

**ADDIS ABABA UNIVERSITY
COLLEGE OF SOCIAL SCIENCES, ARTS AND HUMANITIES
CENTER FOR AFRICAN AND ASIAN STUDIES**

**AFRICANA WOMANIST GAZE ON HAILE GERIMA'S CINEMATIC
IDEOLOGY**

BY

TIGIST ALEMAYEHU GION

MARCH, 2026

ADDIS ABABA, ETHIOPIA

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IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY IN AFRICAN AND ASIAN STUDIES

MARCH, 2026

ADDIS ABABA, ETHIOPIA

DECLARATION

I, Tigist Alemayehu Gion, hereby declare that this thesis entitled "*Africana Womanist Gaze on Haile Gerima's Cinematic Ideology*" is my own original work and has not been submitted, either in whole or in part, for any other degree or qualification at any other university or institution of higher learning.

Except where due acknowledgment has been made in the text, this thesis contains no material previously published or written by another person. All sources of information and data used in this study have been properly cited and referenced in accordance with accepted academic standards.

I further declare that this research has been conducted in full compliance with the ethical standards and regulations of Addis Ababa University, College of Social Sciences, Arts and Humanities. I affirm that I have not engaged in any form of plagiarism, data fabrication, or academic dishonesty, and that the work presented here is the result of my independent scholarly effort.

This thesis is submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) in the College of Social Sciences, Arts and Humanities, Addis Ababa University.

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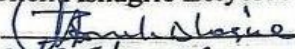
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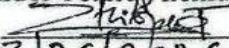
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This is to certify that the dissertation prepared by *Tigist Alemayehu Gion*, entitled: *Africana womanist Gaze on Haile Gerima's Cinematic Ideology* submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy *African and Asian studies* complies with the regulations of the University and meets the accepted standards with respect to originality and quality.

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DEDICATION

This work is lovingly dedicated to my daughter, Amen Melake, who continues to teach me the unknown secrets of life and the mysteries of human nature. Her existence has been a constant source of inspiration.

ABSTRACT

This study analyzes the cinematic ideology of Haile Gerima through the dual lenses of Africana Womanism and Africana Critical Theory, situating his work within the broader intellectual genealogy of African, Pan-African, and diasporic revolutionary thought. It argues that his cinema constitutes a distinctly decolonial praxis one that fuses political resistance, cultural reclamation, and gendered agency into a transformative aesthetic and ideological project. Grounded in the theoretical insights of Frantz Fanon, Amílcar Cabral, Kwame Nkrumah, and Julius Nyerere, alongside Africana Womanist scholarship such as Clenora Hudson-Weems, the research reconceptualizes Haile Gerima's filmography and writings as Black Radical Memory–Praxis Cinema: a cinematic ideology that treats historical memory as both a critical archive and a pathway to liberation. Methodologically, the study employs a qualitative design integrating textual analysis, ideological critique, and historical contextualization. It examines Haile Gerima's films within the intersecting frameworks of Third Cinema, Black Radicalism, and Ethiopianist autonomy, highlighting how his narratives expose cinema's racialized and gendered structures while reclaiming the medium as a communal tool of storytelling. This approach foregrounds the cultural, spiritual, and collective dimensions of liberation that animate Gerima's work, especially his commitment to re-centering Africana women as carriers of memory, moral authority, and cultural continuity. The findings reveal that Gerima's cinema synthesizes four interlocking ideological pillars: Black Radical politics, Pan-African consciousness, Ethiopianist self-definition, and Third Cinema praxis. Through this synthesis, he reshapes cinema into a form of revolutionary Radical Memory-Praxis, an art of remembrance and reconstruction that binds historical consciousness to moral and spiritual renewal. The study terms this synthesis "Haile Gerima's Style." The thesis contributes to Africana film and cultural studies by demonstrating the analytical power of Africana thought as both a theoretical and methodological framework for examining Africana cinema. It concludes that Haile Gerima's filmmaking embodies a liberatory epistemology rooted in collective memory, gendered balance, and the enduring struggle for Africana self-representation.

Key words: - African Cinema, Africana Womanism, Black Independent Cinema, Black Radical Cinema, Cinematic Ideology, Film, Haile Gerima, Gaze.

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CHAPTER ONE

1. INTRODUCTION

2.1. Background of the study

The term “Africana” has been used by intellectuals for more than a century to represent the life worlds and experiences of continental and diaspora Africans as well as the “convergence of most Africans with the racial term ‘Black’ and its many connotations” (Gordon, 2008). According to Outlaw (1997), the racial identification of this population as African or of African descent is not based on shared genetic uniformity but rather on distinct combinations of specific traits that arise from local bio-cultural evolutions of groups originating in a particular geographical area- Africa. He has asserted that, over extended periods and across vast continental areas, these groups have shared increasingly varied biological and cultural heritages that have been perpetuated, to different extents, through origin, movements, and migrations. He has elaborated that groups within a race often have unique genetic characteristics and cultural practices, influenced by their “ancestors,” which can lead to varying prevalence of physical traits and traditions across people of African origin. Therefore, the identification based on race, which comprises a blend of biological traits and cultural attributes that create common ancestral similarities among diverse groups of people, is denoted by the term "Africana," which specifically refers to individuals of African and those of African descent.

W.E.B. Du Bois is acknowledged for hypothesizing the notion while initially proposing the creation of the *Encyclopedia Africana* in 1909 to chronicle the history and condition with the contributions of Black intellectuals. According to Contee (1971), Du Bois has planned a special kind of encyclopedia by the name that only focuses on Africans and African descendants rather than all types of knowledge of every society. He proposed a comprehensive scientific work on people of African origin that would disprove the Enlightenment notion of the Black race that they do not have any significance in world civilization (Gates, 2000). Du Bois’s unique interest in Africa and its daughters and sons in America, Europe, and other parts of the world led to a set sequence of Pan-African congresses held in different places (Gomez, 2004). Since then, with influences from different intellectuals, the concept and application of Africana thought have developed meaningfully.

Africana thought encompasses the range of inquiries arising from the concepts centering on African cultures and their hybrid and mixed forms found in Europe, North America, Central and South America, and the Caribbean. It also pertains to the questions posed by the historical endeavors of conquest and colonization that began in 1492, along with the ongoing struggles for liberation that persist today (Gordon, 2000b). Thus, the conception of Africana can be used as an umbrella notion to situate the collective experiences of African descent people living in different parts of the world.

In this research, two theoretical frameworks within the broader Africana intellectual tradition will be employed: Africana Critical Theory (ACT), to analyze and interpret Haile Gerima's cinematic ideology, and Africana Womanism, to explore the significance of his ideological framework for Africana women in cinema. Africana Critical Theory, as developed by Reiland Rabaka (2006, 2009), foregrounds the intellectual contributions of African-descended scholars and activists, challenging the Eurocentric hierarchy that often frames figures like C. L. R. James, Frantz Fanon, and Du Bois as derivative of European thought (Bogues, 2003). Rabaka emphasizes that Africana thought offers original insights into oppression, liberation, and social justice, critiquing mainstream paradigms including Marxism, feminism, and postmodernism for neglecting African-centered perspectives. ACT draws on Afrocentric methodologies privileging ideas "born of struggle" (Asante, 1988, 1990, 1998), linking historical, cultural, and political analyses with praxis-oriented action (Claybrook, 2020; Tillotson, 2016). Through the works of Du Bois, Amílcar Cabral, Fanon, Walter Rodney, Kwame Nkrumah, and contemporary thinkers such as Karenga (1993), Smallwood (2001), and Stewart (2001), ACT interrogates structures of racial, imperial, and patriarchal domination while envisioning revolutionary alternatives rooted in Africana philosophical and cultural traditions (Bassey, 2007; Outlaw, 2004; Hernton, 1966; Gordon, 1997).

