, which Mitchell calls the most immediate historical antecedent of the American Gangster film, the manifestations of the American psyche in the American Gangster film are in the restructuring of the myth. As Mitchell puts it, all of Alger's plots played with the theme of disinheritance where the main task of the protagonist (a boy) was to maintain his traditional value and security by restoring his identity and position in the world – his inheritance. Mitchell observes that, unlike the Alger myth where the hero's inheritance is returned to him (albeit pejoratively), the American Gangster film denies the very value of the Alger hero by permanently disinheriting the gangster. According to Mitchell, these elements of Puritanism, Social Darwinism and the Horatio Alger myth form part of the dynamics of the American mind. The same dynamics provide the bases for the significance of American gangster films.

CONCLUSION

In this literature review, I have drawn attention to the Euro-American universalising theoretical approach to cinematic narration. I have highlighted the African and Latin American's limited evidence to support their calls for *culture* to underpin cinematic narration and its theorization. I have singled out, as remarkable, the Indian approach which uses culturally specific frames of reference to study narration in the Hindi film. Throughout the review, it has become apparent that cultural mechanisms do impact cinematic narration to an extent that remains unknown in many cases. Also, it remains obscure whether, or not, any relation between culture and narration can be useful in the formulation of principles of narration. Even more obscure is the possibility that such principles can lend themselves to cross-cultural applications.

In the next three chapters, I analyse theories of narration from the same cultural-cum-geographical contexts to establish the extent and ends to which the structure of cinematic narration and its theorization in specific cultural contexts are continuous with corresponding cultural patterns of thoughts. Particularly interested in probing the

cross-cultural transposability of theoretical approaches, my analysis will entail answering two central questions:

- To what extent and ends do specific cultural mechanisms influence the structure of cinematic narration in a specific cultural context?
- Of what utility and effect can such influence be to cinematic narration in African cultural contexts?

In all instances, selected theories will be tested out against a working hypothesis that *the validity of a theory of cinematic narration is relatively linked to its degree of relevance to a specific cultural context.*

CHAPTER 2

Euro-American Theories: Culturally Specific or Universal?

Introduction

In *Unthinking Eurocentrism*, Ella Shohat and Robert Stam (1994, p. 1) define Eurocentrism as "the procrustean forcing of cultural heterogeneity into a single perspective in which the world is envisioned from a single privileged point" – that of Europe. In their view, Eurocentrism remains so embedded and endemic in present-day thought and education, so pervasive, that it often goes unnoticed, if not naturalized. Against that, they advance the idea of "polycentric multiculturalism" – a relational form of multiculturalism which sees all cultural history in relation to social power, disperses power by transforming subordinating institutions and discourses, sees and imagines from the margins and does not epistemologically privilege any single community or part of the world, whatever its economic or political power. This follows from their view that communities, societies and nations, and even entire continents, exist not autonomously but rather in a densely woven web of relationality. In such a web, Shohat and Stam find all utterances inescapably taking place against the background of the possible responses of other social and ethnic points of view. Hence they present "polycentric multiculturalism" as a tool to dislodge persistent Eurocentrism.

This chapter is one such response. On the one hand, the chapter seeks to demonstrate embedded, naturalised Eurocentric affectations in Euro-American theories of cinematic narration. It analyses these theories by situating them in their originating cultural contexts, thereby interpreting their theoretical claims against the legacy of Euro-American cultural thoughts. On the other hand, the chapter interrogates the relevance of these theories in an African context to better explain their universalising tendencies.

I am aware of the terminological uncertainty that characterises hostility to the idea of 'a' Euro-American thought. Luther S. Luedtke (1998) confronted sceptics who deemed it futile to search for a palpable commonality among a population as large and ethnically diverse as the United States. In his introduction to *Making America*, an anthology that narrates the processes and evaluates the forces which have given shape to the reality of an American national identity, Luedtke shows an intimate relation between the histories of Euro-American philosophy and Western philosophy as well as its remarkable identification with Protestant/Puritan theology. Considering the cultural diversity in both Europe and the USA, it would seem pointless, if not over-ambitious, to speak *singularly* of a Euro-American thought. In fact, it would appear antithetical to this dissertation, which advocates a culturally specific perspective to cinematic narration. However, if we consider the historical evidence, such scepticism becomes merely probable when we ignore the acculturation that never ceases to remind us of Western imperialism. It will require that we pretend Eurocentrism does not exist. We need not look further than O.R. Dathorne's (1994)*In Europe's Image* to find evidence of the singularity of Euro-American thought. Dathorne traces the prevalent definitions of being American back to the colonial historical legacy. He points out prevalent imperialistic strains that continue to define the American character. Among these strains, Dathorne reminds us that the USA is constructed in non-native American, non-African American, neo-Anglo terms, and laboriously defined with an Anglophile mythology. This mythology espoused rigid thought patterns that placed, and tacitly continue to place, the Native American, African American, Asian American and other descendants of non-Western Europe outside a humanity defined in total adherence to Western European cultural reference points. Dathorne call this "the Euro-American humanity" (Dathorne 1994, p. 20).

It is this sense of "Euro-America" of which I speak: the Euro-America whose Eurocentric affectations undermine the cultural diversity and cultural values of its inhabitants for the sake of conformity to European, and particularly English cultural reference. It is the Euro-America whose thought owes so much to English and European thought (Commager 1950), whose distinctive style of thought remains faithful to its European ideological origins (Kohn 1957), a Euro-America formed by American colonial communities committed

to European values (Harris 1988). In this Euro-America, we find the thought legacy of English colonists who saw no need to develop original philosophers but looked to the motherland (England) for political as well as intellectual leadership (Murphey 1988).

It is in relation to some tenets of such thought that I deconstruct the universalising tendencies of selected Euro-American theories of cinematic narration with references to Puritanism, Idealism, Pragmatic Individualism and Social Darwinism. The choice of these thought patterns is informed by (1) their epistemological intersections and their Eurocentric formulations, (2) by their continued relevance and prevalence in present-day Euro-American intellectual and cultural production and (3) by their remarkable manifestations in Euro-American theories of cinematic narration and the cultural by-products epitomised in the dominant American cinematic texts.

It should be noted that my analysis is contingently historical but primarily ideological. The historical aspect of it consists in contextualising the developments of certain theoretical positions, but it remains ideologically vocal by paying particular attention to cultural epistemological affectations which seem to support, but instead challenge, aspirations to universality of the examined Euro-American theories. This aspect is essential in as much as it highlights the ways in which culturally specific thought patterns permeate the theoretical paradigms informing the predominant modes of intellectual and cultural production in the field of cinema.

In no particular order, here are brief descriptions of thought patterns which form the contextual framework of the analysis in this chapter.

Puritanism

With its origin in English Calvinism, Puritanism holds that people were conceived and born in sin; they were hopelessly depraved and had no hope of redemption except for those few whom God elected to save. In America, says Murphy (1998), the Puritan thought was modified to institute the doctrine of visible sainthood originally absent from the original

English Puritanism. Based on the belief that the reception of grace so altered the individual's nature that other gracious individuals can validate the individual's salvation, the social validation of a person as a saint depended upon peer acceptance. In Commager's (1950) view, such modification was dictated by the need to conform to the realities of the American experience and become reconciled with the idiosyncrasies of the American character. This resulted in a world view grounded in theology combined with logical, rhetorical and mathematical theories, according to which God was the only true efficient cause in the universe. Hence, human and natural events were interpreted as expressions of God's will (Murphy 1988). In both the American and English versions of Puritanism, we find the roots of contemporary patterns of thought in the perception of human nature as sinful, and in the view that humans, as the purposed end of creation, had within them some portion of divinity that predetermined them for moral improvement and ultimate perfection (Commager 1988).

Pragmatism

Pragmatism is a philosophy according to which the truth of an idea is determined by its results and most philosophical topics are therefore best viewed in terms of their practical uses and successes (Lundin2006; Rescher 2000).In Hofstadter's (1945) explanation, the pragmatist views the environment as something that an individual can manipulate, making the active human effort essential in the bettering of life. Consequently, Pragmatism assumes that men and women can direct their spiritual and political destinies alike. Pragmatism is therefore an individualistic philosophy which denies unconditional reliance on God or on nature and decrees that human beings succeed or fail through their own effort. According to Robert Bellah (1985), an American psychologist, this continues to define the Euro-American individualism which lies at the core of Euro-American culture. For Luedtke (1988), individualism has become a moral obligation bound to American's highest and noblest aspirations for their society and the world.

Social Darwinism

Derived from Charles Darwin's evolutionary theory of Natural Selection, social Darwinism advances the idea that human beings are products of the environment: only the fittest survive to exploit it through adaptation. Falsely held up as scientific, Social Darwinism set out certain presuppositions upon which social theory attempted to link biological ideas about human society to the theory of human character (Hofstadter 1945; Jones 1980). In Richard Hofstadter's account, social Darwinism attempted to reconcile scientific observations with notions of order and design in nature. It therefore popularised the view that the predatory nature of the human species demanded brutal self-assertion; adaptation enabled the human race to develop a new moral constitution fitted to the needs of civilised life.

Idealism

Also linked to Calvinist Puritanism, absolute Idealism conceives of the Absolute as a community of selves bound together in voluntary harmony, the ideal. The self in this sense is a series of signs or ideas of life bound together by a goal-directed plan. Loyalty to the Absolute is not a matter of choice; it comes as a call from above that compels an individual's will (Murphey 1988). Consequently, the absolute takes the form of the universal to which different selves must account. Idealism, says Murphey, further differentiated itself in a philosophy of cognition, advocated by John Dewey, who preached that a finite organism is a creature energetic by nature that seeks goods and satisfaction in its experience. In so doing it is guided by habits of action, conceived as energy channelled into a particular mode of behaviour to achieve desired goods (Murphey 1988). The idealist thus remains a construct of the imagination fixated on *what reality ought to be.*

From their historical formation, it is clear that these Euro-American patterns of thoughts exhibit culturally specific foundations. In the following section, I reveal the influence of these thoughts on theories of cinematic narration in order to challenge assumptions of a universal applicability of such theories in a diversity of cultures.

Cultural Legacy of Euro-American Narration Theories

In setting up a contextual analysis of the cultural legacy of Euro-American theories, I take narration as an intentional act conceived for a purpose; it requires mediation between the narrating act and the realization of its purpose. In Bordwell's terms (1985, p. 53), this amounts to a process whereby the film's plot and style "interact in the course of cuing and channelling the spectator's construction of the story". From this view, the interaction between plot and style becomes primarily motivated by the impetus to maximize the realisation of the narrator's desired end. This, on the one hand, implies an assumption that the realisation of the narrator's end is improbable unless the spectator uncovers the right cues for reconstructing the story. On the other hand, and by that very fact, it calls forth the narrator's assumption of the spectator's perceptual activities and his/her actual faculties of carrying out such activities. In that regard, McKee (1997) observes that a good story must be shaped in a way that satisfies the audience's desire, suggesting that no film can be made to work without an understanding of the reactions and anticipations of the audience. Such assumptions or understanding will call forth what Stanley Williams (2006, p. 93) termed the "audience-filmmaker value alignment", which is realised "when the audience identifies with the characters in the movie; when the filmmaker's and the audience member's moral reality filters are aligned." By 'reality filters', he means a shared acknowledgment of moral absolutes and moral consequences. This indeed presupposes the narrator's construction of a story world that is knowable or identifiable by the audience members.

In this world, the moral values of the characters, their actions and the consequences thereof must be plausible to the audience members. Similarly, Bordwell (1985) observes that the narration process follows certain principles of narrative logic and purposeful manipulation of time and space and uses specific plot tactics to guide the spectator to construct the story in a specific way. According to Bordwell, the success of these tactics is therefore marked by their ability to guide the spectator to gauge the psychological plausibility and compositional necessity of the film's events, taking their real-world perceptual activities as a frame of reference.

If we link the logic of narrative plot to Bordwell's notion of compositional necessity and consider characterisation as essential to the very compositional necessity, and if it is true that film perception entails the viewer's capacity to gauge the psychological plausibility of a film's events, then narration theories ought to take into account the diversity of cultural contexts and their impact on narration principles because of the cultural dynamics involved in meaning formation. In contrast, Euro-American theoretical accounts of characterisation, genre conventions and narrative comprehension appear to homogenise, if not to marginalise, the impact of cultural contexts on narration and its theorising. On the one hand, this is marked by the rarity of culturally comparative studies of cinematic narration. On the other hand, it can be read in the silences about the contextual limitations and cultural specificity of many theoretical positions.

Consequently, the following analysis probes these silences and limitations vis-à-vis their epistemological continuity with a Euro-American cultural legacy; it highlights the extent to which theoretical positions align cinematic narration with specific Euro-American cultural thoughts; it seeks to reveal ideological contradictions in the Euro-American theoretical tradition where theoretical accounts in one cultural context, the Euro-American context, rarely consider the very context as an important factor in the justification of their claims.

On Character and Characterisation

A large number of narration theories propose that film characters play a crucial role in mediating the reconstruction of the narrator's story by the audience members: Syd Field (2003, p. 45) views film characters as "the heart, soul and the nervous system of the story"; through a character's behaviour within a dramatic situation, the narrator may give the audience members insight into their own lives. William Indick (2002), who proposes a character development faithful to the workings of the human mind, holds that narrative films have the ability to affect the way audience members think and feel about themselves and about the world around them. For Dara Marks (2009), a value is placed on every action of the

character such that this value carries the writer's *vision, passion* and *values*. These, she says, are qualities at the heart of a story's theme without which the writing will almost certainly be insignificant, even meaningless. The theme, posits Marks, must be expressed through the character's actions whose effectiveness and quality reside in exposing an authentic view of the viewer's own humanity. Robert McKee (1997) draws a practical distinction between characterisation and character. According to McKee, characterisation is the sum of all the observable qualities of a human being which make him/her unique. On the contrary, character is the person's inner quality which reveals itself by choices made under pressure; it is "a metaphor for human nature" (McKee 1997, p. 375). The function of character, posits McKee, is therefore to bring to the story the qualities of characterisation necessary to convincingly perform the acting out of choices. Consequently, these qualities are best conceived as pliable to the demands of the story. For Bordwell (1985) these qualities are purposefully designed to ensure that characters and their behaviour produce the necessary story data.

The views above presuppose that the qualities and actions of film characters are calculated to maximise the realisation of the narrative's intended impact on the viewer. The actions, or non-actions, of film characters can therefore be perceived as the lens through which the spectator views the film. Accordingly, and because the viewing of the film necessitates perceptual cognitive activities which cannot be divorced from culture, it stands to reason that characters are more likely to be effective in situations when narrative cues for the viewer's interpretation of the character's actions are aligned with the viewer's habitual perceptual processes. Given that the audience members' perceptual processes vary from culture to culture, it becomes essential that characters take as many identities as can be accounted for in different cultures: but this is not the case with Euro-American theories. Be it with regard to single or plural-protagonist narratives, the treatment of characters in Euro-American theories tends to conform to various aspects of Euro-American thoughts, ranging from Puritanism and Social Darwinism to Idealism and Individualism.

Puritan Characterisation

To see the extent to which Puritanism is manifested in theories of cinematic narration, we need not look further than the treatment of mythology in Euro-American theories. Speaking from a culturalist standpoint, Dathorne (1994) equates a myth with the social consciousness of *a people* based on their interpretations of who they are and what they believe they are. It is clear that Dathorne's definition acknowledges cultural specificity, which can be read in the singularity of his reference to 'a people'. If we take into consideration the diversity of people's cultural identities, myths can therefore be understood as specific to the cultural essence of a people. However, in the hands of many Euro-American film theorists and scholars, the definition of 'myth' becomes riddled with undue universality. Primary in this regard is Campbell's hero myth, which remains very much in vogue in contemporary accounts of mythical characterisation. In *Hero with a Thousand Faces,* Joseph Campbell (1972) adopts a universalising tone in describing the characterisation of a hero. He even goes so far as to suggest a structure fit for a hero's archetypal characterisation. In fact, other writers (Indick 2004; Halperin 1996; Seger 1994; Vogler 1992) who evoke Campbell's hero myth also evoke its universalising approach seemingly unaware that many models of mythical characterisation remain faithful to Western mythology. This can be said of Linda Seger's (1994, p. 135) proposition that "myths are the common stories at the root of our universal existence [...] It is a story that connects and speaks to us all." This also applies to Michael Helperin's (1996) suggestion that myths prescribe how human beings handle problems which seem inherent to their human nature. Regarding the cultural context that frames the universal status of myths, many of these writers leave us in the dark. All we are told is to consider myths as 'universal human stories', without elaboration on what. In stark contrast to its universalistic tone, a closer analysis of characterisation in Campbell's hero myth reveals culturally specific Puritan thought patterns which are pervasive in other notions of film characters.

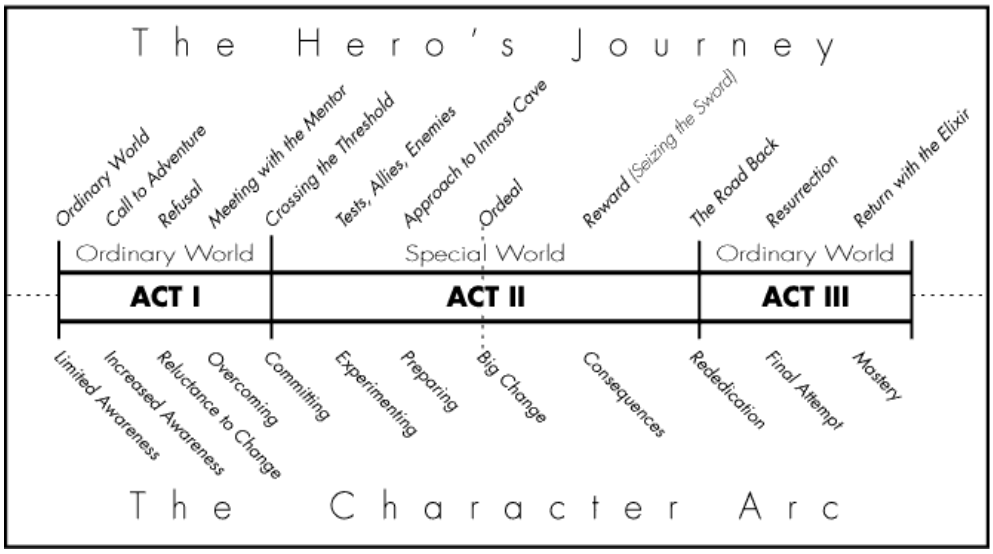


Figure 1: Vogler's Illustration of the hero's journey

As illustrated by Christopher Vogler (1992), Campbell's hero myth can be summarised as a journey that takes a *boy* from his world of the common day into an adventure world of gods and heroes where he is initiated into heroism, a state which can be interpreted as a transcendence of mortality. Following completion of the journey, the hero returns home to become an inspiring mentor. Campbell's hero myth perfectly fits the 'canonical' three-act story structure which is marked by a state of equilibrium followed by disequilibrium which eventually gets resolved, therefore restoring the initial equilibrium. These three states are equivalent to the hero's stages of *departure, initiation and return*. It is worth to note that this story structure implies an orderly world with laws stable enough to maintain the very natural order of the world. Focusing on the implication of this structure and characterisation, my analysis focuses on the major turning points of the twelve stages of the hero's journey, showing the ways in which they reflect Puritan thought.

First is the call to adventure. This stage is marked by an incident that destabilises the hero's inert state of inactivity and launches him into a realm of heroism (Indick 2004). Although the hero might sometimes be reluctant to answer the call, story imperatives dictate that only a particular unrealised hero goes on the journey. Here, there are no other possibilities of who goes on the journey. It is the chosen one. Whether chosen by destiny, chance or even being in

the wrong place at the wrong time, this designation confers onto the initiate hero the valour of divine predestination equivalent to the Puritan exceptional selection by God. Figuratively, the call to adventure almost translates into a call to the hero's journey to reclaim his/her divine inheritance, hi/her immortality.

At some stage of the journey, the initiate hero has to confront and subdue the threshold guardian who blocks the entrance to the road to adventure. From a Puritan viewpoint, this is tantamount to the act of social validation where the initiate hero proves his predestination by demonstrating courage and, especially, innate leadership abilities which allows him to overcome the threshold guardian confirming the hero's extraordinary abilities that distinguish him from the rest as the chosen one. In the course of the journey, another turning point symbolically reiterates the hero's divine predestination to heroism. It is the atonement stage. This stage is marked by the hero's temporary success as a hero; this becomes the fulfilment of his destiny by walking in his *father's* footsteps. This act further elevates the hero beyond everybody else by making his predestination exceptional. It also makes it a hereditary legacy to which only he is entitled from birth: only a *son* of a hero could be selected to go on this journey. This can be seen as elevating the hero's entire progeny so much to imply that, if he was born from a different father, he would not have a hero with whom to atone and therefore not be able to finish the journey. The atonement stage comes before, and logically sets up, the stage where the hero undergoes his direst ordeal and suffers his highest defeat.