Within this framework, Clenora Hudson-Weems's Africana Womanism (1993, 2004, and 2001) articulates a gender-conscious, African-centered perspective addressing the experiences, struggles, and resilience of women of African descent (Nitiri, 1993; Ahmed, 2019). Africana Womanism situates liberation within the triadic interconnection of race, gender, and family, emphasizing self-definition, community solidarity, and spiritual integrity. Historical scholarship highlights the specific vulnerabilities and agency of African-descendant women: Iliffe (2007)

traces the population history linking early Africans to their descendants, including the transatlantic slave trade, while Hudson-Weems (1989) details the physical, sexual, and economic exploitation endured by enslaved women. Morgan (2015) further illustrates how reproductive labor under American slavery transformed women's maternal roles into economic assets for enslavers, compounding burdens of coerced labor and familial disintegration. Despite these oppressive conditions, African-descendant women demonstrated leadership and resilience, participating in anti-slavery and anti-colonial struggles (Darboe, 2006; Dewey, 2012; Makana, 2019; Shaldon, 2017; Hiralal, 2017). Africana Womanism thus provides a culturally grounded corrective to Western feminist paradigms, recognizing women as central agents of resistance, communal continuity, and moral authority (Ahmed, 2019).

Haile Gerima's cinematic ideology complements both ACT and Africana Womanism by situating African-descended experiences within a framework of historical recovery, cultural self-determination, and Pan-Africanist thought (Gerima, 1982; 1989; 1991; 1993; 1996; 2001; 2010; 2016; 2023; Turner & Kamdibe, 2008; Thomas, 2010, 2013; Belachew, 2018). From early works such as *Hour Glass* (1972) and *Child of Resistance* (1972) to narrative films like *Harvest: 3,000 Years* (1976), *Bush Mama* (1976), *Ashes and Embers* (1982), *Sankofa* (1993), and *Teza* (2008), as well as documentaries including *Wilmington 10-USA 10,000* (1978), *After Winter: Sterling Brown* (1985), *Imperfect Journey* (1994), and *Adwa: An African Victory* (1999), Gerima foregrounds the moral, spiritual, and historical roles of women. Characters such as Mona in *Sankofa* exemplify the Africana Womanist focus on communal and spiritual awakening (Hudson-Weems, 1993; Nfah-Abbenyi, 1997). Gerima's essays from *On an Independent Black Cinema* (1982) and *Triangular Cinema, Breaking the Toys, and Dinknesh vs. Lucy* (1989) to *In the Images of Africa* and *Thoughts and Concepts: The Making of Ashes and Embers* (1991) advocate for independent filmmaking rooted in self-definition, cultural authenticity, and Pan-Africanist vision. Influenced by his Ethiopian heritage, diasporic encounters, and engagement with figures such as Malcolm X, Fanon, Du Bois, Cabral, and Sembene (Belachew, 2021; Berry, 2005; Harries, 2004; Thomas, 2010, 2013; Turner and Kamdibe, 2008), Gerima advances the concept of revolutionary memory, using cinema as a medium for historical reclamation and communal rebirth (Gerima, 2016; Gabriel, 1989; Cham, 1984; Diawara, 1992; Ukadike, 1994).

By integrating Africana Womanism into cinematic analysis, scholars can fully appreciate how Haile Gerima's films function as philosophical praxis, emphasizing the interconnected gendered, spiritual, and communal dimensions of African liberation. His work challenges Eurocentric frameworks, foregrounds women as custodians of cultural memory and moral authority, and illuminates the ongoing relevance of African-centered thought within visual culture. In doing so, Gerima's cinematic ideology not only embodies the principles of ACT and Africana Womanism but also provides a unique lens for understanding the radical potential of Black independent cinema in shaping collective identity, historical consciousness, and the pursuit of liberation.

2.2. Statement of the Problem

Despite extensive scholarship on African cinema, postcolonial theory, and decolonial aesthetics, the cinematic ideology of Haile Gerima has not been systematically examined as a coherent, gender-conscious, and philosophically grounded system. Although Haile Gerima's Independent filmmaking practices and cinematic innovations have been acknowledged by researchers like Diawara (1992), Ukadike (1994) Cham (1996) his work has not been theorized as an integrated intellectual project. Existing studies often reduce his cinema to its political commitments or stylistic features, obscuring the deeper spiritual, ethical, and gendered foundations that align closely with Africana Womanist thought and Africana Critical Theory. This absence of systematic theorization creates a significant epistemological gap in understanding how Gerima conceptualizes liberation through film.

Scholars such as Ukadike (1994), Diawara (1992), Gabriel (1989), Cham (1996), and Petty (1995) have described Haile Gerima's contributions to Independent filmmaking practice, Third Cinema and anti-imperialist, their analyses frequently remain confined to the political surface of his films. Such readings overlook the profound ethical and spiritual dimensions that shape his narratives and inform his decolonial cinematic grammar. With more than fifty years in filmmaking, Haile Gerima's cinema which traverses Ethiopian history, African continental struggles, and the broader Black diaspora has not been articulated as a decolonial philosophical system that interweaves gendered agency, ancestral memory, and cultural regeneration. This lack

of attention reinforces the dominance of Western and masculinist interpretive paradigms that continue to structure African film studies.

As Patricia Hill Collins (2000) argues, epistemic exclusion the erasure of Black women's ways of knowing remains deeply embedded within intellectual discourse. In African film criticism, this exclusion obscures the emergence of an Africana Womanist gaze, one that foregrounds relationality, spirituality, community ethics, and ancestral continuity as central components of resistance. A recurring problem in the field is the marginalization of Africana women's agency, whose roles are frequently subsumed under nationalist or patriarchal frameworks (Nfah-Abbenyi, 1997; Ogunleye, 2004). Yet Haile Gerima's films consistently challenge such erasures. In *Sankofa* (1993), *Harvest: 3000 Years* (1976), *Bush Mama* (1976), and other works, Gerima positions Africana women as moral centers, genealogical transmitters, and agents of historical and spiritual continuity (Thomas, 2012; Cham, 1996). His narratives portray womanhood as a site of epistemic renewal and ontological wholeness an overlooked feature in the existing scholarship.

Despite this, Africana Womanism defined by Clenora Hudson-Weems (1993, 2004) as a paradigm rooted in the historical, cultural, and spiritual experiences of African-descended peoples (Hudson-Weems, 2004; Phillips, 2006), has rarely been applied to African Cinema including Haile Gerima's work. This abandonment is particularly unusual given that many of his protagonists are women and that Haile Gerima himself directly confronts gender exclusion in his essay "*Where Are the African Women Filmmakers?*" The failure to engage Africana Womanism has limited scholarly recognition of the gendered, spiritual, and communal ethics that animate his decolonial cinematic practice.

African film scholarship also remains constrained by Western feminist frameworks that inadequately capture the cultural specificities of African womanhood. The Africana Womanist paradigm (Hudson-Weems, 1993, 2004; Maparyan, 2012) offers a culturally grounded alternative that emphasizes self-definition, spirituality, moral complementarity, and communal interdependence as foundations of liberation. Its application to African cinema and particularly to the films of Haile Gerima remains largely unexplored, limiting the interpretive possibilities for understanding his ethical and philosophical vision. Michael W. Thomas (2012) illuminates

tensions within Haile Gerima's Pan-Africanism, particularly the interplay between Ethiopian nationalism and diasporic solidarity, as seen in *Adwa: An African Victory* (1999) and *Teza* (2008). Africana Womanism, as Alexander-Floyd and Simien (2006) argue, integrates race, gender, and historical memory into a coherent analytical framework, one that resonates strongly with Gerima's emphasis on intergenerational continuity and the central role of women in cultural and historical regeneration.

Three interrelated gaps thus define the state of the scholarship:

1. Lack of a Systematic Articulation of Haile Gerima's Cinematic Ideology. Although his cinema in relation to Third Cinema practices are widely examined, no study has theorized his cinema as a holistic epistemological and philosophical system grounded in Africana worldviews. His synthesis of spirituality, ancestral memory, and historical consciousness remains understudied.
2. Absence of Africana Womanist Interpretations on African cinema made by women or male. Africana Womanism emphasizes male female complementarity, asserting that the liberation of Africana women is inseparable from the collective liberation of Africana communities. A key principle within this framework is the male alliance, which recognizes the active role Africana men play in supporting women's struggles against oppression. In this light, Haile Gerima, although he is a male filmmaker, his work consistently critiques the marginalization of women and foregrounds their centrality to cultural survival, communal integrity, and spiritual continuity. His denunciation of women's exclusion from the film industry and his portrayal of women as custodians of memory, resistance, and healing demonstrate a generative partnership rather than an oppositional gender dynamic. Therefore, applying Africana Womanism to Gerima's films not only uncovers overlooked dimensions of gender, spirituality, and communal identity, but also highlights how his artistic practice embodies the Africana Womanist ideal of collaborative struggle between men and women in the pursuit of collective freedom.
3. Epistemological marginalization of Africana Women's knowledge Systems. Dominant interpretive paradigms Western feminist and masculinist nationalist frameworks (Collins, 2000; Nfah-Abbenyi, 1997; Ogunleye, 2004) continue to overlook culturally specific

African ways of knowing, restricting the theorization of an Africana Womanist cinematic gaze.

Taken together, these gaps underscore the urgent need for a study that positions Haile Gerima not only as a revolutionary filmmaker but as a Intellectual of African cinematic consciousness. A significant and persistent gap, therefore, is the near absence of Africana Womanism as an interpretive lens through which Haile Gerima's work has been understood. This is particularly problematic given the prominence of African women across his filmography: *Child of Resistance* (1972), *Sankofa* (1993), *Bush Mama* (1976), *Ashes and Embers* (1982), *Harvest: 3000 Years* (1976), *Wilmington 10–USA 10,000* (1982/1985), *Adwa an African Victory* (1993) *Imperfect journey* (1994), and *Teza* (2008). The omission of this framework silences essential dimensions of Male women alliance, African way of womanhood, spiritual depth, communal ethics that constitute the very foundation of Haile Gerima's cinema. Through the combined frameworks of Africana Womanism and Africana Critical Theory (Rabaka, 2006, 2009), Gerima's cinema can be as that integrates aesthetic demystification, ancestral memory, communal ethics, gendered agency, and spiritual renewal. Such a study expands the terrain of African Studies by bridging film, philosophy, history, gender studies, and diasporic cultural memory, while reaffirming the intellectual sovereignty and cultural agency of African-descended peoples.

2.3. Research Objectives

2.3.7. Main Objective

The major aim of this study is to identify Haile Gerima's cinematic ideology and analyze it through an Africana womanist lens.

2.3.8. Specific Objectives

1. To identify characteristics of Haile Gerima's cinematic Ideology
2. To investigate the agency of African women in Gerima's films and non-fictional works, examining how his ideology expresses their control over narratives and challenges oppressive structures within their communities.

3. To analyze the alliances formed between Africana women and men in Gerima's works, exploring how these relationships contribute to collective resistance and empowerment against systemic oppression.
4. To identify the attributes of Africana womanism reflected in Gerima's cinematic ideology, focusing on traits such as resilience, solidarity, and cultural pride, and how these attributes inform the portrayal of Black womanhood in his films.

2.4. Research Questions

2.4.7. Main Research Question

The central research question of this study is: How can Haile Gerima's cinematic ideology be identified and analyzed through the theoretical and methodological framework of Africana Womanism, particularly in relation to his portrayals of Africana women's agency, cultural identity, and communal resistance?

2.4.8. Specific Research Questions

1. What are the defining ideological and aesthetic characteristics of Haile Gerima's cinema, and how can these be systematically identified through Africana-centered critical analysis?
2. In what ways do Africana women characters and voices in Haile Gerima's films and writings demonstrate agency and narrative authority, and how can these manifestations be evaluated using Africana Womanist analytical tools?
3. How do Gerima's cinematic representations of relationships between Africana women and men reflect the Africana Womanist principles of complementarity, collective struggle, and gender solidarity within decolonial contexts?
4. How Africana Womanist attributes do manifested in the dominant themes and decolonial method in Haile Gerima's films?
5. How does Haile Gerima's biography influence his filmmaking ideology and reinforce the Africana Womanist attributes present in his cinematic practice?

2.5. Significance of the Study

This study holds significant theoretical, scholarly, and cultural importance as it advances critical discourse at the intersection of African cinema, Africana Womanist thought, and decolonial aesthetics. Although Haile Gerima's cinema has been widely studied within the frameworks of Third Cinema, Marxist humanism, and Pan-African liberation thought, few

scholars have examined his work through an Africana Womanist lens a framework that foregrounds the spiritual, familial, and communal dimensions of African liberation. By applying this perspective, the study not only fills a major gap in existing film scholarship but also contributes to the decolonization of film theory by situating Africana woman-centered epistemologies at the core of cinematic analysis.

First, this study contributes to Africana Womanist scholarship by extending its application beyond literature and social theory into the field of visual culture and cinema. As articulated by Hudson-Weems (1993, 2004) and later expanded by Maparyan (2012), Africana Womanism is rooted in the lived experiences and ancestral consciousness of people of African descent. This research demonstrates how Haile Gerima's films visually enact these womanist principles self-definition, family-centeredness, spiritual integrity, and collective survival thereby translating the Africana Womanist ethos into cinematic form. Through this synthesis, the study expands the theoretical reach of Africana Womanism and affirms its relevance as a critical tool for analyzing African and diasporic visual narratives.

Second, the study advances the field of African and Black Independent Cinema studies by reinterpreting Haile Gerima's body of work not only as a project of political liberation but also as a gendered and spiritual philosophy of being. By highlighting women's roles as cultural transmitters, moral anchors, and agents of historical memory in films such as *Sankofa* (1993) and *Teza* (2008), this research deepens the understanding of Haile Gerima's cinematic ideology as one that integrates gender, community, and nationhood into a holistic vision of emancipation. This reading challenges the androcentric tendencies within existing film discourse and affirms the centrality of women's subjectivity to African liberation aesthetics (Nfah-Abbenyi, 1997; Ogunleye, 2004).