Also referred to as the apotheosis (Indick 2002), this stage actualises the Euro-American Puritan view that humans have within them some portion of divinity that predetermined humans for moral improvement and ultimate perfection. At this stage, the hero reclaims his divinity which the hero demonstrates by surviving a near-death experience. Indick (2006, p. 153) describes this experience as "symbolic death and spiritual rebirth". This event is not imposed on the hero. He chooses to face death. In Indick's view, the willingness and readiness to embrace death serve to highlight the hero's sincere and real will to sacrifice himself in order to finish the journey. The embracing of death, the will to sacrifice and the

rebirth can be interpreted as an interpellation of the hero to get in touch with his innate divinity. After surviving this ordeal, the hero goes on to successfully complete his journey; he reaches his goal and returns home. However, at the stage of crossing the return threshold back into the mortal world, the act of shedding his divinity seals the puritan's affectations with the subliminally messianic connotation of the presence of the divine ('God is with us'), in the sense that, having been endowed with divine powers through the journey, the hero needs to return to the mortal world as a mortal. This subliminally re-affirms the presence of those divinely selected among the world of depraved mortals. And we know that, when need be, we have a hero who can rise to the occasion and save the world – a hero Dara Marks (2009) ironically defines as the righter of wrongs, defender of the weak, champion of the oppressed, just an all-round good guy who makes women swoon and men tremble.

Two of the cases that critique the hero myth illuminate other aspects that reveal its Puritan legacy. In the first, Dara Marks blames contemporary theories and their corollary stories for depicting a sanitised archetypal hero; that is, they have lost track of the element on the basis of which the original myth was based. For Marks, the greatest symbol of the hero in Western culture is the character of Hercules found in Roman and Greek mythology. In Marks's account of the actual myth, Hercules was a much darker, insufferable man who once even murdered his own children. Marks's critique challenges modern interpretations of this archetypal hero story for obscuring Hercules' psychotic temper tantrum that forced him into penance. She therefore posits that without the need for atonement in modern interpretations of the hero myth, the trials and labours of the hero become exceptional and extraordinary exploits rather than the reasonable cost of redemption (Marks 2009). The view of an exceptional/extraordinary hero fits the Puritan notion of divine pre-ordinance in that it presupposes the hero's uniqueness in relation to other characters in the story. Further, by presenting the hero's exploits as far removed from the reach of other characters, this view invokes some innate natural endowment of the hero and, in the Puritan sense of the word, confers to the hero "the chosen-one" status.

The second vocal critique of the hero myth comes from Neil D. Hicks (2002). Clearly directed at Campbell's mono-myth, Hicks's critique illuminates other aspects of Euro-American cultural legacy inherent in the hero myth. In Hicks' view, Campbell's version of the hero myth advocates an *every-culture* allegory which gives a wrong impression that all stories in all cultures follow the same pattern. He also finds Campbell's 'every-culture' structure inconvenient in the sense that it implies that the hero is preordained to complete the journey of the story. Against that, Hicks argues that we need to look not so much at the step-by-step structural outline of a tale. He suggests that we rather look at a story's values that impact the spirit of a particular society. He writes: "Whether gathered around the communal fire pit or seated in darkened theatre, society collects to hear the mythmaker impart stability to the human experience and, over these allegorical yarns, to reaffirm the values, attitudes, beliefs, histories, assets, and institutions that make up our *culture*."(Hicks 2002, p. 37)

In highlighting Campbell's assumption that the hero is preordained to complete the journey of the story, Hicks' critique draws our attention to the pre-ordinance characteristic of Puritan thought: if the hero is preordained to successfully finish the journey, then s/he must have *within* him/her, the ability to do so. The hero's journey thus becomes merely a means to bring about the expression of the hero's natural, untested prowess.

To better understand Hicks's critique of Campbell's Monomyth, we need to look at Ken Dancyger and Jeff Rush's (2007) critique of the restorative three-act structure. Derived from the play developed by the French playwright Eugene Scribe in 1820, the restorative three-act structure is the modern mainstream variant of the Aristotelian three-act structure, marked by a compulsory return to complete order. Similar to the archetypal hero story of the Hercules myth as defined by Dara Marks, restorative stories depict an evil character who transgresses the rules of society but also, through the demands of the story, undergoes complete transformation and emerges as a redeemed hero at the end. As is the case with Campbell's hero myth, the restorative three-act structure espouses the view of a neutral form; it presupposes a single form into which any story from any culture, at any time and in any

space, can fit perfectly. Not surprisingly, though, the very view is advanced regardless of the diversity of cultures; it is advanced in blatant disregard of cultural differences and their corollary in the production of cinematic texts, especially the assumptions that guide decisions about characterisation.

At the same time, in their very generalising approach, we can deduce ample evidence of the Euro-American cultural legacy to which Dancyger and Rush's critique cues us. Questioning the formal neutrality of the restorative three-act structure, Dancyger and Rush ask whether there can be such a thing as a neutral form, one in which we can pour any story. For Dancyger and Rush, there can be no such a form, since form is inextricably linked to content and, because the choice of form is a creative decision, there can be no single way of telling a story, for nothing is neutral. They also maintain that "no matter how we disguise it, a story with a clear violation followed by recognition and redemption seems like a moral tale, a reaffirmation of pre-existing, commonly understood ethics." (Dancyger & Rush 2007, p. 30)

From Dancyger and Rush's cue, one can point out the link between the restorative structure and the Puritan view that humans have within them some portion of divinity that has predetermined them for moral improvement and ultimate perfection. We can trace this view from the fact that the character's vicious side visible in the story has to be abolished, and his/her virtuous side, his/her perfect divine side, restored. This connotes two things: that (1) apparent viciousness aside, the character is virtuous by heart and that (2) s/he has have within him/her the ability to reclaim this lost virtue, which can be shown to symbolise the character's preordained divinity. In most mainstream Hollywood cases of these stories, the character's vicious side, their fatal flaw, is frequently attributed to social conditioning (see Halperin 1996; Indick 2002; Field 2003; Marks 2009), but occasions where the character's virtue is linked to society are few and far between. Even in the case of Campbell's hero myth, where the mentor character helps the protagonist discover and internalise his/her heroism, the character's divine pre-ordinance remains applicable.

Divine pre-ordinance is not the only manifestation of Puritan thought in accounts of characterisation in Euro-American theories: other aspects can be found in further accounts of cinematic characterisation. To demonstrate these aspects, I wish to align my analysis with Norman Friedman's (1975) proposition that a plausible analysis is one in which the analyst regards the work as a thing in itself, having its aim within itself and displaying a distinguishable structure of relationships among its parts as they are arranged to achieve the end in view. Hence, my analysis focuses on distinguishable structures of relationships between theoretical positions and Puritan thought patterns. One such thought pattern is the view that social validation of a person as a saint depends upon acceptance by his/her peers. This can be seen in the importance of the antagonist in classical Hollywood stories.

Beyond the Western traditional definition of the antagonist as the character who opposes the protagonist and blocks achievement of the goal of the plot, the antagonist is said to assume other crucial functions: s/he represents a morally different value (Hicks 2002); s/he is the physical manifestations of the internal conflict that is destroying the protagonist; s/he creates an environment in which transformational change for the protagonist is necessary and relevant (Marks 2009); s/he is the negative force that overwhelms the protagonist's will and desire but cause a protagonist to become a fully realised, multidimensional, and deeply empathetic character (McKee 1997). The antagonist affirms the protagonist's heroism (Dancyger& Rush 2007). All these functions can be collapsed into one role: to legitimize the protagonist's transcendence of the story and other characters in the story. In other words, without the antagonist of the sort presented in many of these accounts, we would have no measure of the protagonist's heroism. Hence, the role of the antagonist becomes very relevant to the Puritan concept of social validation according to which a person's salvation is subject to its confirmation by others.

Michael Ryan and Douglas Kellner's (2002) view on militarism is worth summoning in this regard. Defining American militarism as an ideology that valorises military solutions to political problems, Ryan and Kellner see American militarism as symptomatic of a collective neurosis requiring the reconstruction of social structures that promote alienated aggression

such as depicted in the *Rambo* films. In the figure of Rambo, Ryan and Kellner reveal elements of American militarism which symbolise patriarchal pathology based on a threatened and defensive capitalism. In the case of Rambo, they link that pathology to the brutality of a war veteran, who is depicted mythically as a super-killer, enlisted to rescue missing POWs in Vietnam. What is important to this analysis is the relation they highlight between the aggression and the isolation of the Rambo character. For Ryan and Kellner, Rambo's isolation expresses the patriarchal insistence that the male feel singular, to separate from dependence on initial caretakers. Rambo's aggression therefore becomes necessary as a mechanism to separate him from affectionate ties in order to ascertain his male independence.

However, they observe, confirmation of manhood signals a broader need for a feeling of self-worth of a sort that can *only be provided by others*. In this case, Rambo's self-worth can only be confirmed by the number of Vietnamese fighters who succumb to his aggression and by the audience members who adulate Rambo's exploits. This does not only revert to the Puritan view of divine pre-ordinance. It also, and very vocally so, conforms to the Puritan view of social validation. For without the antagonism of the Vietnamese fighters to confront and, of course, succumb to Rambo, neither Rambo nor the audience members will have any ground on which to assess Rambo's self-worth. The character of Rambo therefore becomes a typical example of the extent to which the treatment of the antagonist legitimizes the protagonist's valour. Such a treatment of the antagonist can also be shown to affirm man's depravity, whereby the antagonist, regardless of actions, personal strength or value system, by virtue of transgressing the social order, is doomed with no chance of salvation.

Social Darwinism and Characterisation

As much as it symbolises Puritanism, the exceptional importance accorded to the single protagonist in Euro-American theories has all the hallmarks of social Darwinism. Norman Friedman (1975) defines the protagonist as the character upon whom the causes of the action fall, from whom its consequences flow, and without whom the structure of the action will

cease to function. Similarly, Dara Marks (2009) defines the protagonist as the character primarily affected by the action and conflict of the plot: the character around whom the primary goals of the plot are formed. For Robert McKee (1997), the protagonist must have the will and capacity to pursue his/her desire to the end of the line, to the human limit established by setting and genre.

These definitions and descriptions evoke the classical narrative design and therefore accord the protagonist a privileged status in comparison to other characters in the story. By virtue of being the main causal agent of the action, the protagonist possesses certain attributes to bear the consequences of his/her actions. In story terms, this involves standing up to, and subduing, any forces of antagonism that stand in the protagonist's way. Dancyger (2001, p. 85) calls this "the voice of possibility over adversity". Through the protagonist's negotiation of whatever adversity s/he faces in the story, more especially his/her outmanoeuvring insurmountable obstacles to attain a certain goal, we receive the impression of the protagonist's abilities. However, by subordinating all forces of antagonism and the abilities of other characters to that of the protagonist's, this narrative structure confers on the protagonist a status tantamount to that of the socially selected, in the social Darwinist sense. In the case of the action adventure, for example, the protagonist exhibits extraordinary physical abilities which are either inborn or acquired through self-conditioning. Even in the case of acquired characteristics, the protagonist is presented as having extraordinary ability or discipline to acquire skills that are available to, but unattainable by, any other character. In this context, the narrative confers on the protagonist exceptional conflict survival qualities. The world of the story thus presented becomes subliminally characteristic of social Darwinism: it reflects the ever-changing environment in which only the fittest, the protagonist in our case, survive to exploit it.

Related to the privileged status of the protagonist, the concept of secondary characters, especially the views about their functions, further affirms the protagonist's symbolic status as *the* socially selected. Linda Seger (1994) identifies four distinct functions that can be assumed by secondary characters: supporting, dimensional, thematic and mass-and-weight

characters. While supporting characters can assume roles such as the catalyst, the confidante or the mentor; dimensional characters serve as contrast to the main character, therefore helping to illuminate other dimensions of the main character. The function thematic characters is to ensure that the theme of the story is not misrepresented or misinterpreted, and the function of the mass-and-weight character is to demonstrate the prestige, power or stature of the main character. For Dancyger and Rush (2004), the secondary characters are played against the traditional main character in order to demonstrate that only the main character can surmount the obstacles arising in the story. According to McKee (1997), the role of secondary characters is to help delineate the protagonist's complex nature by means of his/her relationships with the protagonist. In essence, declares McKee (1997, p. 379), "the protagonist creates the rest of the cast".

Such tendencies, including stratifying characters into primary and secondary or into passive and active characters, can be interpreted as conforming to the social Darwinist notion of social selection by relying on the subordination of secondary characters to affirm the protagonist as not only the fittest, the socially selected, but also as the most desirable. This is also found in theoretical positions that clearly privilege active rather than passive characters and a single protagonist rather than multiple protagonists. Because of their salient inclination towards individualism, I choose to explore these positions in the section that follows.

Pragmatic characterisation

Be it in single or plural-protagonist narratives, Euro-American theories of characterisation show arbitrary bias towards individualism of the pragmatic type. Indeed, many writers discuss characters with very little to no mention of multiple protagonists (Williams 2006, Dancyger & Jeff Rush 2007; Indick 2002; Halperin 1996). Even those who do so continue to perpetuate bias towards individualism. Take, for example, McKee's (1997) stipulation that, to form a plural protagonist, all the individuals in the group must share the same desire so much that, in the struggle to achieve this desire, if one character succeeds, all benefit. For Marks (2009), two or more characters will share the role of the protagonist if, and only if,

they can be collapsed into "a single entity even though that entity is expressed with multiple characters" (p. 59). In Marks' and McKee's positions, we can read individualism seeking to unify individuals with different points of view, attitudes and motivation into a singular unit: the protagonist – a predicament that pervades Euro-American theories, whether they refer to single or multiple-protagonist stories.

A case in point would be McKee's position on narrative structure. McKee defends the single-protagonist narrative as pre-eminently superior to other narratives because of its classical design, which he describes as timeless, transcultural and fundamental to every society. In his words, the single-protagonist narrative is

> A story built around an active protagonist who struggles against primarily external forces of antagonism to pursue his or her desire, through continuous time, within a consistent and causally connected fictional reality, to a closed ending of absolute irreversible change. (McKee 1985, p.45)

He adds that the classical design displays the temporal, spatial and causal patterns of human perception. He sees it as a model of memory by virtue of its similarity to the way people shape their memories, and a model of anticipation because of its similarity with the way people mould their fantasies. He states:

> Most human beings believe that life brings closed experiences of absolute, irreversible changes; that their greatest sources of conflict are external to themselves; that they are the single, active protagonists of their existence; that their existence operates through continuous time within a consistent, causally connected reality. The classical design is a mirror of the human mind (McKee 1985, p.45).

He goes on to say that the classical design is not a Western view of the world, that it is neither Western nor Eastern; ancient nor modern; but human. If he is right, especially if the classical design is not a Western view of the world and his justification thereof is to stand, how else can we justify its encompassing predominantly Euro-American cultural values? I am

referring to the concept of an "active protagonist" who is defined as an individual with the capacity to manipulate the environment, epitomising another pragmatist view of non-reliance on God or nature. Outside the Puritan stance of divine pre-ordinance, how else can we justify the view of a causally connected fictional reality which accords the main causal influence to the active protagonist in the unfolding of the plot events, elevating him/her to the status of a creator by virtue of his/her power to force a *closed ending of absolute irreversible change*? Similar questions can also be asked about further correlation between the Euro-American cultural legacy and Euro-American genre theories.

On the Narrative Structure of Genre Films

As is the case with characterisation, the structure of genre films conforms to a vast number of formal and stylistic conventions. Some of these conventions are so entrenched in genre theory and criticism that we encounter cases of genre criticism that evoke, to the extent of affirming, certain conventions without considering any cultural context. Such is the case of the popular view that genre exists as a sort of an implicit contract between the filmmaker and the audience (Schatz 1991). The contractual aspect of genre is thus taken as tacitly regulating the system of production, distribution and consumption of genre films (Grant 2003) and/or providing fertile grounds for negotiating a relation between the expectations of a given audience and a specific production system (Altman 1984). As a result, the audience will view each film forearmed with a complex set of anticipations learned through previous film viewing experiences (McKee 1997). To the same conclusion, Neale (2003) adds that these expectations and the knowledge they entail are public in status, that is, they involve perceptual processes derived from experience of existing works. Consequently, the notion of genre as an implicit contract amounts to an epistemology of theorizing about the viewer's cognitive activity in comprehending genre films. It also provides the same epistemological ground for theorizing about design traditions of the narration process in genre films and about the socio-cultural functions of genre films. Most of these theories, however, appear to be riddled with a universalising pattern of thinking which amounts to Eurocentrism,

especially given their remarkable allegiance to patterns of thoughts specifically characteristic of Euro-American culture.

Idealism and Genre

In discussing the self-reflexive musical, where reflexivity refers to a critical category of multiple diegesis that depicts a film within a film or a play within a play (Wollen 1972; Feuer 1977), Jane Feuer observes that MGM self-reflexive musicals are conservative texts in every sense. Feuer's view is often associated with politically radical films that aim to deconstruct the so-called classical narrative cinema, but in the MGM musical, reflexivity perpetuates, instead of deconstructing, the codes of the musical genre. Of these codes, she singles out three conventions which she refers to as traditional "myths" of the musical genre.

The first is the myth of integration. In genre theory, this is a structural category according to which the fulfilment of a character's desire is interlinked with the extent to which the character's situation accords with the music and/or the singing in the musical film (Neale 2002; Feuer 1977; Mueller 1984). While some theorists vaguely discuss integration in the sense of stylistic and aesthetic coherence (Neale 2002), Feuer describes integration in terms of the relation between personal fulfilment and the realisation of the musical number. Using *The Band Wagon* (Vincente Minnelli; USA 1953) as an example, Feuer chronicles the main character's transformation from isolation to the joy of being part of the group. She therefore observes that:

> The myth of integration suggests that the achievement of personal fulfilment goes hand in hand with the enjoyment of musical entertainment [such that] successful performances are intimately bound up with success in love, with the integration of the individual within a community, and even with the merger of high art and popular art. (Feuer 1977, p. 463)

Feuer's view, then, is that such integration offers a vision of musical performance originating in folk musical, generating a live and cooperative spirit that includes everyone in its grasp and can conquer all obstacles. This view echoes Altman's (1981, cited in Neale 2000)

definition of the folk musical in which integrating two disparate individuals into a single couple heralds the entire group's communion with each other.

The second myth of the self-reflexive musical drama identified by Feuer is the spontaneity myth. For Feuer, spontaneity in the self-reflexive musical suggests that music, dance and singing can no longer be defined as the realm of professionals only: any performance in those categories permeates the lives of non-professional singers and dancers. It also suggests that entertainment can break down the barriers between entertainment and art, that the musical is not an artificial construct but natural. Therefore, she points out that the spontaneity myth operates to make musical performance, which is part of culture, appear to be part of nature.

Continuous with this myth is the "audience myth'. According to Feuer, the audience myth is premised on the proposition that in a successful performance, the performer is sensitive to the needs of the diegetic audience and gives them a sense of participation. Hence, the use of theatrical audiences in films provides a point of identification for film audiences by making the audience in the film express the adulation which the musical seeks to arouse from the film's audience. She proceeds to observe that this operates to confirm the ritualistic characteristic of the musical: the musical's propensity to articulate and reaffirm the place that entertainment occupies in its audiences' psychic lives.

Although Feuer's perspective sheds some light on the ritualistic aspect of the self-reflexive musical, and although it remains contextually limited to Hollywood, it unfortunately reflects an exclusionist approach in the lack of reference to other reflexive musicals that are not from Hollywood. Feuer sets up to reveal but ends up silencing the cultural voices inherent in her integration myth. With the exception of declaring that the musical film *Dames* (Ray Enright; USA 1934) resolves a narrative in which forces of Puritanism do battle with the forces of entertainment, Feuer turns a blind eye to the Western cultural thoughts to which she cues us. On Feuer's cue of the musical as a genre that generates a live and cooperative spirit that includes everyone in its grasp and that can conquer all obstacles, we can read a legacy of Idealism: for only in an idealist framework can we phantom a cooperative spirit that can

conquer all obstacles. Only in this framework can we fancy the certainty of positive integrative forces; only in an idealist framework can we presume the plausibility of a hypothetical link between success in entertainment and personal fulfilment.

Although integration might seem antithetical to pragmatist individualism, this is far from the case. First, the musical drama's insistence on the narrative framework reverts to the very structural antecedents of the classical design. Let us take the idea of an individual being integrated into the group which acquires its status from its distinctive identifying features, which could include the group's way of doing things, the style of their performance or their specific world view. When a person is integrated into a group, they do not just espouse the group's feature but ascertain their own individuality as being aligned with that of the group.