Third, the study makes a valuable contribution to Pan-African cultural studies by situating Haile Gerima's work within the transnational continuum of Black artistic resistance. His commitment to independent filmmaking, exemplified by his founding of Mypheduh Films and his activism within the Howard University film community, reflects an ongoing struggle for cultural sovereignty and epistemic autonomy. An Africana Womanist reading of this praxis reveals how his ideological stance aligns with broader efforts to reclaim indigenous modes of

knowledge, storytelling, and spirituality as foundations for self-definition and collective empowerment.

Finally, this study carries practical and pedagogical significance for film scholars, students, and cultural practitioners. It encourages a reorientation of African film curricula to include Africana Womanist theory as a critical interpretive lens, thereby diversifying methodologies in film and cultural studies. It also provides a framework for understanding how African cinema can serve as a site of healing, memory, and intergenerational dialogue key tenets of both Gerima's ideology and Africana Womanist thought.

In sum, the significance of this study lies in its ability to bridge theory and praxis, revealing the Africana Womanist dimensions of Haile Gerima's cinema as vital to understanding his revolutionary aesthetics. By reclaiming Black woman-centered epistemologies in film discourse, this research not only broadens the interpretive scope of African cinema studies but also contributes to the ongoing project of decolonizing knowledge production and representation in global cinema.

2.6. Delimitation of the Study

While the study acknowledges Haile Gerima's broader contributions to film production, pedagogy, and activism particularly through Mypheduh Films and his role in the L.A. Rebellion movement these aspects are examined primarily in relation to how they embody his ideological commitment to cultural sovereignty and self-definition. The research does not provide an exhaustive historical account of the L.A. Rebellion or Ethiopian cinema but situates these contexts as intellectual and cultural backgrounds that inform Haile Gerima's thought. Similarly, the study does not engage in a comparative analysis with other filmmakers in the African or diasporic canon (e.g., Ousmane Sembene, Safi Faye, Djibril Diop Mambety). Instead, it concentrates exclusively on him as a case study to articulate how his cinematic practice exemplifies the principles of Africana Critical Theory and Africana Womanism.

The research is also limited to textual ideological analysis rather than empirical audience studies or production ethnography. Its emphasis lies in theoretical interpretation drawing from close reading, film hermeneutics, and Africana philosophical inquiry to illuminate the

epistemological and ontological foundations of Haile Gerima's work. Geographically, the study engages both African and diasporic contexts, reflecting Haile Gerima's transnational trajectory from Ethiopia to the United States and his synthesis of Pan-African and Ethiopian nationalist perspectives. Temporally, the research focuses on his works from the 1970s to the 2000s, a period that captures the evolution of his artistic and ideological vision from revolutionary militancy to reflective humanism.

Finally, this study foregrounds the epistemological and axiological dimensions of Haile Gerima's cinema, examining how his films construct knowledge, moral values, and ethical frameworks within an Africana worldview. While ontological questions of identity and collective being emerge organically, the study prioritizes epistemic reconstruction and ethical re-humanization. Its scope is defined by a dual commitment: to reconstruct Gerima's cinematic ideology as a coherent Africana ideological system and to interpret it through the lens of Africana Womanism, highlighting its contributions to decolonial knowledge, gendered ethics, and cultural liberation. Analytical depth and theoretical coherence are maintained by focusing on all of Gerima's films, writings, and relevant critical frameworks that illuminate the ideological core of his vision as both filmmaker and intellectual.

2.7. Organization of the Study

This study is systematically organized into seven interrelated chapters to ensure logical coherence and analytical progression. Chapter one introduces the research by presenting the background of the study, statement of the problem, research objectives, research questions, significance, scope, and delimitation of the study. It establishes the contextual foundation and articulates the rationale for examining Haile Gerima's cinematic ideology through the theoretical lens of Africana Womanism.

Chapter Two engages in a comprehensive review of relevant literature and delineates the conceptual and theoretical frameworks underpinning the study. It explores major constructs such as Africana Womanism, Africana Critical Theory, cinematic ideology, representation, and the historical development of African and Pan-African cinema. This chapter situates Haile Gerima's

intellectual and cinematic practice within the broader discourses of decolonial thought and Black independent cinema.

Chapter Three elaborates on the research methodology adopted for the study, detailing the research design, data sampling techniques, methods of data collection, analytical procedures, research assumptions, and ethical considerations.

Chapter Four examines Haile Gerima's cinematic ideology, providing a biographical overview and critical exposition of his philosophical reflections on cinema as an instrument of liberation, cultural reclamation, and Pan-African consciousness. It also conducts a detailed textual and contextual analysis of selected films by Haile Gerima, emphasizing their narrative structures, aesthetic innovations, and revolutionary consciousness.

Chapter Five offers a critical interpretation of Gerima's cinematic ideology through an Africana Womanist gaze, interrogating how his films embody and reflect the core tenets of agency, alliance, and attributes of Africana women.

Finally, Chapter six synthesizes the major findings of the study, draws overarching conclusions, and proposes recommendations for further scholarly inquiry into Africana cinematic and theoretical discourses.

CHAPTER TWO

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Conceptual Frame work

2.1.1. Africana Woman in Cinema: From Africa and Beyond

The pursuit of equality and fair representation for Africana women has deep historical roots, shaped by the struggles of continental leaders since the 16th century and further informed by the intellectual contributions of Black scholars beyond the African continent during the 19th and 20th centuries. Historically, prior to the rise of African-descended intellectuals in these later centuries, African leaders were instrumental in establishing foundational precedents in the struggle for freedom and equality, exemplifying the resilience of Africana women against European colonial subjugation.

Notably, Across African history, women have been central agents of political, spiritual, and cultural sovereignty, embodying the principles later articulated in Africana Womanism. Figures such as Queen Nzinga Mbandi of Angola (1581/83–1663), Kimpa Vita of Kongo (c.1684–1706), Queen Ndete Yalla of Senegal (1810–1860), Sarraounia Mangou of Niger (19th century), and Yaa Asantewaa of the Ashanti Confederacy (c.1840–1921) exemplified resistance to European imperialism and the preservation of communal values (UNESCO, 2015). In East Africa, Emperor Menelik II (1889–1913) and Empress Taytu Betul (1851–1918) led Ethiopia's anti-colonial struggle at Adwa, symbolizing early Pan-African unity (Noh, 1998). The legendary Queen Sheba of Ethiopia, revered as the mother of Menelik I and progenitor of the Solomonic dynasty (Adamu, 2009), and Gudit, who overthrew the Aksumite male lineage (Steyn, 2019), demonstrate women's enduring transformative authority; further attest to women's transformative power. Ethiopian women across centuries exemplified Africana Womanist principles of resistance, spiritual strength, and communal leadership through decisive political and military action. From Bilen Saba's 14th-century mediation of dynastic conflict to Queen Elleni's 1509 diplomatic alliances against Ottoman-backed forces (Abebaw, 2024) and Empress Seblewongel's 16th-century defense of Christian Ethiopia (Budge, 2028), women consistently safeguarded national sovereignty. Mentewab's 18th-century consolidation of royal power (Bogale, 2016), Etege Menen's military leadership in 1850 (Abebaw, 2024), and Taytu Betul's anti-colonial mobilization at Adwa in 1896 (Zewde, 2002) further demonstrate women's

centrality to Ethiopian statecraft and liberation. At Adwa, 20,000–30,000 women including Taytu, Zewditu, Azalech, and Woizero Wolete Amanuel sustained the army logistically and morally (Zelege, 2021), embodying collective survival as resistance. Under Empress Zewditu (1916–1930), Ethiopia’s entry into the League of Nations (Abebaw, 2024) marked women’s continued role in shaping national identity and diplomacy. Collectively, these figures transform Ethiopian history into a continuum of woman-centered leadership and liberation, affirming the Africana Womanist ethos of self-determination, unity, and spiritual resilience.