Feuer's "spontaneity myth" also reveals a legacy of Idealism since spontaneity in the self-reflexive musical is not only limited to the characters who play the role of performers but encompasses the spontaneity of passers-by and the putative audience in the film. In this sense, spontaneity confers on the inhabitants of the world of the musical an extraordinary talent to burst into song and dance and do it in unprecedented harmony. Such spontaneity caters to a utopian view of a world where life problems can be joyfully dealt with in community, where everyone habitually, if not naturally, bursts into song and dance. This can be read in Neale's (2000) view that musicals motivate singing and dancing as diegetic action set against a narrative world otherwise filled with conflict, where music and dance serve as means of escaping, transcending or changing the everyday world. It can also be read in Altman's (1981) statement that musicals offer aesthetically *utopian* solutions to real social needs and contradictions.

We can also find manifestations of Idealism in theories of the science fiction genre. Although science fiction has generated comparatively few theoretical studies as compared to genres such the gangster or the musical film, an analysis of the few available accounts reveals an idealist legacy. Let us consider Dancyger and Rush's (2007) view that the threat in science fiction serves as a reminder that the inhabitants of Earth do not have enough respect for the

environment, for science, or for each other; if this tendency persists, Earth will destroy itself. Conversely, Earth will be preserved if its inhabitants show enough respect for the environment, for science and for each other. In this view, we have connotations of a stable environment, incapable of threatening humans unless humans interfere with it. This is indeed a utopian view of the world which seeks to present nature as benevolent and pliable to a certain extent. It is idealist in depicting humans, in the form of the protagonist, as capable of restoring nature to its benevolent, stable and conflict-ridden state. This is a perspective that can also be read in studies of the melodrama genre.

Recent studies of the melodrama tend to look at it not only as a genre but as a sensibility, distinguished by its own mode of address and employing specific conventions and rhetorical strategies to generate identification and emotional engagement with the audience (Gledhill, cited in Mercer and Shingler 2004). For Mercer and Shingler, the melodrama adopts an aesthetic of muteness to symbolize the limitations of conventions of language and representation in conjunction with an excess in mise-en-scene; it attempts to speak the unspeakable and represent the un-representable. A common view in this regard is that the melodrama's mode of address puts heavy reliance on the protagonist's undeserved misfortune to elicit pity in the audience by depicting its central characters as powerless, strong willed and virtuous (Neale 2002 , Mercer & Shingler 2004; Dancyger & Rush 2007). This organises a narrative trajectory where the central character transgresses a rigid power structure and risks their own existence motivated by the belief that life must and can be improved (Dancyger & Rush 2007). Music and the omni-communicativeness of the narration serve to highlight the character's emotional suffering inflicted by circumstances and chores. In Bordwell's view (1985), this serves to amplify sincere appeals to the audience so as to maximize concern about what will happen next. For Noel Carroll (1999), the melodrama highlights the character's propensity for self-sacrifice in spite of their powerlessness amidst adversity so that pity comes in tandem with admiration.

The melodrama's insistence on eliciting strong emotions from the audience can be seen to epitomise the idealist view of the human being as a creature energetic by nature who seeks

good and satisfaction from experience. This can be read in the protagonist's resolve to undergo suffering not of their own making and overcome socially-sanctioned limitations which prevent them from using available power structures to act on their own behalf. It can be seen in the main character's transcending powerlessness to resolve the central conflict in the narrative. Applied to contradictory social and political values, the melodrama conspires to advance a rather utopian idealist ethos, popularising the idea of a putative perfect world, thereby denying the very reality of rigid, tragic social structures. In this view, the narration can be viewed as an instance of interpellation of the audience to distance themselves from tragic social structures while beckoning them to imagine a reality without such a tragedy. This narrative tactic is also frequently employed in the biographical film.

As in the melodrama, the protagonist of the biographical film is dissatisfied by the social status quo. His/her conviction is that life can be better (Dancyger & Rush 2007; Neale 2002). Obviously, the optimism of the melodrama and biopic protagonists undermines an equally apparent reality that life can be worse. From an idealistic bias, both the melodrama and biographical films chronicle the events that confirm the optimistic view that life can be better in spite of the prevalence of tragic social structures. Even if we can imagine a biographical film or a melodrama that depicts a character who fails, the very idea of failure can mean the character is self-deceived in attempting to change a perfect social system or that their conviction in an imagined but unattainable perfect social system is delusional. Either way, the narration epitomises the idealist search for a putative perfect existence – a construct of the imagination fixated on what reality ought to be.

Puritanism and Genre

In Feuer's (1977) audience myth of the musical film, in its expression of the adulation which the musical seeks to arouse from the film's audience, we can read the Puritan notion of 'social validation'. The adulation of the audience in the film, even if it seeks to elicit identification from the audience of the musical film, can be construed as a validation of a good performance. It implies an audience that knows, or has the taste for, what makes a good

performance. The adulation of audience serves therefore to validate the quality of performance and most importantly, the performer's spontaneity, integrating both the performers and the audience into a unified world of common taste.

Puritan thoughts can also be found undergirding narration in other genres. In Mitchell's (1976) account of gangster film genre, the taint and corruption which pervade the American gangster film with inevitable consequences for the gangster character (his death) are equivalent to the Puritan view that in Adam's fall, we sinned all; we are all guilty and nothing alters. He therefore observes that even if the law may serve as the instrument of the gangster's demise, its cause is that the gangster has sinned. The gangster's death can also be interpreted as revealing the Puritan view that people were conceived and born in sin, hopelessly depraved and without any hope of redemption except for those few who God elected to save. In this sense, the gangster's demise can be perceived as validating the depravity of humans: regardless of the gangster's drive for and attainment of success, the order of God's selection is inescapable: the gangster is not selected for salvation and in consequence is not predestined for success; unable to change God's order, the gangster must die in fulfilment of the very same order.

Regarding science fiction, we find the legacy of Puritanism in its narrative trajectory. Ken Dancyger and Jeff Rush (2007) describe the science fiction film as a tale where an ecological catastrophe, a technological accident, or the unwelcome meeting of two worlds serve to remind the audience that the inhabitants of Earth do not have enough respect for the environment, for science, or for each other. If this tendency persists, Earth will destroy itself. According to Dancyger and Rush, the seminal event of science fiction presents a specific threat to the natural order such that failure of the protagonist to thwart the threat will jeopardise the existence not only of the protagonist but of the whole universe. For that matter, they point out that the antagonist is given so great a scale to remind the protagonist of his/her mortality and of how very human s/he is. Dancyger and Rush, then go on to propose that the science fiction film celebrates past moral victories while warning humans to renew their moral fervour or there will be no future. Regarding the setting in the science fiction film,

Dancyger and Rush highlight how the environment (Earth or space) is presented to remind people of their place in the natural order.

The narration in science fiction films that present the threat to the universe as a consequence of human actions push the Puritan agenda by sanctifying nature, ridding it of the potential to inflict such threat. This, in return, upholds the Puritan worldview according to which God is the only true efficient cause in the universe. Consequently, human and natural events are interpreted in terms of God's will (Edward, cited in Murphy 1988). It should be noted that science fiction does not identify God as the source of the threat in the film. Because it is not God's will, the threat takes the form of a sin for which humans stand to be punished by impending oblivion. This then translates into God's way of warning humans against their interference with the natural order, where the protagonist symbolizes the guardian of the moral, social and natural order as instituted by God, eventually justifying the demise of the agent of this interference.

On Spectatorship

In "Film, Emotion and Genre", Noel Carroll (2006) proposes a hypothesis which explicitly requires taking the spectators' cultural backgrounds into account in order to adequately assess their emotional responses to the narrative film. According to Carroll's hypothesis, to analyse the way in which a film arouses an emotional response from the viewers, we need firstly to determine the way in which the film is criterially refocused: we need to determine the pattern of salience given to certain cognitive criteria appropriate and sufficient for specific emotions. For example, for the emotion of fear, the appropriate criterion is cognition of possible harm; for anger, inflicted wrong; for pity, undeserved suffered misfortune. Second, he suggests reviewing the way in which filmic elements are patterned to give prominence to depictions or descriptions that elicit the criteria for certain emotions. Following that, it is necessary to determine the features of the film designed to generate "pro attitudes" in viewers, along with determining what those attitudes are. That, he says, is what explaining the emotional state of the audience amounts to.

Interestingly, the analyst does not ascribe emotions to some other spectators; the analyst is the spectator whose own emotions s/he seeks to explain. As a challenge to the practicability of his hypothesis, Carroll identifies the discrepancy in cultural backgrounds because:

> Undoubtedly, often we are watching films that are remote from us in time and place; we will not be able to depend on our emotional responses to a film because we do not have the appropriate cultural background. This is exactly where film history and the ethnographic study of film have an indispensable role to play [that is], to supply us with the background necessary to make the emotive address of films from other cultures and other periods in our own culture emotionally accessible to us (Carroll 2006; p 225).

Reproaching dominant critical paradigms, Melissa Thackway (2003) similarly suggests that placing culturally unfamiliar works in their own context helps to understand their various stylistic and thematic influences, their director's creative agendas, and the role film plays in a given context. Applying Carroll's and Thackway's observations to many Euro-American theories of spectatorship, we can ask: how possible is it for a theory of film *comprehension* which is conceived in, and based on films from, one cultural context to be relevant to spectators from a remote cultural background? More pertinently, the question would be: how could theories that appear continuous with particular cultural thoughts be of relevance to cinematic productions in other cultures? These and other questions guide my analysis of theories of spectatorship. In the following pages, the focus is on challenging the validity of implied universality, or aspirations thereto, found in instances of cognitive theories of narrative comprehension in spite of their evident conformity to aspects of Euro-American cultural thoughts.

Puritanism and Narrative Comprehension

In his introduction to *Narration and Film*, David Bordwell (1985) presents three ways of looking at narrative storytelling: as representation, as structure and as process. In the case of representation, the narrative is considered in relation to the story's world, its portrayal of some reality or its broader meanings. As a structure, he speaks of a particular way of combining the parts in order to make the whole. The study of narrative as a process is

premised on his idea of narration as an activity of selecting, arranging and rendering story material in order to achieve specific time-bound effects on the perceiver. It is this third aspect, the process, which is the central concern of his book which, he states, draws upon the works of Russian formalist critics of the 1920s. He justifies the choice of the formalist approach on the ground that formalist theories encourage the breaking of arbitrary boundaries between theory, history and criticism. For Bordwell, this is crucial in the sense that it introduces a vigorous, if variegated and complete, approach to studying the work in multiple contexts.

One would therefore expect Bordwell's work to be complete, variegated or, at the least, multi-contextual. His work can be seen as variegated in the sense that it sweeps across four historical modes of narration (classical Hollywood, art cinema, Soviet materialism and parametric), encompassing film form and style and the ways in which they interact to guide the viewer's activity. It shows enough rigour as far as verifying his theoretical abstractions is concerned. In fact, Bordwell's comparison of different narration strategies in different historical modes of narration is insightful. For example, he compares how different modes of narration treat the film technique as a vehicle for the plot to transmit the story information for the viewer's perception of the film. In the case of classical narration, he observes that every instantiation of film technique is subordinate to the character's transmission of story information such that bodies and faces become the focal points of attention (Bordwell 1985). With regard to parametric narration, he observes that style can completely dominate the plot, or it may be seen as equal in importance to the plot, or a combination of both. With regard to Soviet materialism, he notes that characters become prototypes of whole classes, milieux or historical epochs, allowing the narration to be overt and stylistically embroidered through a propensity of frontality of body, face and eyes – an abashedly direct address to the camera. He employs the same methodology in comparing other principles of narration such as temporal ordering, retardation, causal links and levels of knowledge.

At face value, Bordwell's work appears to reflect variegated viewpoints. Closer analysis, however, reveals the legacy of Puritanism which recognises the ultimate authority of reason

and an allegiance to conventional principles (Commager 1950) to the detriment of meaningful contexts. Bordwell clearly bases his assumptions on *his* findings which he obviously deems reasonable (to him); he then selects certain conventional principles of narration whose presence or absence he seeks to establish in selected modes of narration. In so doing, he affirms his allegiance to these principles; by seeking them in different modes, he aligns the reader to infer variegation. If my hypothesis is valid, we must question Bordwell's work for clearly ignoring important contexts of the work and for giving the impression of homogeneity of narrative intentions. Such homogeneity risks undermining the representational dimension of narration and, as a result, stands to obscure the relations between the narrative and the story's world or its broader meanings.

Cognitive Theories and the Idealised Spectator

To highlight the legacy of Idealism in theories of narrative comprehension, it is important to recall McKee's (1985) justification of the eminence of the 'arch plot', especially the view that most people believe that life brings closed experiences of absolute, irreversible changes. In the classical sense, this refers to experiences that are understandable but which also resolve all the issues raised within the film. For Jill Nelmes (2003), this amounts to the presentation of a preferred reality. For Peter Wollen (1972), it serves to produce pleasurable fictions, where the contradictions of every-day life are magically resolved. In my reality, however, this would amount to an *idealised* utopian view of the world. McKee's view that most humans believe themselves to be the active protagonists of their existence can be shown to reflect the idealist presupposition of an orderly life defined by orderly actions capable of achieving a predetermined goal. The very same presuppositions can inform McKee's assumption of a universal belief in a consistent, causally connected reality. Arguably McKee's use of the word 'believe' negates his whole argument; even if most people believed that life brings closed experiences of absolute, irreversible changes, the mere state of *believing* does not necessarily translate our beliefs into practical outcomes. If I am right, then McKee's description idealises most film spectators; so do most Euro-American cognitive

theories of film perception by overlooking how cultural and social factors influence perception and rationality, presenting them as universal cognitive processes.

Cognitive theories of spectatorship placate the view of an active spectator, a hypothetical entity who processes films using psychological faculties and draws upon schemata acquired from the "real world". (Prince 1996; Gaut 2006; Coplan 2009; Bordwell 2010; Plantinga 2011; Smith 1995). This view of the spectator is congruent with the idealist notion that people are guided by habits of action amounting to energy channelled into a particular mode of behaviour to achieve desired goods. In the cognitive tradition, this can be read in the implications of a *hypothetical* spectator who actively reconstructs the story using real-world schemes of perception. Through concepts such as familiarity, identification, empathy, suture and emotional engagement, cognitive theories equate a hypothetical, imaginary spectator's response to that of actual spectators; they thus idealise the spectator as well as the whole process of film comprehension by underplaying the heterogeneity of real-world experiences.

The most manifest affectations of Idealism in cognitive theories can be read in tendencies to homogenize human experiences. Consider Murray Smith's (1995) notion of allegiance. For Smith, allegiance is something that pertains to the moral evaluation of the character by the spectator; it depends upon the spectator having the necessary qualities to afford reliable access to the character's state of mind; it follows understanding the context of the characters' actions on the basis of which the spectator morally evaluates the character. From this evaluation, the spectator goes on to adopt preferences with regard to characters, responding sympathetically rather than empathetically to the traits and emotions of the character in the context of the narrative situation. To provide such a response, Smith posits that the perceiver must first understand the narrative situation, including the interests, traits and states of the characters. In Smith's account of allegiance, especially the assertion that it relies on the moral evaluation of the character based on understanding the narrative situation, we can deduce implications of a universally understandable story context. These implications overlook the cultural context of the spectator. They seem aligned with assumptions of a singular, accessible meaning of the film narrative, ignoring the plurality of background experiences in

the audience members. In this ignorance, we can read the impetus to idealise the whole process of film comprehension by underplaying the heterogeneity of real-world experiences. Without negating this heterogeneity, cognitive theories appear inclined to homogenize experiences of film viewing by disregarding the various contexts of reality that not only give birth to narration, but also govern the very idea of understanding.

The tendency to homogenize human experiences of narration is indeed conspicuous in many more theoretical accounts: Berys Gaut (2006) proposes that the spectator's emotional response to films depends on the viewer's imagining being in the character's situation. He suggests that the spectator's imaginings are shaped by the demands of the context. Amy Coplan (2009) presents a similar thesis, suggesting that the spectator's responses draw upon empathy or simulation to gain a unique kind of experiential understanding of characters. Such an understanding, states Coplan, provides a representation of another person's subjective experience, a representation of what it is like to be another person. Steven Prince (1996) argues that we conceptualize film-viewing processes in terms of levels of information processing and emotional response. Consequently, he submits, the viewer easily comprehends cinematic images by rationally processing narrative features that facilitate attentiveness because of their similarities to the viewer's extra-filmic life experience.

Carl Plantinga (2009) suggests that spectators respond to a narrative film by mimicking real-world responses. That, in Plantinga's view, lends realism to responses elicited by a narrative film. Elsewhere, Plantinga (2011) posits that the study of spectatorship cannot proceed without a model of the hypothetical spectator – a spectator capable of executing operations necessary for the perception of the film. For Bordwell (1985), spectators are hypothetical and 'real' for possessing certain psychological limitations which real spectators also possess. They are active in the sense that they are cued by the experience of the text. Accordingly, they comprehend the narrative film by using problem-solving processes and other cognitive activities pertinent to information processing in their real-world experiences.

In these cases and more, spectators are presented as most likely to make meaning of the film with reference to their specific experience of a specific world with which they are familiar. They all imply a contextual essence of narrative comprehension but devolve into mere generalisation as none dare place their views epistemologically or specify *the* contextual frame of reference for their theories. Through their lack of contextual details to support their claims, they leave us uncertain whether they imply unity of subjectivity or uniformity of meaning formation routines for all viewers. In so doing, especially given the lack of supportive empirical evidence, these theories disregard the heterogeneity of viewing experiences, thus homogenising human experiences of narration in an idealistic manner. A particular case in this regard is Carl Plantinga, who advances a hypothesis that appears to promote heterogeneity of film-viewing experiences but eventuates in their homogeneity.

In "Spectator Emotion and Ideological Film Criticism", Plantinga (1997) goes from stating that emotion depends on *and* informs belief, to suggesting that responses to films depend on the viewer's cultural moral order. Faithful to the cognitive tradition and in a similar vein to Smith (1995), Plantinga's view proposes that spectator emotions involve thinking, belief and evaluation; that ideological criticism must appraise the spectator's emotions in the context of the narrative. Unlike Smith, who gives primacy to the context of the story, Plantinga gives primacy to the spectator's cultural context in the perception of the film. For Plantinga, spectator emotions are accounted for by the kinds of evaluation that relates narratives to ideological concerns. Accordingly, and through repetition and promotion, narrative scenarios are made to seem natural, morally correct, or to accord with advanced tastes and attitudes; both notions are useful when they conform to emotion schemata into which a culture educates its members.

I have no quarrel with Plantinga's point altogether. In fact, I concede to his view that audience response lies at the intersections of individual and general spectator characteristics, specific contexts and textual cues. My concern is twofold: first, while Plantinga acknowledges the importance of these contexts, he offers no detail as to what those specific contexts might entail. Nowhere does he link a particular scenario to any specific culture.

Instead, his treatment of the impact of culture on narrative comprehension remains abstract; it relies heavily on interpretation and lacks supporting verifiable data. Undoubtedly, Plantinga's view shows allegiance to Idealism in the sense that, in equating a hypothetical, imaginary spectator's response with that of actual spectators, and in failing to elaborate on verifiable means to evaluate concrete ways that the specificity of a cultural context bears on the actual spectator's affective response, Plantinga's spectator becomes a mere construct of the imagination of what the actual spectator ought to be – a clear legacy of Idealism.

Conclusion

The relation between Euro-American narration theories and their cultural context proves problematic indeed. On the one hand, Euro-American theories adopt a universalising posture but, on the other, they appear continuous with specific Euro-American cultural thought patterns. Their universalising trend is evident in the way Euro-American theories fail to reference the cultural context within which they are conceived. They also tend to pay very little attention to the diversity of cultural contexts and their impact on narration principles. Marked by a remarkable shortage of culturally comparative studies of cinematic narration and by silences about the contextual limitations of their theoretical claims, several Euro-American theoretical accounts appear to align themselves with an approach that homogenises the impact of cultural contexts on narration and its theorization. This approach presupposes a neutral narration form into which any story from any culture can fit perfectly. Euro-American theories clearly overlook the fact that the choice of form is a creative decision which can hardly be divorced from cultural moorings.

With regard to spectatorship, for example, Euro-American theoretical accounts of cinematic narration show a tendency to ignore the cultural context of the spectator. This tendency seems aligned with assumptions of a singular, accessible meaning of the film narrative. In this omission, we can read the impetus to homogenize the whole process of film comprehension, thereby undermining the importance of various cultural contexts that not only generate narration but also govern various modalities of film perception. This is observable in the

prevalence of theoretical accounts that fail to acknowledge contextual frames of reference for their theories, which implies either unity of subjectivity or uniformity of meaning formation routines for all viewers. This, in turn, amounts to a trend to universalize narration principles.