In the early 20th century, Black intellectuals, many trained in Western institutions, responded to the imperialist logic of the “Scramble for Africa” by interrogating the political and economic dominance of Europe and the United States (Bercey, 1968). Nneka D. Dennie (2020) foregrounds the activism of Black women in the late 19th century, citing grassroots groups like the Washerwomen’s Association of Atlanta and suffragists such as Mary Ann Shadd Cary and Frances Harper, alongside Black male thinkers like W.E.B. Du Bois. She notes that Du Bois, from the early 20th century onward, wrote extensively on the marginalization of women of African descent. Patricia Hill Collins (1989) similarly argues that Du Bois encouraged Black men to uplift Black women amid entrenched social prejudices. Valethia Watkins (2016) adds that Du Bois and Frederick Douglass, despite differing historical contexts, were central in bringing the “woman question” into Black political thought, insisting that Black women’s liberation is inseparable from the broader fight against racism and sexism.

Within this intellectual lineage, Anna Julia Cooper offered a critical analysis of racial and gendered violence, particularly lynching, aligning her with contemporaries like Du Bois and Douglass. Ula Y. Taylor (1998) highlights the cultural and intellectual contributions of African American women such as Cooper, Audre Lorde, Bessie Smith, and Queen Latifah, who employed scholarship, oral traditions, and artistic expression to articulate the complexities of Black womanhood. Patricia Hill Collins (1996) further examines the emergence of a self-defined collective voice among Black women writers in the 1970s including Toni Cade Bambara, Ntozake Shange, Angela Davis, Toni Morrison, June Jordan, and Alice Walker whose works cultivated a critical consciousness that empowered African-descendant women in the United States through the 1980s and 1990s (Collins, 1990; hooks, 1989). Their expanding body of work

reoriented public discourse on race, gender, and power, broadening political and intellectual horizons by centering women's issues within wider struggles for equality.

According to Bercey (1968), the intellectuals of the 19th and 20th centuries who advocated for resistance against inequality and the fair representation of people of African descent were characterized by two primary elements: a profound concern for the struggles faced by Black individuals worldwide, stemming from the belief in the international relevance of these challenges, and a staunch opposition to colonialism and imperialism. Banla Samuel Fonyuy and Mbuh Tenu Mbuh (2023) note that a substantial portion of Black history, particularly concerning individuals migrating from Africa through various means, has been shaped by persistent and often detrimental portrayals. These representations have largely been negative and rooted in erroneous or distorted notions of imperial superiority. The legacies of the slave trade, slavery, colonialism, and ongoing racism continue to shape the perceptions of African peoples, whether justified or not. Negative portrayals persistently influence discourse within Africana studies. Du Bois (1936) argued that the enhancement of the lives of individuals of African descent necessitated a focus on Africa itself. He posited that the advancement of these individuals was inextricably linked to the progress of Africa and the broader African diaspora, observing a growing sense of unity among people of African descent globally, united in their struggle against the demeaning assumptions and insults propagated by Europeans.

In her 2020 analysis, Daniela Ricci contends that the contemporary African experience is intricately linked to a historical narrative marked by slavery and colonization, profoundly affecting notions of identity and humanity. The historical denial of African identities as well as erasure of names, and objectification, has fostered self-hatred among African descent individuals. Colonization often justified as a "civilizing mission," imposed Western cultural norms and established hierarchies that devalued indigenous languages and cultures. The Berlin Conference of 1884–1885 became a pivotal event in the colonization of Africa, resulting in the appropriation of fertile lands and widespread poverty, which coerced indigenous peoples into labor for colonial powers while concurrently compelling them to purchase the goods they themselves produced.

On top of this, Banla Samuel Fonyuy and Mbuh Tenu Mbuh (2023) illustrate that racism was foundational to the systems of slavery, the slave trade, and colonialism, framing Black

individuals as inferior and rationalizing their oppression. This historical context, exemplified by the triangular trade, continues to manifest in enduring inequalities, as highlighted by critics such as Deborah-Eve Lombard, who points to persistent discrimination and condescending attitudes towards Black individuals. Despite the crucial roles played by activism and public resistance in the abolition and decolonization movements, these efforts have yielded new forms of marginalization, resulting in the cultural and physical exclusion of African descent individuals from societal competition.

Negative representations of Blackness perpetuate white supremacist ideologies and hinder productive political and diplomatic conversations about Black communities. Dokotum asserts that many Western interpretations of Africa are primarily fabricated, shaped by imperialism and serve to maintain Euro-American supremacy. Mammo Muchie argues that these portrayals present a bleak perspective of Africa, fostering a patronizing mindset that has lasted for over five centuries. Michael Omolewa highlights a notable absence of accountability among the descendants of those who benefited from colonialism, while Nicholas Creary characterizes European engagement with Africans as a warped version of "Western Syphilization." Despite efforts from modern African intellectuals and movements, such as the Negritude movement and Thabo Mbeki's African Renaissance, to challenge these damaging stereotypes, the struggle to alter these narratives continues. Ricci (2020) points out that the historical mistreatment of people of African descent has influenced collective perceptions, emphasizing the importance of restoring dignity and self-worth. This legacy is evident in contemporary art, where the influences of slavery and colonial oppression persist, creating obstacles to achieving systemic equality. African cinema, in particular, addresses these historical scars, acting as a vibrant medium that reflects on the past while envisioning future possibilities through a variety of themes and representations. Dokotum's critique of Western depictions aligns with Muchie's perspective on the enduring negative image of Africa. Omolewa's emphasis on the irresponsibility of colonial beneficiaries, combined with Creary's insights, deepens this conversation. Contemporary African scholars and movements persist in their efforts to confront and challenge these negative portrayals, continuing a long-standing fight for authentic representation.

Stuart Hall's 1997 framework on cultural identity suggests that identity is fluid and constructed through representation, emerging from shared historical experiences and cultural codes that create a sense of unity. He emphasizes cinema as a crucial medium for expressing and

shaping cultural identity, particularly through films that highlight Black experiences and narratives. Hall notes that representation affects our perceptions and meanings, emphasizing its complexity and context-dependence. Additionally, Frantz Fanon's 1952 work, *Black Skin, White Masks*, explores the psychological effects of cultural domination, particularly how internalized inferiority can lead to a fragmented identity, which is especially pertinent for Black women facing multiple forms of oppression. This fragmentation connects to the ideas of W.E.B. Du Bois and Anna Julia Cooper, who advocated for recognizing the complexities of identity. As Howard (1997) and Tekletsdik (2022) note, cinema has become an essential platform for navigating these intricate representations.