This universalizing impetus does not, however, displace a Euro-American cultural legacy which encompasses a number of cultural thought patterns embedded in a large number of theoretical positions. These thought patterns range from Puritanism and social Darwinism to Idealism and individualism. We find ubiquitous instances of theoretical positions on characterisation and genre conventions which are continuous with the Puritan concept of divine predestination. We have views that confer the lone protagonist a status symbolic of 'the socially selected' notion of social Darwinism. Other views assign an exceptional causal influence to the single protagonist, elevating him/her to the status of a creator with the power to manipulate the environment and force a closed ending of absolute irreversible change. Many more views cater for a Euro-American idealist view of a world where life problems can be joyfully dealt with in community, as frequently portrayed in musicals.
The juxtaposition of a universalising façade and the cultural legacy evident in Euro-American theories raises some concerns about the relevance of Euro-American theories in other cultural contexts. In other words, how could theories that appear continuous with particular cultural thoughts be of relevance to cinematic productions in other cultures? More importantly, what effect would adopting such theories in other cultural contexts have on cinematic cultures in these contexts? Putting these concerns aside, it is worth stating that the validity of Euro-American theories in the Euro-American context becomes unquestionable because of their continuity with Euro-American cultural thoughts. From this, we can see the importance of reading cinematic texts in their own cultural context; we can gauge the extent to which cultural mechanisms inform various stylistic and formal choices in cinematic narration; we can begin to appreciate thematic influences on the film-maker's creative agendas, and the role a film plays in a given context.

CHAPTER 3

African and Latin-American Theories

Introduction

Given this dissertation's focus on cultural specificity, it would seem incongruent to speak of African and Latin-American cinemas together. Because of the diversity of cultures in both geographical regions, it would seem even more problematic to link the cinemas of these geographically remote regions. However, I do so because they are unified by a common historical past. In both regions, local cinemas have suffered the effects of imperialist domination and continue to struggle against the persistent legacy of that domination (Solanas & Getino 1969; Hondo 1979; Gabriel 1985; Diawara 1988; Stam & Xavier 1997). Filmmakers and film scholars from both regions appear to have similar aspirations. For example, asked to summarise his position with regard to the type of cinema he wanted to make, Ousmane Sembène answered: "I regard the cinema primarily as a political instrument of action [...] this is why I want to make a militant cinema that causes an awakening in the spectators" (cited in Busch & Annas 2008, p. 12). For Sembène, the primary function of cinema should be to crystallise an awakening among the masses, to raise awareness of current realities and of the engagement of the day. Similarly, Solanas and Getino (1969, p. 7) insisted that the film, as a work of art, be inserted in the process of liberation, that it should be placed "first at the service of life itself, ahead of art". Using Ousmane Sembène's *Xala* (1975) as a reference, Nwachukwu Ukadike (1994) posits that black African film-making emerges out of the responsibility of creating a new Africa out of the one victimised by colonial, racist and Hollywood caricatures of its image; it is a quest for the revivification of Africa's lost cultural heritage and identity. Glauber Rocha defends Brazilian cinema against Brazilian film-makers who imitate American genre conventions, condemning them for propagating 'forms of communications' that amount to colonial instruments of alienation (Rocha 1997). In January 1975, FEPACI (Fédération Panafricaine des Cinéastes) adopted the Algiers Charter on African cinemas which demanded vigilance against imperialist attempts

at ideological recuperations as it redoubled its efforts to maintain, renew and increase its cultural ascendency (Bakari & Cham 1996).

A similar historical past and aspirations could be expected to yield a similarly unified theoretical agenda. Indeed, theorists of African and Latin-American cinemas hold a unified view of cinematic narration as an agent for social transformation; they consider film as an artistic tool with which to counter imperial instruments of cultural alienation perpetuated by Eurocentric theoretical paradigms and artistic practices (Ukadike 1994; Solanas & Gettino 1969; Stam & Xavier 1997; Gabriel 1985; Diawara 1988, etc.). Most theoretical positions in both traditions adopt the common stance that their different cultures should underpin the conceptualization and theorization of cinema. It must, however, be noted that the common concerns of theorists in Africa and Latin-America do not, in any way, homogenize their different practices and regionally specific concerns.

This chapter analyses these theories to assess the strengths and/or weaknesses of these culture-specific paradigms. It investigates the extent of their influence on, and their utility in, cinematic narration in their respective cultural contexts. It focuses on their common epistemology to better understand the specificities and differences of their methodologies.

To identify the necessary and sufficient conditions for culture-based principles of narration, my analysis draws upon Ukadike's (1994, p. 25) notion of 'fragmentary discourse'. According to this notion, expression and interpretation are coded in a special or sacred language which utilises cultural models in which meaning must derive from hermeneutic deciphering of known symbolic values. For Ukadike, African cinematic practices involve creative matrices that depend on narrative choices which correlate with historical and cultural processes. In these matrices, allegory forms the basis for the indelible register of social concerns. Through this allegorical juxtaposition, he concludes that black Africa's film practices manage to subvert the dominant Western mode of production in order to acquire a sense of identity and national transformation. Consequently, on the one hand, this chapter establishes the extent to which African and Latin-American theories relate these cultural

models to African and Latin-American film practices. On the other, it assesses their effectiveness in subverting Western influences on local film studies and practices.

Western Influence on African Cinematic Narration

In his *Black African Cinema,* Nwachukwu Frank Ukadike (1994) reminds us that African cinemas were not controlled by Africans until the 1960s, when Africans began to achieve political independence and made their own feature films. Until then, notes Ukadike, beginning at the turn of the century when in 1897 the Lumière brothers' film titles stigmatised Africa with exoticism, colonial films excluded Africans in their making, gave no priority to African interests but, instead, portrayed Africans as savages who nevertheless were loyal and grateful to the Europeans for coming to guide and protect them. For Ukadike, early African contacts with cinema were meant to reinforce the imperial philosophy, caricaturing Africans as miserable people needing saving, projecting the Western way of life as desirable and that of the Africans as foolish, in order to instil in the minds of Africans feelings of inferiority about their culture and their whole being. Melisa Thackway (2003) reveals the same tendency among French colonial authorities, saying that they actively sought to discourage the development of any African film-making activity by reinforcing the 1934 Laval Decree which allowed colonial authorities to contain or eliminate any film likely to subvert official colonial discourse.

From the 1950s, with the advent of independence movements, African films, broad in scope, superb in talents yet limited in material resources, started being meaningfully used as a voice of and for the people, strengthening traditional structures aimed at the decolonisation and reaffirmation of all aspects of black African life (Diawara 1992; Ukadike 1994; Cham 1996; Thackway 2003). Afterwards, notes Ukadike, cinemas in the ex-colonised countries followed different patterns of development which adopted models of representation corresponding with those of their respective colonising countries, except the dominant black cinema of Nigeria now commonly referred to as *Nollywood*, which remains true to its Yoruba theatrical roots. According to Ukadike, this cinema owes little to Western models, nor does it

derive its style from any known national cinema, East or West. One therefore wonders whether this could be the reason that Nollywood has stood out among many cinemas on the African continent.

The 1970s and 1980s are seen by Mbye Cham (1996) as periods when African productions focused on interrogating cultural practices and customs, especially their exploitation and abuse for individual profit. Ukadike (1994) characterises this period as an introspective and engaged period of African cinemas during which the overall themes reflected the collective malaise caused by socio-political problems ranging from alienation, illiteracy and corruption to the recapture of Africa's distorted past and the clash between tradition and modernity. From the 1990s onwards, African films became much more suffused with mixing of styles and generic forms that juxtaposed popular cultural forms of all origins with more specifically African cultural differences, making some African filmmakers move away from earlier, typically African conceptions of the film-maker's socially responsible role (Thackway 2003).

In spite of these developments, Western influence on African cinemas remains so prevalent that one could say it has mutated/adapted so as to remain relevant to the evolving trends, perhaps to escape the stigma of condemnation for hampering the growth of cinemas in Africa. It nonetheless continues to be condemned for far worse impacts on African cinema. Senegalese filmmakers Ngaido Bah (cited in Pfaff 1996) and Cheick Fantamady Camara (2010) have remarked that it has become a tradition for African filmmakers to make films dictated to them by European funders who ensure that films thus made correspond with European views of Africa. Balufu Bakupa-Kanyinda (2010) blames this trend for turning African cinemas into another 'genre' whose unspoken rules stipulate that African films must deal with famine, poverty, disease and war, otherwise people in Europe will say that they are not genuinely African films because they do not reflect the image of Africa familiar to European expectations.

Thackway identifies this tendency in the policy of France's inter-ministerial "*Fonds Sud*" subsidies to francophone countries: it dictates that recipients primarily meet expectations of French/Western audiences and locate their films principally in Africa. In that way, African filmmakers remain restricted with regard to where they can direct their gaze (Thackway 2003). For Bakupa-Kanyinda, who strongly believes that not much has changed since colonialism came to an end, Western influence on African cinemas leads to a predicament where Africa's own mirror, film and television, leaves it invisible. Against that, he suggests that African filmmakers use more potent images to negate the tendency to meet European expectations, that they start narrating stories about Africa with its own ideas and images.

Manthia Diawara (2010) links Western domination of African cinemas to the fact that African film-makers are under pressure to link up with ideas of the contemporary. In doing so, they are making 'world cinema' which alienates cinema audiences in Africa, marginalises other African film traditions and edges them out of view for both the Western audience and for Africans themselves. The very idea of 'world cinema' is Eurocentric in that it defines its terms from a Western standpoint such that any other film tradition foreign to this tradition appears primarily of value as something exotic. Criticising the selection criteria for the Cannes and Venice film festivals, Diawara further observes that the criteria in question ignore the craft and quality of non-Western films. He writes:

> The reason they are not shown in Cannes or Berlin is that [...] they simply do not fit into the concept of world cinema. Anyone not making world cinema is out of place in Cannes or Berlin – unless, that is, they are American. Then they can churn out an awfully bad film like *Kill Bill* and still open Cannes. (Diawara 2010, pp. 200, 201)

Related to the issue of foreign funding, Western influence continues to weigh on African film style through a foreign-dominated film distribution network which exploits a lack of audience interest and the distribution and exhibition problems in Africa (Ukadike 1994). Already in 1982, the distribution problem was identified in the Niamey Manifesto of African Filmmakers. It was also highlighted in the Final Communiqué of the First Frontline Film Festival and Workshop in 1990 in Harare (Bakari & Cham 1996). Martin Mhando (2000)

associates this problem with a culture of dependence of local African cinemas on the global construction and maintenance of distribution – a culture that, according to Mhando, fosters a continued reliance of African film producers on the festival circuit which thereby forces filmmakers to conform to and become hostages of Western canonical models, except for *Nollywood* and its model of filmmaking in some other African countries.

African scholars as well as African filmmakers have been unapologetic in condemning the pernicious implications of Western influence on African cinema. They have identified and lamented the imperialist nature of Western thought paradigms as the primary culprit. Notwithstanding the condemnations, the influence still persists. People may attempt to justify it on the basis of misconstrued concepts of globalisation, transnationalization or multiculturalism. Some may think of it as emanating from a culture of self-indulgence and/or of complacency. My assumption is that, although it is necessary to discredit the imperialist agenda of this influence, the overstated preoccupation with it diverts our attention away from what matters the most: conceptualising African cinematic practices within their most pertinent, contextual realities. Consequently, the following analysis looks at African theories of cinematic narration from this perspective.

Theoretical Paradigms: Their Strengths and Weaknesses

In *Wretched of the Earth*, Frantz Fanon (1963, p. 210) laments the fact that colonialism is not satisfied merely with emptying the native's brain of all form and content but that "it turns to the past of the oppressed people and distorts, disfigures and destroys it", with a condemnation that is continental in its scope. For the colonists, asserts Fanon, the 'Negro' is not a native of any particular country; s/he is simply the savage 'Negro'. From that situation, Fanon condemns any effort of the native to rehabilitate him/herself from the claws of colonialism, if such effort is inscribed from the colonist's view point, that of subsuming all of Africa's cultures under one culture, a 'Negro' culture. He then suggests that a national culture, through which a people has created itself and *keeps itself in existence* [my emphasis], should be at the very heart of the struggle for freedom of each country. For Fanon, expression

of national consciousness is the most elaborate form of culture. That, he affirms, does not, however, imply that consciousness of self is the closing of a door to international consciousness.

In Fanon's position, not only can we infer an acknowledgement of the importance of cultural specificity, but we can also deduce a warning against the pernicious legacy of colonial thought which distorted such importance. For the sake of this dissertation, Fanon's view, especially that the expression of national consciousness is the most elaborate form of culture, will serve as a useful frame of reference for the assessment of the strengths and weaknesses of African theoretical approaches suggested or adopted in the theories analysed in this section.

I wish to begin with Teshome Gabriel's (1985) study of Third World film cultures, in which Fanon's work constitutes a critical framework. In his search for a methodological device for a critical inquiry into Third World films, Gabriel draws upon Fanon's analysis of the steps of the genealogy of Third World cultures because, states Gabriel, Third World film culture has followed the same path as that of Third World cultures - from domination to liberation. According to Gabriel, Third World film culture can be categorised in three phases. The first, the assimilation phase, is one in which film texts and the rules of film style conform to Western conventional practices, with a heavy reliance on Western modes of controlled production and experimentation. In the second phase, the remembrance phase, themes are indigenised but the film language remains faithful to the Western conventional film style. In the third phase, he writes,

> The text and the subtext go through a radical shift and transformation – the chief formal and thematic concerns begin to alter the rules of the grammar. Another film language and a system of new codes begin to manifest themselves. (Gabriel 1985, p. 6)

Calling it the combative phase, Gabriel states that in this phase the viewer is no longer alienated because recognition is vested in a genuine cultural ground. For Gabriel, the characteristics of this phase suggest that Third World films initiate a coexistence of film art

with folk customs, where films adhere to structural, aesthetic and thematic patterns drawn out from the Third World's cultural history, moved by the requirement of its social action and contexted and marked by the strategy of that action. As evidence, he identifies close associations of formal and stylistic elements of Third World films with Third World cultural postures. A recurrent posture to which he refers the most is the tradition of collective engagement which interlinks the individual with the social fabric of the community. Accordingly, he associates the preponderance of wide-angle long shots with a viewer's sense of community; he describes the subordination of characters to the goals of the community as emanating from the tradition of collective engagement, symbolising the cultural posture that personal change is not an individual process but rather of and by the community. Linking the importance of collective engagement and action to the spatio-temporal points of view of Third World films, he postulates that the individual hero in the Third World context does not make history but only serves historical necessity.

Gabriel also emphasizes the correlation of film art with folk customs and oral tradition, which he associates with a minimal use of temporal manipulation, non-linearity, repetition of images and graphic representation. With regard to time, Gabriel notes that, though essential, time duration is not a major issue because, in the Third World context, the need is for films to touch a sensitive cultural chord in a society. Regarding graphic representation, he points out that because a spatial factor is part of a general rhythm of pictorial representation in most Third World societies, graphic art creates symbols in space that enables Third World viewers to relate more easily to their films. As a rationale for the conspicuous graphic syntax and effects in Chinese cinematography, Gabriel cites A. Goldsmith's view that "the spiritual quality achieved in the Supreme Chinese landscape and nature paintings is the feeling of harmony with the universe [...] which resonates with the viewer." (Goldsmith, cited in Gabriel 1985, p. 15)

Based on the continuity of Third World films with Third World cultural practices, evidenced by the views highlighted above, Gabriel submits that every aspect of critical theory of Third World films should take into account the changes in the rules of film grammar which varies

from one culture to another. He strongly laments the fact that Third World aesthetics and cultures have been long ignored in art criticism and film appreciation, making it impossible for it to occupy its premier place in a unified human science. To curb that predicament, Gabriel calls for a new school of film-making which may be "almost wholly untouched by European conventions" (Gabriel 1985, p. 15). Such a school, he proposes, will require a general overhaul of the parameters of film forms, including the conventions of cinematographic language and technique. Most importantly, posits Gabriel, the new school should negate and displace the use of Western critical paradigms to analyse non-Western films – a view that Augustine-Ufua Enahoro (1988) evokes almost faithfully in "Towards a Philosophy of African Cinema".

Setting out to explore the Africanity of African cinemas in order to justify the irrelevance of Western theoretical/critical paradigms to African film practices, Enahoro references a total of 21 African films, showing greater detail regarding the variety of the films' subject matter and their similar cultural foundations. According to Enahoro, African cinemas are based on principles that express historical movements going on in African societies; they are conditioned by the motivations and experiences of their people, geared towards the realisation of the goals and aspirations of each society. They are inspired by social convictions most sincerely held, they are based on unspoken values of African norms and their aesthetics is usually informed by the artist's social vision. Hence, submits Enahoro, culture is the organisational core of African cinemas and should therefore be the theoretical basis for a critical investigation and assessment of African cinemas.

Regarding cultural inscriptions of African films, Enahoro expresses two interesting views in his reading of *Xala* (Ousmane Sembène 1975). First, he considers the collaborative efforts portrayed in *Xala* as symbolising collective will corresponding with and rooted in African philosophy. This view substantiates his observation that African films place emphasis on sacred ceremony which draws persons together in fellowship and communality. Second, Enahoro proposes that African film-makers are conditioned by, among other things, their cultures which give film-makers their angles of vision. He consequently affirms that *Xala*

reflects Ousmane Sembène's own experience as a victim of exploitation both by colonial masters and their neo-colonial stooges. Such, states Enahoro, is the function of the social and cultural resume in African films: to make strong pronouncements on the political and moral deprivation of people in African societies. For Enahoro, this is because the problems created by colonialism and neo-colonialism are so apparent that African filmmakers cannot afford to engage in futile analysis of some neurosis simply to conform to the so-called 'international standards'. He writes:

> The African film-maker has a responsibility to his community, he is a part of African society and his fate is mirrored in that society and every one of his films is calculated to move his people towards progress. African cinema provides cultural format for […] the description of African identity. (Enahoro 1988, p. 141)

If indeed African cinemas provide cultural format for the description of African identity, then, I submit, film analysis and theorization of cinematic narration must take into consideration the diversity of cultural contexts in African countries. If, as Gabriel and Enahoro show, African and Third World film practices are grounded in their corresponding cultural contexts, then film analysis and theorization of cinematic narration may not overlook the importance of the specificity of particular cultural contexts. Such is the problem with both Gabriel's and Enahoro's approaches.

While Enahoro posits that African film-makers' angles of vision are informed by their cultural conditioning, he does not link any filmmaker's angle of vision to the specificity of the film-maker's culture; he offers no explanation of the Africanity of the unspoken values of African norms that inspire African aesthetics, nor does he attempt to define the very idea of a culturally inspired aesthetics. One can therefore argue that Enahoro's work remains so generalizing as to elicit doubts about the cultural specificity of the African films he surveys.

Gabriel's work, like Enahoro's, overlooks the specificity of cultural formations in different cultural contexts of Third World countries. For examples, When he associates the preponderance of wide-angle long shots with a viewer's sense of community, or when he

observes that the subordination of characters to the goals of the community emanates from the tradition of collective engagement, he neither provides evidence that such an association is possible in *all* Third-World cultures, nor does he single out any cultural practice which can be said to be specific to any cultural context. Although it is understandable that this could be because the focus of Gabriel's study is on the critical and theoretical matrix applicable to Third World film culture and filmic institutions, his generalising approach tends to homogenize Third World cultures, opening it up to possible objections, given the diversity of cultures in Third World countries.

However, within the context of subverting Western theoretical and methodological paradigms in the conceptualization of African cinemas, Gabriel's and Enahoro's views cue us to what could be a necessary condition for film analysis and culture-based theorization of cinematic narration: if it is to be accurate and complete, any film analysis or theory of cinematic narration that views culture as an organisational principle of the narrative film, must take into account contextual inflections that amount to the most local level of cultural expression. This, I suggest, would be very useful to corroborate views that narration in the narrative film encompasses the narrator's assumptions that are hardly free of inflections of the narrator's view of the world (McKee 1997; Field 2003; Marks 2009), bearing in mind that culture plays a huge role in the formation of identity, which in turn informs a person's view of the world (Hall 1994; Helperin 1996).

Seen from Fanon's perspective that expression of self-consciousness is the most elaborate form of culture, it would seem impossible for any theory or analysis that draws upon culture to explain its positions sufficiently without attending to all levels of cultural expression, general and local. Hence, while Gabriel's and Enahoro's preoccupation with the malice of imperialistic discursive paradigms is useful as far as awareness is concerned, while they provide a strong rationale to link the understanding of any cinema to its cultural context, the generalising approach taken by both scholars diverts their attention away from a search for what could be seen as the 'cultural matrix' of cinematic narration, that is, a set of cultural

elements that should constitute essential terms of reference for a complete analysis of cinematic narration in a particular cultural context.