Historically, cinema has served as a medium that shapes and often distorts African identities, predominantly through the lens of colonial and Eurocentric viewpoints. Scholars such as Stuart Hall (1997), Okaka Opio Dokotum (2020), Patrick Brantlinger (1988), and Pierre Bourdieu (as referenced in works by Ricci, 2020) investigate how filmic cultural representations result in the misrecognition and symbolic marginalization of African people and cultures. Hall (1997) posits that cultural identity is not a static characteristic but rather a dynamic process influenced by representational frameworks. He asserts that cinema is an active producer of meaning, shaping perceptions of cultures both internally and externally. Complementing this idea, Dokotum (2020) illustrates how colonial fantasies and scientific racism have historically painted African identities in skewed, reductive terms, exemplified in films like "Tarzan" and "King Solomon's Mines," which portray Africa as a land of chaos and savagery. Brantlinger (1988) argues that imperial narratives were deliberately constructed to validate and justify colonial rule, depicting Africa as a region in need of Western redemption. Furthermore, Bourdieu's concept of symbolic violence though articulated earlier finds resonance in Ricci's (2020) discourse concerning how prevailing Western imagery consistently misrepresents African self-identity and perpetuates existing power dynamics. African filmmakers including Med Hondo and Gaston Kabor (cited in Ricci, 2020) actively contest these distorted portrayals by championing the significance of self-representation. Hondo contends that the absence of authentic African imagery in film erodes the dignity of African individuals, while Kaboré emphasizes that access to self-representation is vital for cultivating a coherent sense of identity. This perspective aligns with the progressive ideologies expressed by Fernando Solanas and Octavio Getino (1969), who argues that cinema, should extend beyond mere entertainment to

function as a potent tool of resistance against capitalist and colonial ideologies through a transformative visual language. While these cultural critiques shed light on the broader issues surrounding cinematic misrepresentation, discourses emerging from the African diaspora address the gender-specific dimensions of this distortion. Scholars such as Patricia Hill Collins (1999, 2001, 2002a), Anna Julia Cooper (1892), Reiland Rabaka (2003), and Frantz Fanon (1952) analyze the compounded marginalization faced by African-descended women, first at the intersection of race and subsequently at that of gender and representation.

Film scholars such as Hooks (2003), Collins (1991), Mapp (1982), Mills (2018), and Sewell (2013) have meticulously examined the prevalent representations of Black women in Hollywood, categorizing them into archetypes such as the Mammy, Jezebel, and Sapphire. The Mammy, as identified by West (2012) and Mapp (1982), is frequently portrayed as an older Black woman occupying subordinate domestic positions, akin to Hattie McDaniel in *Gone with the Wind* (1940) and Octavia Spencer in *The Help* (2011). In contrast to their white counterparts, mammies are often undercompensated and lack personal ambitions. The Jezebel archetype, as defined by Fontaine (2011), is marked by hypersexualization, exemplified by Dorothy Dandridge's performance in *Carmen Jones* (1954). The Sapphire, also explored by Fontaine (2011), embodies the modern "angry Black woman," characterized as sassy and domineering, often tolerated or even embraced by white characters, as illustrated in Tiffany Haddish's role in *Like A Boss* (2020). These entrenched archetypes not only distort the representation of Black female identity but also limit the diverse nature of Black womanhood. As noted by Fernando Solanas and Octavio Getino (1971), and later by Jonathan Buchsbaum and Lisa Jarvinen (2021), all films carry ideological significance; they act as conduits for cultural, social, and political messages. Consequently, the persistence of these stereotypes misrepresents culture and serves as a mechanism of ideological subjugation that reinforces existing societal hierarchies and norms.

In her 1999 work, Patricia Hill Collins (2002) investigates into these representations by presenting archetypes that uphold systemic inequalities. She characterizes the Mammy as a devoted domestic figure whose desexualization supports white supremacist views of Black inferiority. Collins introduces the Matriarch archetype, portraying a single mother who is unjustly blamed for social issues, caught in the dilemma of whether to work outside the home or care for her children. Davidson (2010) argues that such depictions divert attention away from the structural inequalities affecting Black communities. Collins critiques the Welfare Mother

stereotype, which intersects with the Matriarch narrative to present Black women as idle and lacking male support, despite the historical barriers that obstructed their access to early welfare programs. The Black Lady serves as a contemporary iteration of the Mammy, illustrated as a successful professional yet experiencing romantic solitude attributed to racial factors, inadvertently implying the notion of reverse racism. Both Donald Bogle (2001) and Carolyn West (1995) trace the origins of the Mammy archetype to the American South, where she was depicted as content in her slavery. West (1995) elaborates that the Jezebel stereotype casts Black women as sexual aggressors, justifying their exploitation. Additionally, Collins (1999) examines the Jezebel or "hoochie" stereotype, a hyper sexualized image prevalent in mainstream rap culture. Wallace-Sanders (2002) affirm these claims, asserting that the representation of Black women as either hypersexual or asexual underscores systemic racism. Patricia Hill Collins (2001) added that these controlling images form a broader ideological framework that normalizes both racism and sexism. In family films, Black women are often sexualized more than their white counterparts, portrayed as less desirable and afforded significantly fewer opportunities for dialogue. While Andrews and McClain (2022) acknowledge a gradual enhancement in the quality and quantity of Black female representation in prominent roles, they emphasize the necessity for audiences to critically engage with media portrayals of marginalized communities, referencing bell hooks (1992/2014). Conversely, Julie Dash's film *Daughters of the Dust* (1991) presents a nuanced and rich narrative centered on a Gullah family in the early 20th century. As the first widely released film directed by a Black woman, it underscores themes of heritage and identity.

In discussing the African continent, Haile Gerima identified that the representation of women in African cinema is often skewed, highlighting three primary trends. The first trend includes filmmakers who exploit women as sexual objects, relegating female characters to superficial roles that cater to male sexual fantasies and uphold oppressive narratives rooted in feudal and neocolonial systems. The second trend features filmmakers who convey a patriotic narrative, portraying Africa's history as glorious and suggesting that the primary challenge is for Africans to reclaim their continent. In this perspective, women are expected to be ideal homemakers or pursue limited career paths like nurses or flight attendants, which reinforce gender inequality. The third trend focuses on progressive filmmakers who strive to showcase liberated men and women with social, political, and economic aspirations; however, these films

are often viewed through a male lens and do not fully address women's concerns. A notable lack of African women filmmakers persists, despite the significant contributions of pioneers such as Safi Faye's *Letters from My Village* (1975, Senegal) and Sarah Maldoror's *Sambizanga* (1972, Angola), which are important milestones in African cinema yet remain underrepresented in the wider film industry.

Daniela Ricci (2020) underscores the significance of reclaiming narratives within contemporary African and diasporic art, which strive to transform historical traumas into tales that emphasize dignity, agency, and resilience. In this framework, cinema can sometimes diminish and objectify African women, making the pursuit of authentic and nuanced representation crucial. Frank Ukadike (1994) observes that Black cultural creators are engaged in an ongoing effort to carve out a unique identity and to promote positive depictions of Black individuals, reflecting the spirit of African liberation movements. This endeavor has become even more pressing as filmmakers work to integrate Afrocentric values into stories often shaped by Western influences.