To substantiate the importance of such a matrix, I wish to enlist support from Haseenah Ebrahim's (1998) and Nwachukwu Ukadike's (1994) studies that chronicle influences of African oral tradition on African film practices. The importance of both studies is that they delve into local levels of cultural expression pertaining to African oral tradition. Also, both studies propose that references to traditional cultural practices in films by African film-makers constitute an effort to subverting the domination of Western models of film-making. As it was with my analysis of Gabriel and Enahoro's works, this analysis continues with the search for necessary and sufficient conditions for culture-based paradigms of narration. In this case, I will pay particular attention to such conditions for effective subversion of pernicious Western influences on African filmmaking practices and their theorization.

To begin with, Ebrahim (1998) explores African cultural heritage and oral tradition in selected films by women filmmakers of the African Diaspora. She argues that, within the African Diaspora in the Caribbean and the United States, the cinematic use of various elements of the oral tradition by women filmmakers makes oral tradition ultimately subversive in nature, signifying a recognition, and respect, by the filmmakers of an alternative (i.e. to those privileged in the West) form of knowledge. She further notes that several of these elements are not used merely for reference purposes; they constitute formal and stylistic devices employed by filmmakers for specific purposes. Among them, she highlights: the celebration of the popular afro-Cuban religion, *Sateria*, in Gloria Rolando's *Oggun: Forever Present* (1991), the reference to West African deities in *Daughters of the Dust* (Julie Dash 1991) and the use of riddles and proverbs in Zeinabu Irene Davis' *Mother of the River* (1995). In keeping with similar positions explored in this and the next chapter, I wish to focus on features of oral tradition which Ebrahim demonstrates in these films.

In *Daughters of the Dust*, Ebrahim singles out the following as elements of oral tradition upon which the film's structural elements draw heavily: digression and meandering of the story line, the absence of psychologically conflicted characters, and the use of a multi-layered narration. In *Mother of the River,* Ebrahim observes that narration draws on oral forms of communication as a pedagogical tool necessary for survival. She shows this in the interaction between the character of Dofimae and her father as he spurs his daughter onto independent thought, analytical and critical skills through riddles and proverbs. Apart from the pedagogical aspect of oral tradition, Ebrahim highlights other aspects of orality operating in Euzhan Palcy's *Sugar Cane Alley* (1984). Remarkable about these aspects are the storytelling ritualised performances, which entails the call and response ritual seen in encounters between two characters in the film, the *laghia* and storytelling at wakes, the fabrication of charms, and the singing of chants to ward off evil. In *Sugar Cane Alley*, explains Ebrahim, these elements constitute a narrative strategy employed to counter the in-roads made on the self-esteem of a young black child by the French educational system and the Martinican social structure, both of which denigrate African cultural heritage which Ebrahim locates not only in the act of storytelling, but also in the kind of ritualised performances.

It is important to note that some of these elements are common in other orally inclined cultures. For examples, digression is said to be characteristic of the obligatory song and dance numbers that punctuate virtually every conventional Hindi film, and the emphasis on exterior exploits by characters is a hallmark of the Hindi film's disregard for psychological characterisation, both of which are said to be characteristic of Indian oral storytelling tradition on which popular Hindi films draw (Nayar 2008). A striking parallel between Ebrahim's and Nayar's accounts is that both scholars single out oral storytelling devices specific to the contexts of the films they analyse. In Ebrahim's case, the chants, the call and response ritual and the *laghia* are examples of oral storytelling devices specific to African contexts.

A very interesting observation in Ebrahim's account is that these devices perform specific functions crucial to the intended ends of the films' narration. In *Sugar Cane Alley,* for example, narration draws on various devices of orality to compete with the elite's elevation of the French language, customs and practice in an effort to show that the identity of one of the film's characters, Jose, as well as Caribbean identity, requires negotiating a pathway between an imperial culture and an ancestral one. In addition to that, Ebrahim affirms that the use of devices from African heritage and oral tradition by the afore-mentioned filmmakers constitute an attempt at subverting Western discursive practices.

In Ebrahim's account, it is undoubtedly clear that narration in the mentioned films is continuous with cultural practices particular to African contexts. What is, however, not clear is whether or not the use of these devices does actually displace the Western discursive practices they aim to subvert. Nonetheless, by demonstrating this typical use of oral storytelling devices in several films, Ebrahim's work instigates the need to rethink the importance of cultural practices in cinematic narration, particularly its impact on a film's intelligibility. Through the observation that the tradition of oral literature "positions context and performer as crucial elements with the storytelling performance, requiring an intimate connection between the teller and audience" (Ebrahim 1998, p. 103), Ebrahim indirectly points to some important neglected areas of scholarship as far as cinematic narration is concerned. I am referring to studies whose aims would be to investigate various ways in which the continuity of cinematic narration with corresponding cultural practices can help to theorise alternative modalities of filmic narration and reception. In Nwachukwu Ukadike's (1994) self-professed critical insider's eye, we find further insights in this regard.

It is important to point out that Ukadike, like Gabriel and Enahoro, expresses his disapproval of employing Eurocentric paradigms to explain the nature of African cinematic practices. He, too, is of the general view that culture binds motivational and ideological forces which structure each African film. Beyond and above that, Ukadike explains specific ways in which black African cinematic practices attend to intervening mediations between community life and representation. He attends to the ways in which intentions of black African film-makers

translate into the specificities of black African cinematic practices, and he points out specific cultural dynamics of African traditions that warrant such specificities. He posits these specificities within multiple contexts: historical, economic, political and cultural. For the purpose of this analysis, I will focus on his definition of African film language based on forms of representation rooted in indigenous cultural sources, especially the African oral tradition, and the ways in which such forms of representation illuminate the continuity of African narration with specific cultural patterns of thoughts in African contexts.

Focusing on Sub-Saharan African cinemas, Ukadike sets out to define the Africanness of black African films and bring to light the ways in which black African films utilise their specificity to reassert Africa's identity and thereby restore African pride and dignity. One of the traits that he highlights is the legacy of oral tradition. For Ukadike, the structure of oral art is the interconnection of a system of signifiers and cultural codes. Among the salient principles of oral art narration which influence and define the language of black African cinematic practices, he identifies (1) interventions and digressions that help to shift points of view in time and space, (2) the use of multiple narrative voices and (3) dance and song as a narrative structure. He demonstrates the workings of these practices in a number of African films among which I wish to focus on his reading of three of them: *Wend Kuuni* (Jean-Marie Gaston Kaboré; Burkina Faso 1982), *Visages des Femmes* (Désiré Ecaré; Côte d'Ivoire 1983) and *Jom* (Samb-Makaram, Senegal 1981).

In his analysis of *Jom,* Ukadike (1994) focuses on the role of the *griot* as living archive of popular tradition, recounting to listeners the history of the entire community, placing the *griot* first and foremost at the service of society. *Jom* tells the story of a Senegalese prince who murders a French colonial administrator. In the rage that follows the revenge by the French colonists, the prince, rather than surrender, decides to die a dignified death by killing himself. In the film, *Jom,* the prince's dignified act is recalled by a *griot,* Kally, in the present day, during a large industrial strike that divides the workers into two factions: those fighting for better salaries and the reinstatement of retrenched workers, and those sabotaging this effort by accepting management's new proposals.

The *griot* recounts the prince's act with a view to intervening in the cultural ramifications of the conflicting factions. According to Ukadike, by placing the griot at the heart of the film, making him the protagonist who responds to the actions of the masses, *Jom* prioritises "the moral issues intrinsic to oral culture" epitomised in the pre-eminence of a collective will demonstrated through commitment and collective endeavour. Indeed, that is a generalised role of the *griot* in many African cultural contexts.

On a more local level, Ukadike reveals a culturally specific aspect of the role of the griot in *Jom*. He finds this in the title of the film, *Jom*, a Wolof concept which has no equivalent in English but can be loosely translated as the origin of all virtues, dignity, courage, respect, efficiency and equality for all. For Ukadike, the concept of *jom* is manifested in the *griot's* intervention which does not simply unify the masses but motivates this unification by recalling an event which epitomises the traditional values of the *jom* concept, suggesting the very values essential to alleviate inequities of the neo-colonial order and restore "rights and dignity".

An important parallel which Ukadike draws between the structure of *Jom* and the teaching philosophy of *jom* is that no person, not even the protagonist, is individually responsible for unification. Rather, the protagonist allows the spirit of *jom* to penetrate the minds of the people and remind them of their collective association to realise desire for an improved society. All the protagonist does is to catalyse a collective action by recollecting the prince's exemplary commitment to the traditional teaching of the philosophy of *jom*. What must be emphasised is that, although the griot catalyses the main actions in the film, the thematic and therefore the organising principle of *Jom* are the traditional, local teachings of *jom*.

Though Ukadike refers to general markers of the African oral tradition such as the use of truncated periods of time and the use of song and dance, it is in his elaboration of the *localized* role of the griot in *Jom* that he demonstrates how a culturally specific traditional practice organises cinematic narration in a specific cultural context. His account is limited to a specific cultural context, distinguishing his view of cinematic narration from the more

universalizing Euro-American ones. Even in his analyses of *Wend Kuuni* and *Visages des Femmes,* where he employs a rather generalist approach such as Gabriel's and Enahoro's, Ukadike's work, like Ebrahim's, challenges the cross-cultural transposability of Euro-American theories in favour of culturally based theories.

Wend Kuuni tells of an abandoned boy who is found unconscious in the bush. Mute and unable to tell his story, the boy is adopted by a family in the village. One day the boy discovers the body of a neighbour hanging from a tree limb; he is so traumatized by this gruesome event that he regains his speech and tells his story, informing his audience that his muteness was caused by the trauma suffered as a result of seeing his mother die in the bush after being ostracised and chased out of the village by the denizens who accused her of being a witch for refusing to remarry according to custom.

Describing *Wend Kuuni* as a prototype of creative candour for its effort to utilise specifically African cultural elements to create indigenous cinematic aesthetics, Ukadike holds that the narration in *Wend Kuuni* is directed at awakening consciousness, and in doing so is indebted to oral art. He finds this in the film's use of the *griot's* intermittent oration to clarify events in the films. He links it to the fragmentation of a linear story into episodic sequential units which introduce three stories merging them into one. According to Ukadike, this structure evokes the oral tradition's organisation that gives primacy to the examination and interpretation of the society's present and past – an examination directed at awakening or raising consciousness.

In his analysis of *Visages des Femmes,* he similarly states that oral tradition functions as a way of conceiving cinematic structure and a way of articulating political and cultural possibilities. He points out that the song-and-dance structure in *Visages des Femmes* conforms to the cultural significance of song and dance within African oral tradition, citing that music and dance are inextricably linked with aspects of everyday life because they serve as bridges to the animating forces of nature in traditional cultures. To substantiate the link

between the song-and-dance patterns with cultural imperatives of the African way of life, Ukadike writes:

> In this tradition, for instance, it is common practice for peasants working collectively or individually to interrupt their speeches with song in the same way that in African storytelling tradition main narratives are interrupted to allow interconnecting stories to be sung or danced. (Ukadike 1995, p. 217)

He goes on to suggest that just as drumbeats signify the dissemination of news, in *Visages des Femmes* drumbeats test and affirm the cultural context. He also affirms that drumbeats and rhythms differ from region to region, from culture to culture. However, with reference to *Visages des Femmes*, Ukadike does not pinpoint the specificity of the drumbeats as used in this film. Also in his analysis of *Wend Kuuni*, Ukadike's outlook on the elements of oral tradition he identifies in the film remains far so generalised as to elicit the question of whether oral tradition is uniform around all the African cultures or whether it lends itself to the specificity of the cultural context where the story originates – an approach which runs the risk of homogenising cultural practices.

As much as it would seem homogenising to speak of an African culture in singular (Ebrahim 2015, pers. comm., 20 February) especially given the constantly changing nature of culture, so would be any analysis that refers to more generalised African traditions without identifying their local levels of cultural expression. This does not mean the analysis must avoid general forms of African traditions. Instead, it means that any analysis of the cultural imprints in a film can draw upon generalised levels of cultural expressions but in order for such analysis to be complete, it needs to equally attend to the most local levels of cultural expression.

On that cue, it must be noted that there are valuable insights to be gained in the type of works I have just analysed. For the sake of this study, their value lies in that they remind us of essential outstanding tasks in theorising African cinemas. Firstly, we gain the insight that a complete, sufficient culturally specific theorization of cinematic narration is possible, which

would require theorists to account for both the Africanity and the local specificity of cultural elements characteristic of cinematic narration in specified African cultural contexts. Secondly and most importantly, these works constitute a body of solid points of references upon which we can draw culture-based approaches for reformulations of theories of cinematic narration.

On Reformulation of Theory: a Latin-American Case

Like their African counterparts, Latin-American theorists of cinematic narration remain very vocal about the need to understand cinematic narration within their cultural contexts. They emphasise views that support cinematic traditions which focus on local contexts, oppose Eurocentric moral and aesthetic hypocrisy (Rocha 1997), and advocate the need to critically examine from within the socio-cultural structures of countries, focusing on representing all that is authentic and experiential (Diegues 1997). For Stam and Xavier (1997), such cinematic practices should be suffused with historical substance and cultural specificity; they should inform a search for more cultural forms that can contribute to collective decolonisation through the decolonisation of film-makers and films (Solanas & Gettino 1969; Burton 1997). They are fuelled by an inclination to subvert Western, especially Hollywood, influence on local film practices and reception.

Glauber Rocha (1997) chronicles that influence with regards to the Brazilian cinema. For Rocha, the influence of American cinema has affected the image of life of the Brazilian public so much so that a Brazilian audience expects a Brazilian film to be an "American-type" Brazilian movie. The audience does not accept the Brazilian film-maker's image because it does not conform to that of the technically developed and idealistic world of Hollywood movies. Consequently, laments Rocha, the formula for success consists in applying American narration principles to a Hollywood theme which, he argues, is socially and morally wrong. Rocha describes this as a condition of the public's deformed taste – a condition which owes much to the fact that cinema is an industry which generates culture and vice-versa. Accordingly, the use of American formulae in Brazilian films turns the Brazilian

industrial cinema into a propagator of the imperialistic conditioning of the public. In Rocha's view, this conditioning places the Brazilian film-maker in an impasse with a two-sided and conflicting moral repercussion: on the filmmaker who produces the imitation to his obvious discredit, and on the public which rejects the original effort of the Brazilian filmmaker with manifest annoyance. Stam and Xavier (1997) place such an impasse in the spectre of cultural colonialism where Brazilian film-makers are considered too imitative, too servile towards the dominant Hollywood model.

To end such an impasse, Rocha calls for an end to populism, an approach according to which the artist has to give to the audience what it wants, and speak simply so that the audience can understand. For Rocha, populism hardly cultivates the cultural values of an underdeveloped society at all. Instead, it produces paternalist film-makers who show no respect for the public, idealise popular types as subjects of fantasy with scarcely any political consciousness, and in so doing perpetuate the colonising culture's instruments of alienation.

Against that, he suggests that Brazilian filmmakers organise themselves into the dangerous revolutionary adventure of reformulating every theory through every practice. This requires the impure aggressiveness of a new art which subverts any notion of technical perfection inherited from colonising cultures. This art necessitates consolidating and extending the Brazilian distribution network; it requires film-makers to take part in the discovery of the consciousness of what is Brazilian; it asks of film-makers to divorce their practices from the tendency to elicit the viewer's "tame monkey" mentality to react in a predetermined way. Further than that, it will consist in focusing on what film-makers think about themselves rather than on what the developed world might think about them. It is important to note that these were the many facets of the movement known as *Cinema Novo* which Rocha thought necessary to bring about qualitative change to overcome cultural underdevelopment and to develop local culture into a source of popular inspiration.

How could such a noble enterprise fall by the wayside? From Rocha's "consciousness of what is Brazilian", we sense a strong nationalist vision for a cinema that draws upon the

identity of the Brazilian people for its specificity. By inference, the impediment to such cinema is the legacy of colonialism that has made the Brazilian audience and film-maker too servile to the dominant model. This legacy can be said to problematize the very concept of Brazilian identity, an identity whose definition has to be excavated amid deeply rooted imperial legacy. It stands to reason that a movement such as *Cinema Novo* would choose to prioritise the decolonisation of the filmmaking practice. As noble as it might sound, such a revolutionary enterprise, as Rocha called it, would require more than the decolonisation of cultural practices. It would furthermore necessitate, on the one hand, a complex process that would employ a methodology that accounts for the complexity of what it is to be Brazilian, bearing in mind the salient contexts that frame Brazilian identity. On the other hand, it would require theorists who advocate the decolonisation of film practices to take into account aspects of the Brazilian character that have persisted despite colonial mooring.

With regard to contexts that inform Brazilian cultural identity, it is important to invoke Hans Proppe and Susan Tarr's "Pitfalls of Cultural Nationalism in *Cinema Novo".* For Proppe and Tarr, the failure of *Cinema Novo* has been its inability to account for the political effect on national consciousness. They launch this as a critique of Rocha's theory, pointing out that:

> Rocha is more involved and more articulate when dealing with theories of filmmaking and the cultural characteristics of the Northeast than he is when analysing the political implications or applications of either. When Rocha claims for *Cinema Nova* a "revolutionary" role in Brazil, he is doing so at the cultural and not the political level. [...] While all reclamations of a national culture constitute a first step in establishing a national identity and consciousness, it does not follow that all cultural expositions have meaningful political effects. (Proppe & Tarr 2005, p. 45)

To add to the lack of a political context in Rocha's writing, his highlighting the debilitating effects of imperialism on Brazilian identity is indeed essential, but he remains ambiguous regarding ways in which to salvage it. He invites filmmakers to take part in the discovery of the consciousness of what is Brazilian yet he offers few examples of what those may be. In fact, through 'discovery', it could be interpreted that, if it has to be discovered, the very consciousness of what is Brazilian is an abstract reality rather than a situational one, making

it appear detached from practical realities of the Brazilian people. This brings me to the point of what is specifically Brazilian that has withstood colonial mooring. More specifically, what are the ways in which cinematic narration can aesthetically relate to it?

In "The Aesthetics of Hunger", Rocha (1997) qualifies hunger as the essence of Brazilian society, stating that Brazil's hunger is an economic and political conditioning which has led the Brazilian people to philosophical malnourishment and impotence, respectively engendering sterility and hysteria. Therein, says Rocha, lies the tragic originality of *Cinema Novo:* its commitment to depict "the most noble cultural manifestation of hunger", violence, as a potent tool to free the Brazilian people from the debilitating delirium of the same hunger.

For Rocha, this violence encompasses love – a love for action and transformation. Although philosophically intriguing, the very idea of hunger as the essence of being Brazilian appears to rest on very shaky ground as it seems to advance a post-mortem definition of the Brazilian character: it defines Brazilianness as an aftermath of colonialism, giving no merit to aspects of the Brazilian character other than those resulting from imperialist conditioning. Unless this violence is understood as inherently Brazilian, the basis for such a definition of the Brazilian character appears unconvincing, especially because we are not told what makes this violence specifically Brazilian.

On another note, an analysis of Rocha's idea of reformulating every theory through every practice reveals a rather insightful approach, especially his view that creation results from revolutionary practice which gives primacy to demystifying the different aspects of the real while conferring a cultural value to films. For Rocha, this is necessary if we are to reformulate theory through practice. What is insightful in this is the insistence on an aggressive practice drawing upon one's insufficiencies and building on them to create the flexible foundation of a way of thinking designed to stimulate the development of a new style. This style is congruent with Garcia Espinosa' s (1972) notion of an imperfect cinema which advocates a film tradition whose practice inscribes and takes into account the material limitations of Latin-American society.

The effect of reformulating theory through practice was demonstrated by Else Viera's (2007) analysis of *Cidade de Deus* (Kátia Lund and Fernando Meirelles, 2002). *Cidade de Deus* tells the story of a boy, Rocket, who struggles to free himself from the grasp of the slums of a lower-class quarter west of Rio de Janeiro where desperation, drug abuse and violent crime prevail. In her analysis, Viera contests the idea that to achieve international success Latin-American films must emulate Hollywood genres and codes of representation. She presents *Cidade de Deus* as evidence to suggest that it is the capacity of Brazilian films to renew outworn film codes and their firm roots in Brazilian reality that has ensured their distinctive place in international spaces. For Viera, *Cidade de Deus'* experimentalism challenges hegemonic codes of representation; it locates cracks in the richest and most enduring genre of Hollywood's repertoire; it absorbs elements from both the Brazilian tradition and hegemonic genres without being submissive to any, producing new meanings and generic innovations instead.

The challenged hegemonic codes which Viera identifies are the formulaic aspects of the Hollywood Western among which images of violence, the centrality of the gun, the isolated community and the clouds of yellow dust are salient. But unlike the Western, which just only occasionally offers the perspective of the excluded – the Indian and the Mexican – and which shows an open racism in the Western's maintenance of order through its assertion of white male supremacy, *Cidade de Deus* sets in motion an inversion of order and values in the community, foregrounding the working of the misfits within an excluded community. In *Cidade de Deus*, the gun, says Viera, is not depicted as the prime tool of territorial expansion wielded against the wilderness in the Western; it is rather depicted as a major critical updating of the agenda of capitalist violence. With regards to the Brazilian tradition, Viera highlights the ways in which the film constantly updates its social agenda by casting a Western scene within the Brazilian tradition of *cangaceiros*, the 'honourable' bandits who roamed the Northeast of Brazil from 1870 to 1940, taking over landed estates or goods on behalf of the poor and the marginalised. She also cites the development of untapped talent as conferring on the film the means to intervene in the country's social and racial imbalances. According to Viera, this challenging of codes has engendered a new cinematic technique

symbolising an eloquent expression which engages in dialogue with and contributes to mainstream cinema; for example, the adoption of *Cidade de Deus'* style of cinematography in *The Constant Gardener* (Fernando Meirelles; USA 2005)

What Viera brings to our attention is that a culturally specific cinematic practice does not require rewriting of cinematic codes. Just as Hollywood borrows from other cinemas, Viera sees no wrong in borrowing from Hollywood cinematic codes. After all, if one can adopt the technology of cinema which has a foreign origin, why not borrow some of its codes altogether? She maintains that one can borrow from foreign conventions and still be culturally relevant to local contexts. Whether this involves using the borrowed conventions to disturb or debunk them, whether it involves selecting the aspects of the borrowed conventions that are compatible with the film's intended form, or whether it requires reshaping the conventions to suit local contexts, what matters, from Viera's writing, is to give primacy to local modes of representation so that the local perspective overarches the narration.

In "Playing Hollywood at Its Own Games", Deborah Shaw (2007) presents a similar argument. She challenges the pessimism of theories that describe the risk of national cinemas going extinct as a result of Hollywood domination, and she questions notions of originality and copying, dismissing the conception that Hollywood has specific claims to specific genres. For Shaw, any film from any culture can employ film techniques and conventions of its choice. That these conventions are familiar ingredients in Hollywood films should not be used to suggest that such film is a little more than a foreign version of an American genre. This, she argues, would amount to ignoring the film's roots in its local culture and society, granting Hollywood undeserved exclusive rights to these ingredients. As evidence, she highlights how such ingredients are employed in Fabian Bielinski's *Nueve Reinas* (Argentina 2000) without locating the film in the Argentine derogatory category of Hollywood-style movie spoken in Spanish.

Nueve Reinas tells the story of a notorious con artist who is defeated by a large-scale con in revenge for his having swindled his associates and innocent members of the community. In Shaw's account, *Nueve Reinas* employs cinematic conventions and techniques familiar from Hollywood films, namely, a plot-driven narrative, strong characterization and the concept of a final twist. Far from organizing the narration, Shaw finds these features subordinated to the overarching cultural references specific to Argentine society – that of endemic corruption – foregrounding a communal desire to take action against a culture of corruption in the absence of a reliable justice system. Although the ultra-modern Hilton hotel and many other locations typical of contemporary urban settings were used to dilute the foreignness of *Nueve Reinas* for international audience members, Shaw finds all these elements peripheral to the cultural antecedent of the film. She elaborates on that by comparing the Argentine version and its U.S. remake *Criminal* (Gregory Jacobs 2004). She points out that the specific references to national corruption are totally lost in the U.S. remake and that a national problem in the original Argentine version becomes an individual trait confined to a single negative character. Consequently, the demise of the swindler in the U.S. remake affects him alone, while in the original, the swindler is caught up in a national crisis that affects many. For Shaw, these differences result from the specificity of the cultural context of both versions.

For Viera, as for Shaw, cinematic codes are fluid and pliable enough to suit the context of a film without submitting to slavish imitation. What this implies is that the cultural context of cinematic narration presents fertile grounds for the reformulation and adaptation of narration modes to meet the dictates of specific cultural contexts. Like Rocha, Stam and Xavier, Viera and Shaw demonstrate the importance of a cultural context in the structure of narration. However, as is the case with their African counterparts, the model for such an enterprise remains unclear, especially given the fact that only a few films are shown to possess prominent cultural foundations aimed at the reformulation of theory. Nonetheless, to validate this will require that we further investigate many films for such features so as to establish necessary and sufficient conditions for reproducible culture-based principles of cinematic narration.

Conclusion

My analysis of Latin-American and African narration theories has highlighted areas of concern and further interest. With regard to the former, we have African and Latin-American theories that adopt a stance that culture should underpin the conceptualization and theorising of cinema. They propose that, to appreciate films in the African or Latin-American context, one must take into account the special language that utilises cultural models to generate meaning. For theorists of African and Latin-American cinemas, this is a necessary and effective approach in order to subvert Western, especially Hollywood, influence on local film practices and reception which they consider alienating (Ukadike 1994; Solanas & Gettino 1969; Stam & Xavier 1997; Gabriel 1985; Diawara 1988). In spite of efforts to counter alienation, which is seen as the aim of Eurocentric theoretical paradigms, Western influences on African and Latin-American cinemas remain very prevalent. The extent of these influences seems so overwhelming that it tends to divert the scholars' attention away from what they advocate: conceptualising African cinemas within their most pertinent, contextual realities.

In that category, we have African theories that suggest that African films should draw upon culturally specific modes of address and aesthetics, but the evidence for such claims remains far from culturally specific. In other words, while it is argued that African films employ a culturally inspired aesthetics which invokes unspoken values of African norms, these values are predominantly interpreted from a continental perspective; neither is there any attempt to define the very idea of a culturally inspired aesthetics.

That notwithstanding, especially if viewed in continuity with African theories that employ a culturally specific approach, the anti-Eurocentric justifications presented in African theories of cinematic narration provide insights that it would seem inadequate for any theory or analysis that draws upon culture to explain its positions sufficiently without attending to all levels of cultural expression, general and local. Attention to the most local level of cultural expression has also been shown to have great potential for what I call the 'cultural matrix' of

cinematic narration: a set of cultural elements that should constitute essential terms of reference for a complete analysis of cinematic narration in a particular cultural context. This is exemplified by the view that African cinematic practices employ a mode of address in which African philosophical thought patterns form the basis for the indelible register of social concerns, which has been demonstrated by Ukadike's analysis of *Jom*, where he demonstrates how a culturally specific traditional practice organises cinematic narration in the cultural context of that film.

With regards to Latin-American theories, striking insights were gained concerning the reformulation of theory. Like their African counterparts, Latin-American theorists argue that Latin-American film-makers should use the consciousness of Latin-American culture as a frame of reference for filmic narration and culturally-based interpretation of Latin-American films. While there is little evidence of what is culturally specific to the Latin-American context upon which theories of cinematic narration can draw, Viera's view that a culturally specific cinematic practice does not require rewriting of cinematic codes proves very useful to the context of this study: whether the rewriting of these codes involves selecting the aspects of the borrowed conventions compatible with the film's intended form, or whether it requires reshaping the conventions to suit local contexts, what matters, from Viera's cue, is that cinematic codes must be considered as fluid and pliable enough to suit the context of a film without submitting to slavish imitation. This cues us further to the importance of a cultural context in the structure of narration. However, because of the shortage of culture-based studies of cinematic narration that focus on clearly defining culturally specific principles of narration, and given the fact that only a few films are shown to possess prominent culturally specific underpinning, the best way to champion culture-based theories of narration is to conduct further investigations of an ethnographic nature. Pitfalls encountered by previous studies, especially given the continued domination of Western models of theory and film practices, can be avoided by conducting more rigorous studies limited to specific cultural contexts and focusing on cinematic texts in those contexts.

CHAPTER 4

Theories of Narration in the Popular Hindi Film

Introduction

In the previous chapter, I did a close comparative analysis of African and Latin-American narration theories on the assumption that, in both regions, local cinemas continue to struggle against the persistent legacy of imperialist domination. Indian cinema has suffered a similar fate. Rajinder Dudrah and Jigna Desai (2008) posit that the hegemony of Western and Hollywood cinemas in media, film and Cultural Studies has considerably prevented the flourishing of scholarship on Indian cinema. They lament the fact that, within much scholarship, Indian cinemas are immediately read within Eurocentric hermeneutics that simply see Europe and North America as the sites from which all cinema development and progress must be measured and understood. Desai and Dudrah's insights are comparable to Frank Ukadike's (1998) and Melissa Thackway's (2003) views on how early African cinemas were used to reinforce imperial philosophy. Both Ukadike and Thackway highlight the fact that this philosophy gave the colonial authority the power to contain or eliminate any film deemed likely to subvert official colonial discourse. Similarly, Desai and Dudrah state that the colonial authority in India attempted to prevent the portrayal of any offensive images of whites in order to prevent anti-colonial sentiments in order to preserve the perception of superiority of white colonial rulers.

Despite the parallels, I have chosen to discuss Indian theories in a separate chapter for a number of reasons. First, popular Hindi cinema is the only major film industry to emerge under colonialism (Dudrah & Desai 2008). Secondly, it is the only film industry whose share of its local market outweighs Hollywood's. Unlike other markets where Hollywood claims a share of 60 to 90 percent of individual local markets, the Indian industry's share of the Indian film market leaves Hollywood with an average share of 5 percent (Kishwar 2004). In the Asia-Pacific region, Indian films scoop 73 percent of movie admissions (Dukhira 2011). Third and most importantly, theories of narration in Indian cinemas boast some intellectual

approaches that successfully subvert Western theoretical paradigms. Be it on characterisation, on spectatorship or on genre conventions, Indian theories of Hindi films single out specific issues pertinent to Indian culture that explain the distinctive aspects of popular Hindi films. A case in point would be Sheila Nayar's (2008) "Oral Contours of a National Popular Cinema" in which she demonstrates culturally specific overtones of orality punctuating popular Hindi films. For example, drawing upon the view that commitment to conservatism is a typical characteristic of orality, she shows how Hindi films reformulate old popular epics while maintaining their oral inflections, such as the digressive nature of the obligatory song and dance numbers that punctuate virtually every conventional Hindi film. For Nayar, these inflections serve to preserve a sense of tradition, preserving the essential meanings of story.

Indeed, India boasts an array of regional film industries categorised statistically and according to the languages in which they are distributed. The main ones are: Hindi, Tamil, Telugu, Bengali, Marathi, Kannada, Odiya and Malayalam. The Hindi film industry, based in Mumbai and commonly known as Bollywood, is said to be the largest, most popular and commercially successful branch of Indian cinema (Ebrahim 2012; Dukhira 2011; Hirji 2010). It is also said that even though Bollywood continues to suffer from its old difficulties of defining a generic production line (Rajadhyaksha 2003), its films remain the most prominent, spearheading the global Indian cultural industry and serving as India's most powerful cultural ambassador (Kishwar 2004). The following analysis therefore pertains specifically to theories of narration in Bollywood films written or translated in English. Taken in contrast to African, Latin-American and Euro-American theoretical approaches, my analysis purposefully overlooks the various ways censorship regulations of the Indian state shape and influence cinematic representation to create a sense of Indian identity. Instead, I single out theoretical approaches that provide insights into the culturally specific underpinning of the Hindi films. This is to explain, on the one hand, Bollywood resistance to Hollywood domination and, on the other, its commercial success despite, to use Haseenah Ebrahim's (2012) expression, misgivings by critics who view it as an industry producing knockoffs of Hollywood films.

Bollywood Spectatorship and its Cultural Terms of Reference

Among the many charges levelled at Bollywood is the view that it represents the encroachment of Western influence, producing mere apolitical escapist fantasy melodrama (Dudrah & Desai 2008). Rosie Thomas (1985) lists an additional set of terms used to criticise Bollywood films with expressions such as 'not only vulgar but imitative', 'absurd stories', 'mindless boring melanges', 'capitalist', 'sexist' and 'exploitative'. Finding such positions among both Western and Indian scholars and commentators, Thomas describes this type of criticism as supercilious and misplaced because it not only evaluates Hindi cinema in terms of film-making practices which it has itself rejected, but also shies away from the fact that Hindi cinema gives enormous pleasure to vast pan-Indian audiences. Hence she suggests:

> What seems to be needed is an analysis which takes seriously both the films and the pleasures they offer, and which attempts to unravel their mode of operation [and] help organise descriptions that take Indian cinema's own terms of reference into account and from which further questions about spectatorship and pleasure become possible. (Thomas 1985, p.25)

Taking into account Indian cinema's own terms of reference is a theoretical approach also proposed by Dissanayake (2003). He laments the uncritical application of Western theory in evaluating Indian cinema in favour of theoretical approaches that take into cognisance traditional aesthetic conceptualities. According to Dissanayake, this is one way of creating more locally based vocabularies of cinematic re-description. Because cinema offers semiotised space for the articulation of the global imaginary and its formation within the discursive practices of the local, Dissanayake proposes that the aesthetics of Indian cinema must be understood from within its own discursive frameworks, and that those very frameworks can provide the most adequate platform to examine the culturally grounded nature of spectatorship and spectatorial agency in the Hindi film.

In this section, I analyse Indian theories that recognise specific discursive frameworks as important points of reference. While acknowledging the existence of a variety of points of reference such as the non-local influences in the forms of Shakespearean drama and Persian

lyric poetry, the analysis in this section primarily seeks to highlight the manner in which local cultural terms of reference are shown to organise narration in the Hindi film and ways in which the very terms of reference influence the intelligibility of the Hindi film to its Indian audiences.

Indeed, many scholars of narration in Hindi film acknowledge that its specific cultural foundation critically influences Indian film audience response. Faiza Hirji (2003) holds that the way Hindi film mines Indian culture accounts for the success it enjoys among diasporic networks of South Asians. Shoma Chatterjee (1999) posits that the Hindi film employs a sound design reflective of Indian culture and therefore conducive to audience identification and Vinay Lal (2006) submits that Hindi film is firmly grounded in the mythic world of Hinduism.

Reading from *Jai Santoshi Maa* (Vijay Sharma, 1975), a film said to draw heavily on puranic inspiration to bridge the gap between humans and gods, Lal (2006) reports that some audience members left footwear outside the cinema hall, while others bowed when the character Santoshi Maa, representing a pan-Indian goddess of recent origins, appeared on the screen. For Lal, this is in keeping with practices germane to devotional Hinduism. A similar view is held by Madhu Kishwar (2004), who believes that Bollywood appeals to and resonates with its audiences primarily because Hindi film is attuned to quintessentially Indian values engrained in the two great epics of India, the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*, which function as meta-texts of the Indian tradition and as the foundational texts of the Indic civilisation. I will thus begin by examining the extent to which these epics are said to facilitate reception of the Hindi film.

In "Indian Cinema: Pleasure and Popularity", Rosie Thomas (1985) goes from noting that no close copy of Hollywood has ever been a Bollywood hit to argue that Hindi films that work with the Indian audience are those that draw wholly upon the essence of "Indianization", the integration of aspects of Indian values with the process of narration. One such form of integration is placing cinema within the context of earlier and coexisting cultural forms and

traditions, the most important being the *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata*. For Thomas, these Hindu epics remain potent resources for Indian filmmakers to draw upon so as to place the film within the realm of the familiar, making the story predictable for the Indian audience and therefore meeting their inclination towards repetition. Sheila Nayar (2008) associates this inclination with the Indian oral tradition inherent in the *Mahabharata* epic. Citing Walter Ong, an English and humanities scholar, Nayar observes that in an oral tradition the mind, which must be the holder of all things, is naturally inclined towards Pragmatism and conservatism, not towards speculation and discovery. Hence, the Hindi film, like the ancient oral epics, takes this inclination towards conservatism into account. This is manifested in a predilection for sameness, repetition and temporal telescoping. For Nayar, this is in keeping with the psychodynamic characteristic of orality which requires that each tale in the telling must be the repository of the past and a resource for renewing awareness of present existence.

Another aspect of Indian values which Thomas identifies as integrated within the process of narration is the tolerance of overt fantasy in the form of overblown dialogue, exaggerated stylised acting, disregard for psychological characterisation and fantastic excess in the song-and-dance sequences. In Thomas' view, such whims of fantasy in the Hindi film imply recognition of the importance of the audience's delight in expensive spectacle. As with the Indian audience's predilection for repetition, Nayar associates the preponderance of overblown dialogue in the Hindi film with the agonistic delivery characteristic of most oral cultures. This delivery, says Nayar, is marked by a tendency to perform in a manner that is dynamic, thick, excessive and explosive. This is because, in oral cultures, all knowledge must pass through word of mouth; it exists in the act of speaking, as outward display, as event that necessarily engages others in verbal intellectual combat.

With regard to stylised acting, Nayar remarks that physical behaviour is presented in a fashion that is celebrated, exaggerated, even extreme. This is in keeping with the mnemonic phrasing of oral epic. It then makes sense that in *Hum Aapke Hain Kaun* (Sooraj R. Barjatya, 1994), the discussion of familial ethics is housed in shared truths and memories, that is,

clichés and proverbs – utterances guarded against change because they render knowledge easily transportable.

It is worth highlighting that the integration of the old with the new is not an unconscious choice. Nor is the tolerance of overt fantasy. These are strategies employed by Indian film-makers in order to satisfy the desires of the audience (Thomas 1985). Even though we are not told that the film-makers are cognisant of the working of the oral mindset per se, we are shown their predisposition to adopt a culture-based mode of address. We are also shown that this mode of address is premised on giving audiences a cultural frame of reference for making sense of the film text within its cultural context. Even more significantly, the integrative mode of address employed by Indian film-makers invokes an inclination to locate their audience within the changing geographies of culture. This can be seen as negotiating a form of identity between the obligatory changes of modern times and the entrenched cultural traditions of a people. As stated by Thomas, this mode of address acts as a frame of reference which can be used to throw light on the different possibilities of forms of address which might be expected or tolerated by the Indian audience.

As far as theorising is concerned, an additional point is that these accounts explain the workings of Hindi cinema independently of any preconceived, prescriptive criteria of how narration ought to work. Their approach gives primacy to actual predominant audience responses to Hindi film. Perhaps even more importantly, it highlights the contextual limitations of Western theoretical paradigms and the concomitant danger of subsuming Indian film studies under paradigms based on externally conceived cultural forms. This is primarily a descriptive approach which, if complete and exhaustive, stands to produce a reliable explanation of the mechanism of cinema in specific cultural contexts.

The common thread of the theoretical approaches employed by Indian theorists is the emphasis on placing Hindi film inside a continuous framework of Indian cultural development. It highlights the cultural foundation of the Hindi film and reminds the reader that an explanation of the reception of the Hindi film by the Indian audience should not be

removed from its cultural context; that understanding of the Hindi film text is best accounted for from within that cultural context. It should be noted that the approach also takes into account the impact of modernity. As Kishwar (2004) has shown, Hindi film owes its popularity to the fact that its narrative style attempts to resolve the anxieties of a modernised society that is uncomfortable with the very nature of modernity, presenting a world where a happy balance between the traditional and the modern is possible and even desirable. But such balance is portrayed as subordinate to certain seemingly eternal values that must be kept intact in order to warn its audience against a mindless modernity.

It is important to note that while Kishwar acknowledges the presence of this anxiety in other 'modernised' societies, 'the eternal values' he associates with narration in the Hindi film are only those that he deems distinctively Indian. For example, he shows how inter-generational conflicts in Hindi films are resolved without undermining the core of a harmonious family or atomising it. While Hindi film encourages the young to revolt against parental tyranny, he writes, they are not forgiven for disowning responsibility for the care and respect due their parents and elders. They are rather expected to win parents over to their points of view with patience and love, avoiding any permanent rift. At the same time, he points out that the Hindi film criticises the expectation that children slavishly obey their parents as destructive to family well-being in the Indian sense of the word. In a similar vein, Patricia Uberoi (2008) posits that, even when inter-generational conflict in the Hindi film involves a mythic conflict between *dharma* and desire or between freedom and destiny, the Hindi film resolves this conflict in a manner that promotes the 'joint family ideal' as an emblem of Indian culture and tradition. Like Kishwar, Uberoi's view is limited to the Indian social context where, she submits, "the family remains [...] the sole institution which can signify the unity, uniqueness and moral superiority of Indian culture in time of change, uncertainty and crisis" (Uberoi 2008; p.182).