After the independence of African nations in the mid-1960s, indigenous African film practices emerged, intentionally moving away from colonial cinematic conventions to reaffirm cultural identity. Ukadike points out the historical underrepresentation of women, particularly those of African descent, in film, where they are frequently depicted through patriarchal and colonial perspectives. Advocates, including filmmakers and scholars, are fighting for the rehumanization of Black women in cinema, with trailblazers like Kathleen Collins and Julie Dash at the forefront. Their films, along with those by Safi Faye and Salem Mekuria, challenge the historical omission of Black women's stories. For example, Faye's *Selbe: One Among Many* (1982) and Mekuria's *Sidet: Forced Exile* (1991) tackle the socio-economic difficulties faced by African women; however, Ukadike critiques Faye for neglecting broader topics such as healthcare and education.

Films like Ousmane Sembene's *Ceddo* (1977), Med Hondo's *Sarraounia* (1987), and Desire Ecare's *Faces of Women* (1985) depict women as central, empowered characters. In *Ceddo*, Princess Dior's fight against Islamic patriarchal norms critiques the erosion of matrilineal traditions under colonial pressures. Additionally, works such as Moffatt's *Nice Colored Girls* and Ngozi Onwurah's *Coffee-Colored Children* delve into themes of colonial oppression and internalized racism, presenting complex portrayals of Black female identities.

The Davis Institute on Gender in Media (2021) acknowledges advancements in representation, yet points out that stereotypes like the Mammy, Jezebel, and Sapphire persist, continuing to undermine the emotional complexities of Black women. According to Ukadike and others, reclaiming Black female narratives in film is a necessary political act that challenges Western intellectual paradigms, engages with material critiques of race and gender, and empowers Black women to share their own stories.

Lindiwe (2012) highlights that since the 1960s, African-authored films have prominently featured strong female characters, matriarchal societies, and critiques of patriarchal systems, including colonialism and postcolonialism. She points to pioneering works like *Borom Sarret* (Sembene, 1963), *Black Girl* (Sembene, 1966), *Emitai* (Sembene, 1971), and *Sambizanga* (Maldoror, 1972) as examples where female characters are portrayed with depth and agency, contrasting sharply with Western depictions. These characters exhibit complexity; for instance, in *Borom Sarret*, a wife seeks work to support her family, while in *Emitai*, women resist colonial oppression. In *Sambizanga*, the central female character challenges colonial authority, and Diouana in *Black Girl* chooses death over dehumanization, symbolizing defiance. Similarly, Queen Sarraounia in *Sarraounia* (Hondo, 1986) embodies political resistance and Colle in *Moolaadé* (Sembene, 2004) fights against harmful traditions. Other films, like *Kare Kare Zvako* (Kauzhumba, 2001) and *Taafe Fanga* (Kouyate, 1997), showcase women challenging gender norms and sacrificing for their communities. *U-Carmen eKhayelitsha* (Dornford-May, 2005) features a strong female lead confronting male violence, illustrating that these characters embody agency and resistance rather than conforming to traditional roles. Dovey references Jean-Luc Godard's observation that cinema often emphasizes war and women's beauty. While films like *Karmen Gei* (Ramaka, 2001) and *U-Carmen eKhayelitsha* depict female beauty, they do so without the objectification critiqued by Laura Mulvey and other feminist theorists. Instead, these African narratives present nuanced representations rooted in cultural and political contexts. Additionally, many African male filmmakers critically examine patriarchal norms, often satirizing male behaviors, as noted by Tcheuyap. This trend reflects a self-critical approach among African male writers, portraying men as both perpetrators and victims of colonial trauma. Dovey argues that the shared effort of African artists to critique patriarchy while celebrating female strength marks a wider postcolonial artistic movement seeking to transform gender relations and cultural identity.

2.1.2. Black Independent Cinema

Moyer-Duncan (2011) describes independent cinema as films created outside the mainstream Hollywood framework, often featuring alternative narratives and experimenting with various styles, typically embodying elements of avant-garde or counter-cinema. These films are usually produced on low budgets with private funding, and may also receive government support in some countries. Emanuel Levy (1999) further elaborates that true independence lies in a filmmaker's personal vision rather than commercial interests, underscoring the difference between the creative freedom of low-budget films and the constraints of larger studios. This creates two distinct interpretations of independent filmmaking: one that focuses on the sources of funding and another that values artistic vision and originality, as highlighted by industry advocates who stress the significance of creative autonomy. To Diawara (1993) those independent filmmakers are often driven by political and artistic motivations, he also points out that the historical marginalization of Black narratives in mainstream Hollywood has led many Black filmmakers to turn to independent cinema, where they can create genuine portrayals of Black life and challenge societal injustices.

Snead (1993) traces the beginnings of Black independent film production to the early 20th century, arising in response to institutional racism and the negative portrayal of Black individuals, meeting the cultural and political desires of Black audiences who sought empathetic representations. He classifies the evolution of Black independent cinema into three phases: the first phase begins with the 1918 film *Birth of a Race* by John W. Noble, the second phase which spans 1920 to 1950 and is dominated by the works of Oscar Micheaux, and the third phase covers 1950 to 1986, highlighting filmmakers such as Haile Gerima, Charles Burnett, Larry Clark, Julie Dash, Reginald Hudlin, and Spike Lee. Snead concludes that a significant challenge for Black independent cinema is competing with Hollywood for audience attention under prevailing stylistic dominance.

According to Taylor (1996) Black cinema inherently involves conversations about Hollywood's passive racism present in Film. Because of this Studies and the notion of Black Independent Cinema basically is grounded against classical Hollywood Cinema. Defining mainstream Hollywood Cinema Hayward (2000) identified Hollywood as a filmmaking tradition that is defined by a distinct narrative style rooted in earlier melodramatic traditions, characterized by straightforward storytelling and a structure that typically resolves disturbances in harmony.

While films often focus on individual character psychology, they tend to oversimplify historical contexts, presenting pivotal events as unchangeable. This form of cinema usually enforces dominant ideologies, particularly regarding romantic relationships and family, and often punishes deviations from societal norms. A seamless filmmaking style, including techniques like continuity editing and three-point lighting, aims to enhance realism and emotional connections to characters. Critiques of classic narratives also highlight the problematic portrayals of Black womanhood, contrasting traditional representations by Black male filmmakers with more progressive views from female storytellers, while the popularity of B-movies during the Great Depression illustrates the evolving landscape of film production in response to audience demands. In Africa where colonialism exists in most direct form creative writers and filmmakers have turned increasingly to address African problems within African context, leaving the relationship with Europe more and more in distance.

Diawara (1988) noted that Black independent cinema encompasses any Black-produced film that operates outside the constraints of major studios, allowing filmmakers to authentically portray the complexities of Black lives and communities. Lott (1988) describes this cinema as marked by oppositionality, while Cham (1988) advocates for a broader definition that includes race and culture as central elements. He emphasizes that independent films provide alternative representations of Black people, challenging the fixed stereotypes often seen in Hollywood. In these films, White people and Whiteness are marginalized, while Black individuals, communities, and diasporic experiences take center stage. This approach ensures that Black people are portrayed not as problems or villainous stereotypes, but as integral subjects of narrative development, enriching the storytelling landscape in a way that contrasts sharply with mainstream cinema.