As evident in Shakuntala Banaji's (2012) study of Hindi film audiences, this approach to narration theory gives primacy to socio-cultural context, clearly favouring a culturally context-based explanation of the viewer's response to a film text. Accordingly, Banaji's

theory of 'contextual infections' offers an explanation of the manner in which changes of contexts of film viewing influence the spectator's response to the Hindi film. According to Banaji's theory, disjunctions within personal experience lead to radically different perceptions of a film by the same viewer in different contexts and at different times in their lives. To validate its claims, the theory relies on empirical evidence from field notes as well as on findings from an analysis of contemporary studies of Indian film audiences. Throughout her book, the author makes sure the reader is aware that hers is the study of young *Indian* audiences of Hindi cinema. Most importantly, she grounds her analysis within a distinctively South Asian socio-cultural context which she acknowledges to be central to her chosen method of theorization and to the viewer's perception of the film.

Gayatri Chatterjee (2006) adopts a similar approach to show how the Indian social-cultural context influences the mere act of film viewing. For Chatterjee and other notable scholars (Larkin 2003, Prasad 2000; Mankekar 1999), the pleasure generated by the film image is linked to *darshan/darsan,* which refers to an act of worship marked by gazing at one's god and being gazed at in return. According to Chatterjee, *darshan* is operative in the frontality of the film image. She acknowledges that a frontal shot of figures looking out at the audience occurs in other cinemas as well but in this context, the occurrence of this shot is an especially important feature of Hindi film: its frontality is organised to produce an iconic look, that is, a long held frontal shot often accompanied by a sound track that confers on the image a meditative status. In Chatterjee's view, such status interpelates viewers into the position of worshippers, allowing them to bring into the screen space their own corporeality. According to Chatterjee, this can be equated to the *sannidhya* experience, a feeling of nearness brought about by adoration through the gaze. Jigna Desai (2008) corroborates this view by suggesting that the darsanic gaze, in the Hindi film, operates in multiple ways: it initiates the relationship between the viewer and the figure in the film image and it metaphorically describes the relationship between the diasporic spectator and the homeland culture. In this latter instance, Larkin (2008) suggests that the darsanic gaze mediates a relationship in which the diasporic Indian spectator is said to gaze in devotion at the purity and the splendour of the authentic national culture. An important point which Larkin raises is that the darsanic gaze is different

from the scopic relationship described in Western theories in that desire and identification in darsanic positioning are not based on wanting or wanting to be like the object of the gaze. Instead, the darsanic look demonstrates faith by seeing the figure "where only its image exists and by asking to be seen in turn." (Prasad; cited in Desai 2003, p. 239)

One wonders whether this can also explain the nature of stardom in the Bollywood context. Using the notion of "actor as text", Vijay Mishra (2008) submits that a Bollywood star like Amitabh Bacchan becomes a complex text sanctioned by mythology but constructed through the dual process of film production and audience reception. In this sense, the actor becomes a significant element in both the production and the reception of the film; s/he becomes a site of regimes of meaning necessary to construct processes of identification and continuity of audience response produced by the interplay of the film text and the audience member's cultural background. Also referring to the importance of star quality in Hindi film, Sumita Chakravarty (1993) echoes this sentiment, declaring that the continuity of recognition and response mediated by stardom hinges on the notion of authenticity. This view is also invoked by Rajinder Dudrah (2006), who posits that the agile human body of the Hindi film star becomes a literal and symbolic referent through which aspects of selfhood are projected on the screen. For Dudrah, the star actor becomes, through the performance, a site of mediation between long-standing religious texts and globalisation. Though neither Dudrah nor Chakravarty nor Mishra explain their views based on the concept of gaze put forth by Chatterjee, the parallel is clear. In all three positions, the body of the actor, be it through performance or frontal positioning, becomes a symbolic site for the assemblage of the audience members' desires. From a cultural specificity point of view, all these positions can be shown to locate the intelligibility of the Hindi film within the specificity of the South Asian cultural context. They can be seen to imply that influential cultural discourses are pliable enough to infiltrate, with great effect, cinematic narration – a point which can be read in Wimal Dissanayake's (2003) observation that all the forces that influence narration in Hindi film acquire meaning and relevance in accordance with the timeliness of social and cultural discourses.

Culture and Characterisation in the Hindi Film

As is the case with theories of spectatorship, the approach to the study of characterisation in the Hindi film often takes its cue from Indian tradition. This is not only evident in theoretical accounts that consider Indian culture to provide a frame of reference for the perception of the Hindi film. It is also clear in theories of characterisation confirming cultural inscriptions of characters in the Hindi film. In Vijay Mishra's (2008) view, the cuing of theories of narration from Indian culture is essential to the reading of all aspects of Hindi film. He writes:

> Any theoretical critique of the Bombay Cinema must begin with a systematic analysis of the grand Indian meta-text and founder of the Indian discursivity, namely the *Mahabharata* and *Ramayana.* This prerequisite is not just an intellectual ploy; it is the minimal starting point for a systematic analysis of this massive cultural artefact. (Mishra 2008; p. 42)

For Mishra this is essential because Hindi films employ a discursive practice that embeds itself in the narrative paradigms established by the *Mahabharata* and *Ramayana,* either by replacing or refocusing emphasis rather than radically challenging the narrative authority of these epics. He finds this crucial in order to avoid impartial insights into Hindi cinema, on the one hand, and to re-insert it into a continuous Indian cultural formation, on the other. He presents it as an adequate hermeneutic model with which to read Hindi films because thematic categories which characterise and prominently inform narration in Hindi films maintain the same culturally specific significance contained in the precursor text.

Here is Mishra's translation of a verse from the *Mahabharata:*

> *(In the [enchanting] embrace of his wife he, Pandu, and the joy of the Kurus, the foremost upholder of* ***dharma,*** *was united with the law of time.)*

This verse is said to describe the death of Pandu, who has been condemned to suffer sexual abstinence all his life. When one exciting day he finds his wife irresistible and ravishes her, he dies as a consequence of his passion. According to Mishra, this verse epitomises a play on the theme of desire both for the other, in sex, and for the self, in preservation. Such play on

desire, he adds, is a practice that has been espoused by numerous Hindi films, albeit significantly transformed.

Mishra's notion of 'play on desire' is best understood in conjunction with the theme of *dharma (*law) in the *Ramayana.* As in the *Ramayana,* Mishra observes that Hindi films give a surplus value to law, confirming the epics' impetus to reinforce the significance of an orderly transmission of power to preserve the ideology of caste and hierarchy. Hence, insofar as cultural specificity of the Hindi film is concerned, the crucial hermeneutic model for studying Hindi film resides in its appropriation of the *dharmic* categories.

Two such categories, with considerable ramifications in Hindi film, are Mishra's 'renouncer' and 'man-of-the world' categories. Mishra associates the renouncer with the typical 'estranged' hero who must perform a radical act of estrangement from the woman he loves to fulfil his higher sense of duty. He shows instances of this in *Deedar* (Pramod Chakravorti, 1992)where Dilip Kumar blinds himself after realising that Nargis, his love, does not recognise him, in *Rambai Ka Babu* where Devanand loses the woman he loves and in *Mother India* (Mehboob Khan, 1957) where Nargis shoots her son for subverting filial codes. He also associates the renouncer category with the character of the mother who most often renounces everything for the sake of her husband or son under the codes of filial obligations as stipulated by *dharma*, the code that maintains Hinduism.

Mishra also draws our attention to specific constellations of the character of the "Mother" which bear levels of articulation rooted in specific aspects of Indian culture. For example, the prestige of the mother character in the Hindi film is associated with a fundamental feature of Indian culture, namely the importance of genealogy. For Mishra, this is in line with the Indian view of the mother as the origin of all genealogical secrets; it identifies the category "Mother" as crucial in the transmission of genes, which in itself is very crucial to maintaining caste and hierarchy. It also confers the "Mother" the status of the upholder of *dharma* (law). It makes her word law. Accordingly, Mishra points out that it would be preferable to have a film in which the mother is dead in order for the narration to subvert some social codes

without the fear of a Mother's wrath. Even in the case of a prostitute character who is a mother, Mishra further submits that the Hindi film feels so uncomfortable with such a constellation of the 'Mother' category that the narration predominantly favours depiction of a prostitute that is yet undefiled, still possessing the virginal purity which makes her as perfect a mother as any.

What is striking in Mishra's take on the Mother category is that his frame of reference is the Hindu tradition where, he reminds us, every wife is always called *dharmapatni*, literally meaning the wife of *dharma*. All the examples he gives are from Hindi films that model the Mother category on the original dramatisation of women in the *Mahabharata* and *Ramayana* epics, a point which Kishwar also makes.

For Kishwar (2004), the Mother and the woman characters in Bollywood films amount to contemporary coinage of multifaceted incarnations of femininity derived from Indian mythology, history and legend. He writes:

> A woman can choose to be steadfast spouse like Sita, or a besotted lover like Radha, who throws all social restraints to the winds, or a fearless, awe-inspiring Durga. She could be a Rani Roopmati or a Rani Jhansi. She could be a Mirabai or an Indira Gandhi. (Kishwar 2004; p. 8)

Of all these categories, Kishwar notes that the character of the "Mother" occupies a status higher than God's in that any other character (a great doctor or a feared dacoit, a gangster or an upright police officer) may defy God, but may not act against the wishes of a Mother. It is important to note, affirms Kishwar, that in spite of her status, the Mother category remains subordinate to the superiority of family values, the ideal of a well-bonded emblematic joint family. Kishwar acknowledges that women in Hindi films are able to assert their rights as long as their assertiveness does not lead to a breakdown of families. This implies that every woman desirous of the recognition of her selfhood does not have to walk out of her home in order to win that recognition. What is not clear, but very interesting to note, is whether this adherence to family values can be shown to conform to the teachings of early Sanskrit texts

which, in Donald R. David's (2005) words, viewed households and families as the archetype of community and as the primary institution of the law.

Studies of the male characters in Hindi film reveal another level of cultural inscriptions different from that of the female characters. In an article on the male hero as centre of narrative meaning in Hindi films of the eighties, Sumita Chakravarty (1993) observes that the popular Hindi film engages with the question of identity at various levels of articulation through archetypal characters that become strong markers of Indian identity. Unlike Chakravarty, Manjunath Pendakur (2012) finds the centrality of the male character excessively predominant in both earlier and recent Hindi films. According to Pendakur, such predominance subscribes to the codification of proper behaviour drawn from *manusmriti,* a pivotal text of Hindu orthodoxy which provides no autonomy to women. He thus postulates that the whole narrative structure of Hindi cinema, especially the centrality of the male character, is in keeping with the *manusmriti* assumption that what happens outside the home is the man's domain while what happens in the household, the woman's. For example, he uses textual evidence from Hindi films to describe the punishment by death for the 'vamp' characters as a manifestation of the *manusmriti* fear of, and urge to control, women. He corroborates that with evidence from modern Hindi films that portray independent female characters who are willing to fight for their place but still succumb to patriarchal forces or get married and eventually conform to the *manusmriti* code.

Another aspect of characterisation which is said to conform to specific cultural imperatives in the Indian context is amplification and polarisation marked by the preponderance of one-dimensional, oversized and inflated characters. Nayar links this amplification to the structures and performative aspects of orality whose contouring of the Hindi film are prominently and consistently substantial in comparison with other historical or aesthetic influences. She remarks that in the oral universe, the memory cannot retain information that is not sufficiently amplified. Hence, to meet the cognitive needs of its spectator, the Hindi film resiliently depicts oversized characters who are heavily polarised with a focus on exterior exploits rather than on interior consciousness. In Nayar's view, this is truthful to the

aspect of oral tradition which conceives that nothing exists within a character that is not said. This sort of characterisation, states Nayar, is therefore used to render the performance and the story in a language certain to make the spectator's representation self-accessed and their identification assured.

Cultural Inscriptions of Bollywood Genres

Going against a universalising trend in Euro-American theories, the idea of genre has proven difficult to define in a universal context. Of the multiple reasons advanced for that, the issue of culture features prominently. According to Andrew Tudor (1974), that is because the crucial factors that distinguish a genre depend, in part, on the particular culture in which we are operating. According to other Euro-American scholars (Braudy 1976; Altman 2003; Schatz 1991; Wood 1977; Williams 2003), the issue of culture becomes problematic because of the function which genre films perform for audiences. The consensus is that genre exists as a sort of an implicit contract between the film-maker and the audience (Schatz 1991). This contract tacitly regulates the system of production, distribution and consumption of genre films (Grant 2003). Genre conventions thus provide fertile grounds for negotiating a relation between the expectations of a given audience and a specific production system (Altman 1984). As a result, the audience views each film forearmed with a complex set of anticipations learned through previous film viewing experiences (McKee 1997). These expectations and the knowledge they entail are public in status: they involve perceptual processes derived from experience of existing works (Neale 2003).

While some of the views above can be shown to be relevant to the notion of genre in the Bollywood context, the issue of culture in theories of Bollywood genres is seen from a favourable vantage point. Rather than being a problem in defining Bollywood genres, cultural inscriptions of Bollywood genre films are appreciated for giving Indian cinema a distinctiveness which, according to leading Indian scholars (Mishra 1985; Dudrah 2006; Valicha 1988; Chakravarty 1998; Prasad 1998), explains Hindi film's appeal to its devoted audience. This section analyses theoretical accounts to that effect. It focuses on the *masala*

genre mainly because of its propensity to incorporate generic features of other Bollywood genres.

Historically, the *masala* film is said to have been anticipated in the late 1960s by a type of B movies called stunt films packed with glamour and seen to represent the hopes and anxieties of the urban working class (Dudrah & Desai 2008). Often described as an all-inclusive genre, *masala* draws upon all aspects of Indian popular culture for their formulae (Dudrah 2006). Narration in the *masala* film is characterised by, among others, pastiche, digressions and conservatism, all best illustrated in the key component of the Hindi film: the song-and-dance sequences.

With regard to pastiche, Nayar (2008) describes the *masala* film as episodic, sequential and additive in nature, giving piece-meal and coarsely stitched together feeling. She finds these traits in the preponderance of chronological breaks in flash-backs, story-within-story structures and thematic recurrences. On the other hand, Dudrah's (2006) idea of the *masala* film as a pastiche lies in its loosely knit story where one can see "big city underworld crime, martial art fights with exaggerated hitting noise, car stunts, sexy cabarets, elaborate dance sequences, comedy romance and family melodrama – all in this one loosely knit story". (Dudrah 2006, p. 178)

According to Nayar, these features are necessary techniques used to handle a lengthy narrative, to keep it manageable, uncomplicated and memorable. This, she posits, is a characteristic inherited from the oral tradition of the two great Hindu epics, in keeping with the oral mindset's impetus to avoid the strain of developing structural cohesiveness and manipulating a lengthy narrative for tight shape and flow. That is because, in oral tradition, the brain alone serves as the storing and organising site for information.

Concerning digression, Nayar speaks of numerous side tracks that, unlike sub-plots, have little to no bearing on the major storyline but remain crucial to the reading of Hindi films. These digressions may be fun, funny, maudlin, titillating, and even gruesome – and they are

reflected in the obligatory song-and-dance sequences that punctuate every conventional Hindi film. For Nayar, these digressions are meant to amplify intelligibility and impact which they accomplish by adopting a form that is indigenously Indian: the oral propensity for repetition and additives that firmly resonates with an oral mindset of the Indian audience. Sangita Gopal and Biswarup Sen (2008) oppose such a culturalist/traditionalist account on the grounds that song and dance is common to all traditional societies and also popular in literate cultures such as Britain and the United States, where sports fans impulsively burst into songs during games. They also find weaknesses in the culturalist argument for forgetting that Bollywood is pure artifice which needs pay no fealty to the real conditions of life.

At first sight, Gopal and Sen's arguments appear quite convincing, but on closer reading of their view on the song-and-dance sequences, their argument can be shown to support the culturalist/traditionalist view. For example, they suggest that song-and-dance sequences are devices that allow Hindi films to posit versions of modernity that would otherwise be unrepresentable by the prose of the film, affording possibilities of joyous release that cannot be spoken by any character. First of all, one would expect Gopal and Sen to provide explanation of the forces that make these versions of modernity unrepresentable. To stand, their explanation will have to show that such forces are not cultural or traditional by default. Gopal and Sen neither offer such an explanation, nor attempt to disprove the cultural/traditional influences behind the joyous release. This is a predicament which also mars their subsequent arguments. In fact, these arguments appear to support the culturalist view.

For Gopal and Sen, the song-and-dance sequences provide both a context for the film as well as linking it to other cultural practices; they act as instruments for building interiority and subjectivity. As far as providing a context for the film and linking it to other cultural practices is concerned, the authors offer the example of film songs enjoying an existence outside of the film they were written for, thereby establishing a secondary cultural space external to and autonomous of film. We are told that the song-and dance sequences provide a platform for the characters to be more deeply individualised and self-expressive than the narrative would

allow; they posit a strong version of privacy and the private self. What we are not told is how cultural forces provide an occasion for film songs to establish a secondary cultural space external to and autonomous of film. Neither are we shown the extent to which cultural forces impinge on the construction of privacy or the private self. It is thus my submission that to convincingly dismiss the culturalist /traditionalist view of the functions of the song and dance sequences in the popular Hindi film, it is necessary to show that no cultural formation creates an imperative for these sequences, that their context bears no cultural connotation and that the need for building interiority and subjectivity is independent of cultural mechanisms. The fact that this is done through song-and-dance, rather than narrative and dialogue, is arguably itself culturally embedded (Ebrahim 2015, pers. comm., 11 February). Also, an analysis by Ashis Nandy shows how that is indeed the case.

In "Indian Cinema as a Slum's view of Politics", Nandy (1998) likens two processes active in the urban slum with those in popular Hindi film. He defines a slum as a constituency of people who are uprooted and partially decultured, people who have moved out of tradition and have been forced to loosen their community ties. Accordingly, to maintain access to cultural traditions, the slum recreates the remembered village in the forms of new community ties that provide a frame to cope with the compacted heterogeneity of stranger-neighbours. Nandy likens the process of the remembered village to the fact that early models of the Hindi film hero survive in more recent films. Describing the early hero as being a "less violent, more androgynous hero having a culturally rooted moral self and a sense of limits" (Nandy 1998; p 78), Nandy observes that even if Hindi films depict this hero as incapable of handling the new problems brought about by the new villain who has entered Indian life, this hero narrationally functions as a nostalgic moral presence in a world dominated by their new street-smart, ultraviolent incarnations – the politician-as-villain who pushes the hero into his new incarnation as anti-hero. This juxtaposition of the innocent hero with their ultraviolent incarnations in Hindi film is tantamount to the remembered village in the slum in that, while importing elements of modernity to the concepts of heroism, the very juxtaposition disavows such importation by neutralising the violent impulses of the politician-as-villain.

The importance of Nandy's 'slum' analogy is in his statement that popular Hindi cinema "creates a space for the global, the unitary and the homogenising but does so in a principle of plurality grounded in tradition" (Nandy 1998, p. 81). Unlike Gopal and Sen, who deploy modernity against the culturalist argument of the functionality of the Hindi film, Nandy's analogy highlights the inevitable negotiation between modernity and tradition in a way that it becomes difficult to imagine one without the other. It shows that even in a situation where the distant (modern) seems to predominate, it nonetheless remains so in negotiation with the local. One can then counter Gopal and Sen's anti-culturalist stance by arguing that the song and dance sequences can act as instruments for building interiority and subjectivity only in negotiation with the local, within its cultural context. This is even better demonstrated in Nayar's position on Hindi film's commitment to conservative traditionalism typical of oral cultures.

Among numerous features of Hindi film that confer on it a conservative nature, Nayar identifies the telescoping of temporality - a notion according to which the new is invariably incorporated into the old and synchronically presented as fitting the traditions of the ancestors. In Nayar's view, the Hindi film is characteristically regressive: any contemporary shifts in social relations often return to mythic patterns. For example, she notes, the contemporary city setting in *Baazigar* (Abbas Mustan, 1993) naturally segues with the film's end to ancient ruins and deep-rooted principles regarding family obligation and honour. This, according to Nayar, conforms to the idea of self-preservation as a collective affair and to the view that the fabric of oneself in oral culture is inclined towards communal structures of personality. Nayar finds such structures in the 'we'-inflected aspects of Hindi films which emphasise the preservation of the ordered society, considered in oral tradition as the highest good and goal towards which the hero's development is bent. As an example, Nayar presents the fact that in *Mother India* a mother shoots her wayward son rather than allowing him to run roughshod over the ethics of their community and run the risk of atomising the communal self. This preponderance of conservatism is also demonstrated in Lalitha Gopalan's (1997) study of the 'avenging-women' sub-genre and in Manjunath Pendakur's (2003) study of the snake genre.

In his study of the snake genre, a sub-genre of the Indian mythological film that recounts earthly adventures of powerful inhabitants of supernatural worlds, Pendakur shows how the structure of these films conforms to the conservative Hindu code of behaviour stipulated in *manusmriti.* Reading from two of these films, *Nagina* (Harmesh Malhotra 1985) and *Nagamandala* (T.S. Nagabharana 1997), he shows that in spite of these films often featuring powerful central female characters in the narrative, the very characters still conform to the *manusmriti* code.

In *Nagina,* the female snake character (in human form) pursues the male character, but after marriage, she begins to act like a regular daughter-in-law: she rejects her past and gives herself to the husband's family. To Pendakur, this complies with the *manusmriti* code of family honour according to which a daughter-in-law is expected to put her husband's priorities over her own. In a close analysis of *Nagamandala*, Pendakur points out that although the film appears to be female-centred, the film privileges the male by putting the central female character through a purity test to prove she has not committed adultery. The test is administered by the men of the village under the passive watch of the females. Pendakur goes on to corroborate these cultural inscriptions by citing *Nagamandala's* music director who stated that the film's female protagonist has power *because* she conforms to tradition (Ashwash 1997, cited in Pendakur 2003).

Like Pendakur, Lalitha Gopalan (1997) shows how, despite depicting strong leading female characters with a strong presence on screen as a challenge to the prevalent patriarchal pathology, the 'avenging-women' sub-genre of the *massala* film still relies on narration principles that blatantly display conformity with a distinctively Indian patriarchal ideology. Said to be a welcome break from stereotypical roles portraying women as submissive wives and dutiful mothers, the 'avenging-women' film opens with family settings which appear happy and normal according to Hindi conventions, but with a marked absence of paternal figures. The film starts with the rape of the protagonist who files charges against the perpetrator but is let down by the justice system that fails to convict the rapist. This miscarriage of justice leads to the passage of the protagonist from a sexual and judicial victim

into an avenging woman. Gopalan employs a feminist framework to deconstruct the genre's mode of address that aligns the narration with the same normalising patriarchal overtones which this genre purports to subvert.

For Gopalan, the genre does not dislodge or displace conventional representations of women in the Indian cinema: it fails to subvert the use of the woman's body as a stand-in for sex. Gopalan finds this in the structure of the revenge scenes, especially the portrayal of vigilante revenge scenes as equal to, or surpassing, the horror of rape. According to Gopalan, narration in this genre often resorts to a typical anatomical equation which locates the castrated male body in an analogous position to the raped female body so much so that one can read scenes of violent sex as rape retroactively. Rather than subvert patriarchal overtones, this feature of the 'avenging-women' film amounts to a giddy masculine concoction in the sense that, while providing the narrative pretext for revenge and allowing the female star to dominate the screen, a violent assertion of masculine power in the form of rape remains the organising principle of the genre. This can be read to imply that a female character can only have such power under the coercion of some form of masculine power. It subordinates the female's power to the male's; it represents the agency of the female character as reactionary to, and dependent on, the male power and therefore conforms to the inherent dictates of patriarchal social relations with regard to gender imbalance.

Another form of patriarchal pathology that Gopalan finds in the 'avenging-women' sub-genre is the portrayal of the paternal nature of the justice system whereby the state's betrayal of the rape victim is equally accompanied by patriarchal abandonment. Together, these factors consolidate the motivation to shift the narrative towards a transgressive vigilante path. In Gopalan's view, while this trajectory incites anxiety toward the phallic female and opens a fresh representational circuit for women on the Indian screen, the unfettered power of the female character is undercut when the authority of the state is finally reeled in. Gopalan reads this in the narrative closures of these films whereby the avenging woman's access to power is always limited by the arrival of the police which unwittingly connotes the avenging woman's own overwhelming investment in the restoration of a threatened social imaginary. While

other scholars (Prasad 2008, for example) note that this typical narrative closure remains pre-eminent in the majority of Hindi film genres, from Gopalan's perspective we can infer this narrative closure to mean that the film fails to represent a picture of a state of gender balance different from the one prevalent in social power relations. It fails to subvert patriarchy's normalising overtones on the issue of gender. In Gopalan's view, this is because the film takes its national audience as its imagined addressee which consequently limits the film's potential to stray from successful, yet conventional, modes of address that do not accommodate or re-integrate the woman into the social and civic order.

From Gopalan's cue, one can further argue that the Hindi film consciously *reveres* the Indian patriarchal culture since there is no shortage of devices, other than rape by a male perpetrator, which can be used to give agency or a strong screen presence to the female characters. I am referring to devices which need not be a reaction to any male action because the very action is by a male. Nor do they have to adopt a narration strategy that excludes males from the narrative. They can encompass any device that can offer agency to the female character without challenging male power. Why the Hindi film does not resort to these devices is a question that highlights the special affinity between narration in Hindi film and Indian culture, which many Indian theories of Bollywood genres confirm.

It is important to note that this affinity is not arbitrary. It takes the form of a strategy which the narration employs to strike a chord with its audience, perhaps as a cautionary measure against alienating it. On the one hand, this highlights the fact that genres of the Hindi film mine Indian culture for their structure and do so within a context which can be described as moderately conservative: while conforming to Indian cultural codes, these conventions do take into cognisance the modern concerns of its intended audience. On the other hand, it raises the question as to how Bollywood genres conflate issues that go with representation models faithful to dominant cultural constructs. For example, while genre conventions in the Hindi film are shown to conform to different codes of Hindu culture and while the very stance is said to contribute to the favourable reception and commercial success of Hindi film, we are not told by Indian theorists the extent to which these conventions *succeed* or *fail* to,

deconstruct its concomitant cultural antecedent. Neither are we told the extent to which a film's deconstruction of the codes of Indian culture translates into the film's lack of success.

Conclusion

From theories of narrative comprehension and characterisation to those of genres in Hindi films, my analysis reveals two important trends with regard to theoretical approaches and narration strategies respectively. The first trend to feature prominently and specifically entails a theoretical approach that draws upon Indian cultural terms of reference to explain different aspects of narration in Hindi films. It encompasses acknowledging the significance of the cultural context in which narration is produced. What is most striking about this approach is that it does not eventuate in cultural essentialism of the sort that presents a given culture as transcending others. In fact, a good number of Indian theories analysed in this chapter have shown high levels of awareness of the effects of modernity and globalisation on Indian culture in general and on Hindi films in particular. They have shown that Hindi films strive to present a world where a happy balance between the traditional and the modern is possible. This notwithstanding, Indian theories go beyond these phenomena to demonstrate specific cultural inscriptions that characterise narration in Hindi film and the extent to which such inscriptions explain the intelligibility of narration. Even the balance between the traditional and the modern is said to be portrayed in subordination to certain traditional values that must be kept intact in order to warn its audience against a mindless modernity.

It is also clear that Indian theorists emphasise locating Hindi films within a continuous Indian cultural formation to show the contextual limitations of Western theoretical paradigms. Unlike African and Latin-American theories, Indian theories explain the workings of Hindi cinema independently of any preconceived, prescriptive criteria of how narration ought to work. They present substantial evidence from Hindi films to support their claims, justifying the futility of subsuming Indian film studies into paradigms based on externally-conceived cultural forms. As Dissanayake (2003) has argued, this is one way of creating more locally based vocabularies of cinematic re-description. Because of the systematic and repeatable

nature of the Indian theoretical approach, it appears feasible to suggest that this approach can indeed be applicable to theorization in other cultural contexts, especially the case where theorization draws upon specific cultural terms of reference to explain different aspects of filmic narration in specific cultural contexts.

Regarding narration strategies, it is evident that Hindi films employ a mode of address which integrates the new with the local in a manner likely to be expected or tolerated by the Indian audience. This mode of address is inherently integrative in the sense that it mediates between the disruptions of modernity and deeply entrenched values and norms of the Indian people. It entails drawing upon Hindu epics, mythologies and other cultural forms as a potent tool to place the Hindi film within the realm of the familiar. This disposition to integrate the new with the old is intended to make the story predictable for the Indian audience and therefore meet their predilection for repetition – a predilection rooted in a specifically Indian traditional conservatism which also happens to be grounded in Indian oral tradition. Indeed, many theories state that this integrative approach is a technique tacitly employed by film-makers to enhance the intelligibility of Hindi film within the specificity of the distinctive but changing South Asian cultural context.

That notwithstanding, there are still some notable silences which accompany the Indian theoretical approaches. While we are shown the extent to which culture-specific inscriptions permeate narration in Hindi film, while these inscriptions are said to enhance the distinctiveness of Hindi film and enhance its intelligibility, and while such a narration approach is lauded for subverting the domination of Western models of film production and its attendant theorization , there is a staggering lack of ethnographic evidence to show the Indian audience's own acknowledgement of these cultural inscriptions as a criterion for the popularity of the Hindi film. Nor is there any study that references audience members acknowledging the extent to which cultural inscriptions in the Hindi film contribute to the intelligibility of film. Claims to that effect are more often based on theoretical deduction than on empirical evidence of audience members owning up to the same claims. The claim, for example, that Hindi film enjoys popularity in Western Africa because its oral contours

resonate with the African oral tradition (Nayar 2008) is delivered in the abstract, with no actual supporting evidence from the audience.

This does not falsify these claims but points us to more directions for further inquiry. One important aspect of such inquiry would be to test the validity of this assumption from an audience viewpoint. If that can be done, then I submit that the theoretical approach in Indian theories of cinematic narration stands to be an exceptionally beneficial model to emulate.

CHAPTER 5

Conclusions

The main aim of this research has been to discover the extent to which cultural dynamics inform, or not, theories of cinematic narration in specific cultural contexts. It undertook to deconstruct, so as to test out, *theories* of cinematic narration (rather than films) against a working hypothesis that the *validity of a theory of cinematic narration is relatively linked to its degree of relevance to a specific cultural context*. The results were that while some theories seemed to confirm this hypothesis to a considerable extent, there were several others that made such confirmation problematic. I must acknowledge that these results may not pertain to all existing theories in film studies and/or other fields because (1) my research has been limited to theories of cinematic nation written or translated in English, (2) it has been limited, in scope, to three aspects of cinematic narration (characterisation, spectatorship and genre theory) and (3) it has encompassed theories of cinematic narration in only four geographical-cum-cultural contexts: Euro-American, African, Latin-American and Indian.

In Euro-American theories, it became clear that predominant Euro-American theoretical positions are continuous with Euro-American cultural thoughts ranging from Puritanism and Social Darwinism to Idealism and Individualism. For examples, the analysis revealed instances of theoretical positions that explain characterisation and genre conventions from an epistemology continuous with the Puritan concept of divine predestination according to which in Adam's fall, we are all guilty; election, if it comes, is an action initiated by God over which we have no influence. There are also positions that confer the lone protagonist a status symbolical of 'the socially selected' notion of Social Darwinism. Other positions cater to a Euro-American idealist view of a world where life problems can be joyfully dealt with in community as it is often portrayed in musicals where everyone is exceptionally attuned to bursting into song and dance.

Rather than confirm it, Euro-American theoretical positions present a challenge to my hypothesis, notably by their failure to acknowledge the cultural specificity of cinematic

narration or the continuity of theoretical positions with specific Euro-American cultural thoughts. It has also transpired that Euro-American theories adopt a universalising posture by failing to link their theoretical claims to the cultural contexts within which they are conceived; Euro-American theories tend to pay very little attention to the diversity of cultural contexts and their impact on narration principles. Other equally important features of Euro-American theories that can be deemed antithetical to my hypothesis are: a remarkable shortage of culturally comparative studies of cinematic narration, silences about the contextual limitations of theoretical claims and an approach that homogenises the impact of cultural contexts on narration and its theorization. This approach presupposes a neutral narration form into which any story can fit, irrespective of its cultural context.

For examples, a body of Euro-American cognitive theories of spectatorship align themselves with assumptions of a singular, accessible meaning of the film narrative, ignoring the plurality of background experiences of audience members. In this ignorance, Euro-American theories reveal an impetus to homogenize the process of film comprehension by failing to acknowledge contextual frames of reference to their theories as well as the impact of cultural, linguistic and environmental dynamics on perception itself. We thus can interpret this approach to imply either unity of subjectivity or uniformity of meaning formation routines for all the viewers, which amounts to a trend to universalize principles of cinematic narration.

Other than the antithetical relation to my hypothesis, the juxtaposition of a universalising façade and the unacknowledged cultural legacy evident in Euro-American theories raises some concerns about the relevance of Euro-American theories in other cultural contexts. Because Euro-American theories appear continuous with particular cultural Euro-American thoughts, their relevance to cinematic productions in other cultures becomes questionable and raises concerns about the fact that Euro-American theoretical models continue to predominate film studies in spite of the pervasiveness of anti-Eurocentric sentiments.

These concerns aside, it can be argued that the validity of Euro-American theories seems most likely relevant in Euro-American contexts because of the continuity of Euro-American

theoretical positions with Euro-American cultural thoughts. In fact, a good number of these positions advance the view that cultural imprints in narration are crucial in the intelligibility of a film. This view is, however, marred by inconsistencies in theoretical positions, especially the lack of evidence of the audience members' own accounts of the manner in which cultural imprints in narration do indeed affect the intelligibility of a film. While it is said that cultural imprints inform stylistic and formal choices in cinematic narration, rare are theoretical positions that make use of an audience perspective to corroborate that view. The implication of this dichotomy is two-fold: (1) it suggests that reading cinematic texts in their own cultural contexts presents a higher possibility of an adequate explanation of narration in that context and (2) it renders this suggestion problematic because of the scarcity of ethnographic evidence to support it.

Similar implications can also be deduced from theoretical positions about the impact of cultural mechanisms on the Hindi film. My analysis of theories of narration in the popular Hindi film has revealed a theoretical approach that draws upon Indian cultural terms of reference to explain different aspects of narration in Hindi films. This approach encompasses acknowledging the significance of the cultural context in which narration is produced; it seeks to demonstrate specific cultural inscriptions that characterise narration in the Hindi film and it goes on to explain the extent to which such inscriptions enhance the intelligibility of narration in the Hindi film. As a case in point, we have theoretical positions that demonstrate that a balance between the traditional and the modern is portrayed in such a manner that this balance remains subordinate to certain deeply entrenched traditional values which must be kept intact. This approach was identified as crucial to demonstrate the contextual limitations of Western theoretical paradigms in favour of what Dissanayake (2003) has described as locally based vocabularies of cinematic re-description.

Evidence has also shown that Hindi films employ a mode of address which integrates the purely modern and the intrinsically local in order to be accessible to the audience members. It has been said that this mode of address is rooted in a specifically Indian traditional conservatism which entails drawing upon Hindu epics, mythologies and other cultural forms

as potent tools to place the Hindi film within the realm of the familiar and thereby make the story predictable for the Indian audience. Taken in the Indian cultural context, this integrative approach is seen as a tacit technique employed by filmmakers in order to enhance the intelligibility of the Hindi film within the specificity of the South Asian cultural context.

As it is with Euro-American theories, Indian theoretical approaches problematize my hypothesis by juxtaposing theoretical positions that explain the Hindi film from a distinctively Indian cultural formation with silences about spectators' ethnographic responses. We are shown the extent to which culturally specific inscriptions permeate narration in the Hindi film. These cultural inscriptions are said to enhance the distinctiveness of the Hindi film and subvert the domination of Western models of film production and its attendant theorization. To a large extent, these views are backed by evidence from empirical audience researches. However, other theoretical positions do not reference audience members' acknowledging the extent to which cultural inscriptions contribute to the intelligibility of Hindi films. Claims to that effect are rarely based on empirical evidence of audience members owning up to the same claims. That does not however falsify these claims. It rather points us to more directions for further inquiry. One important aspect of such inquiry would be to test out the validity of this assumption from points of view of audience members. If that can be done, then I submit that the theoretical approach in Indian theories of cinematic narration stands to be an exceptional model worth emulating, especially its systematic reliance on specific cultural terms of reference to explain different aspects of filmic narration in specific cultural contexts.

The results of my analysis of African narration theories have highlighted a much more conflicting dichotomy. African theories suggest that African films draw upon culturally specific modes of address and aesthetics but the evidence to substantiate such claims remains predominantly continental in scope, lacking in specificity and therefore somewhat inconsequential. While it is argued that African films employ a culturally-inspired aesthetics which invoke unspoken values of African norms, there is no indication of what these values may be, neither is there any attempt to define the very idea of a culturally-inspired aesthetics.

The little evidence given appears therefore too inconsequential to explain the Africanity of African films. Given also their heavier reliance on philosophical abstractions than on empirical evidence, some African theories have shown a tendency to homogenize cultural formations despite the diversity of African cultural contexts.

We find a similar predicament in Latin American theories, that is, while arguing for culturally-based interpretation of Latin American films, Latin American theorists offer very little evidence of what is culturally specific to the Latin American context upon which theories of cinematic narration can draw. It is not clear whether or not this approach contributes to the continued domination of Western theoretical paradigms and their corollary cinematic texts. It is however clear that Latin American *theory*, like their African counterparts, cannot claim to subvert Western models. Neither do they effectively show that Latin American *films* do so.

There is nonetheless an interesting parallel between African and Latin American theories: both camps present insightful views which, with further exploration, show a potential for an enriching approach to theorising cinematic narration. There is the view that African cinematic practices form a deliberate fragmentation in which African philosophical thoughts form the basis for the indelible register of social concerns. Although there is insufficient evidence to substantiate that claim, focusing on cultural thoughts which are limited to a specific cultural context, if combined with an ethnographic study of film perception, presents fecund grounds on which to think of culture-based principles of cinematic narration. Another potent view is Viera's (2007) suggestion that a culturally specific cinematic practice does not require rewriting of cinematic codes, that it should rather rely on cinematic codes that suit, or are made to suit, the context of a film without submitting to slavish imitation. In the interest of this research, Vieira's view leads our attention to the cross-cultural validity, or otherwise, of narration theories.

In all the cases herein analysed (Euro-American, Latin American, Indian and African theories), the issue of cross-cultural contextual validity of many theories of cinematic

narration became conspicuous, especially by the scarcity of ethnographic studies. This research has highlighted that many theories do indeed testify to the need for a link between narration and its cultural context but *none* looked at cinematic narration from a cross-cultural perspective. Because of the compelling evidence that shows the affinity between narration and culture and because of the impression of universality that permeates many Euro-American theories, it would be interesting to know the cross-cultural effect of cultural inscriptions in cinematic narration from points of view of audience members.

In that regard, further investigations of an ethnographic nature will need to be carried out. Such studies should gain more substance by adopting a comparative cross-cultural approach. This can entail studies where responses of putative audience members to a culturally inscripted film are recorded and compared with responses of the same audience members to another film that is culturally inscripted within a remote cultural formation. It can also entail studies where responses of putative audience members from different cultural backgrounds are recorded and compared with reference to the same film. These studies may need to pay particular attention to audience member's own account of how cultural inscriptions contribute to the intelligibility, the popularity or the success of a film. If rigorous and complete, it is my submission that such studies can contribute to a culturally specific understanding of films within various cultural contexts and thereby recast new constellations on the notion of cinematic value. I am referring to cinematic value primarily defined by the filmmaker's effectiveness to draw upon the cultural context, or his/her effectiveness to use the audience members' conditions of existence as a frame of reference to enhance the intelligibility of his/her story. It is my hope that such studies might not only enhance the appreciation of cinematic texts but that they may as well demystify very important areas of film studies.

If done consistently, cross-cultural ethnographic studies can enable the task proposed by post-theorist scholars who foresee advancement of film studies as dependent on theories that focus on seeking solutions to contextually-motivated theoretical problems (Bordwell 1996; Carroll 1996). Such studies may also support and verify views that accurate definitions of

cinemas must acknowledge historical *specificities* and the discontinuities and complexities of localised situations (Walsh 1996). This, I posit, can be facilitated by a culture-based contextualisation of cinematic codes in general and principles of narration in particular. In this way, culturally contextualised principles of narration become tools to free film studies from generalist theories that essentialize certain discursive practices.

Cross-cultural ethnographic studies of cinematic narration can also be useful to cross-cultural film analysis in the tradition of Hui Miao (2010) who worries that in cross-cultural analysis one is forced to read the works produced by the Other through the constraints of one's own frameworks. Accordingly, that runs the risk of placing the Other in an objective position where one transplants one's own cultural theories across the border onto the Other. That, in Miao's view, fails to generate or promote an original understanding of other cultures. Against that, he posits that a balanced cross-cultural analysis be based on rigorous scrutiny of culturally-specific historical and socio-cultural contexts.

Perhaps no aspect of film scholarship can be better served by cross-cultural ethnographic studies of cinematic narration than scholarship on national cinema, particularly because of their view of cinematic distinctiveness as a powerful weapon in what William Brown (2010) calls 'a globalised war for visibility on the world's cinema screens.' In this war, Brown warns that because much of the majority of film studies is done in Euro-American universities, it can only by definition skew the academic agenda in favour of a Eurocentric viewpoint. I submit that this is a battle that requires rigorous, ethnographic studies that interrogate the cross-cultural relevance of theoretical positions and test out the validity of existing culture-based theoretical approaches.

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