In 1993, Diawara pointed out that Black independent cinema often takes a stand against mainstream cinema by positioning itself as both aesthetically and morally superior, which he criticizes for being populist, racist, sexist, and reactionary. He explores the links between figures like Oscar Micheaux and Hollywood's "race films," Melvin Van Peebles and the Blaxploitation movement, as well as filmmakers such as Charles Burnett (*Killer of Sheep*), Haile Gerima (*Bush Mama*), and Spike Lee, who reinterprets urban experiences in works like *City of Hope*, *Grand Canyon*, *Boyz n the Hood*, and *Straight Out of Brooklyn*. Diawara asserts that mainstream

cinema frequently borrows from independent cinema, assimilating its themes and narrative techniques. Edward Guerrero (1989) adds that independent cinema goes beyond the traditional labels of "oppositional" or "other," as relying on such labels suggests a subordinate relationship to the dominant Hollywood framework. Adding on this Hayward (2000) also Identified the representation of Black womanhood in cinema is explored through the lens of independent Black films. Notable works include Kathleen Collins' *Losing Ground* (1982), which contrasts with Heather Foxworth's critique of Black male sexism in *Trouble I've Seen*(1988). This is juxtaposed with more misogynistic portrayals in films by directors like Lee, Singleton, and Mario Van Peebles. Mira Nair's "Mississippi Marsala" (1991) offers a new take on interracial relationships, showcasing a romance between an African-American man and an Asian-Indian woman, reflecting a diverse cultural interplay.

In *Thoughts on Nomadic Aesthetics and the Black Independent Cinema: Traces of a Journey*, Teshome H. Gabriel (1993) Critiques cinema's binary view of dominant (Hollywood) versus oppositional (reactive) cinema, arguing that black independent cinema represents an emergent axis of its own. This cinema is not merely reactive but seeks to establish a distinct identity, challenging existing norms and classifications. It embraces a fluidity that breaks down traditional genre boundaries, blending documentary, narrative, and experimental forms. . Notable examples of this cinematic representation include *Passing Through* by Larry Clark, *Black Exodus* by Iverson White, and *Passion of Remembrance and Territories* by Isaac Julien and Maureen Blackwood, as well as works like *Ashes and Embers* by Haile Gerima, *Patu* by Merata Mita, and *Handsworth Songs* by John Akomfrah, among others. Additionally, Ben Cauldwell's *I and I* explore African mythology as a metaphorical quest for Black identity, while Barbara McCullough's *Water Ritual* acts as a spiritual cleansing process. Haile Gerima's *Bush Mama* depicts the realities of life in America's ghettos with a fluid narrative style, and Julie Dash's *Illusion*, the first part of the Bridges series, addresses the dual identity struggles of African-Americans. Sharon Larkin's *A Different Image* highlights elements of African identity, all reflecting aspects of a nomadic sensibility, often in an unintentional manner. This perspective is echoed in Charles Burnett's approach to creating *Killer of Sheep: I don't know, I just got raw stock and shot the film*. Similar themes can be found in works from other regions in Africa and the Global South, such as Ousmane Sembene's *Ceddo* and *Emitai*, Glauber Rocha's *Barravento* from Brazil, Miguel Littin's *The Promised Land* from Chile, Gaston Kabore's *Wend-Kuuni* from

Burkina Faso, and Moussa Kemoko Diakité's *Naitou* from Guinea, all showcasing elements of a traveling black aesthetic.

Hayward (2000) emphasizes the importance of addressing race and racism when examining Black cinema, particularly the tension between Black independent films and Hollywood. She has stated that, early pioneers like Bill Foster, Emmett J. Scott, and Oscar Micheaux aimed to create authentic representations of Black life, often depicting multifaceted characters rather than stereotypes. While Micheaux's work tackled complex social issues, it also faced criticism for reinforcing negative stereotypes. The evolution of Black cinema from the 1960s to the 1980s shifted from integrationist portrayals in films featuring Sidney Poitier to the Blaxploitation genre, which initially celebrated Black culture but later leaned into themes of sex and violence, distorting portrayals of Black masculinity. As the 1980s approached, new styles emerged, including urban narratives by Spike Lee and populist parodies by Eddie Murphy, reflecting both the struggles and aspirations of Black communities while sometimes perpetuating stereotypes. Contemporary Black cinema, influenced by the ghetto-centric narratives of the 1970s, often emphasizes themes of violence and addiction, highlighting the socio-economic challenges faced by African-Americans today.

In 1993, Manthia Diawara pointed out that modern Black independent cinema explores a wide range of themes related to Black identity, including family relationships and societal issues concerning class and gender. Directors such as Kathleen Collins, Alile Sharon Larkin, and Julie Dash concentrate on aspects of Black womanhood and spirituality, while Melvin Van Peebles and Charles Burnett address the struggles faced by Black men and urban life. The representation of sexuality and the problem of homophobia are notably present in the works of Marlon Riggs and Spike Lee. Documentarians like William Greaves and Camille Billops give voice to often-overlooked Black perspectives. Diawara observes that mainstream film critics frequently neglect independent cinema, which delves into more profound themes of authorship and representation, largely due to Hollywood's block-booking practices. This kind of cinema utilizes a filmic perspective to confront stereotypes and tackle significant issues, making the exploration of Black independent filmmakers vital for comprehending Black cultural production and its influence on identity and empowerment. Additionally, it's important to include Haile Gerima in this conversation since his theoretical and cinematic contributions shed light on the complexities of Black identity and the African diaspora.

2.1.3. Cinema and Representation

Kiwitt (2012) characterizes cinema as an artistic medium that encompasses edited moving images derived from live action, underscoring the importance of both artistic style and content. This definition includes the entire filmmaking journey, from its development through to postproduction, suggesting that artistic expression integrates communication with art. While communication focuses on conveying content effectively, art prioritizes aesthetic presentation, forming a continuum that includes everything from news broadcasts to avant-garde films. Therefore, cinema relates not only to the craft of filmmaking but also to the venues where these films are presented. It encompasses the artistry, industry, and medium of motion pictures, and is often used interchangeably with the terms movies and films. The *Oxford English Dictionary* succinctly defines cinema as a collective term for films, particularly when regarded as an art form, as well as the process of producing such films.

To clarify this, Jakarta (1989) defines film as an artistic medium made up of a series of live images that, when projected in succession, simulate the illusion of movement. Commonly known as a movie or moving picture, film serves dual purposes: entertainment and commercial gain. It merges narratives, visuals, dialogue, and music, resulting in a multi-faceted and intricate social, psychological, and aesthetic phenomenon. Brown (2022) explains that filmmaking is fundamentally about conveying stories through visual means, with cinematography playing a crucial role in this process. It encompasses much more than just photography or simply capturing what is in front of the camera. For him cinematography is about transforming concepts, dialogue, actions, emotional nuances, tone, and nonverbal cues into a visual narrative. The techniques of cinematography include a diverse range of methods and skills that enhance the film's content, adding depth and subtext to elements such as the actors, settings, dialogue, and action. According to Janney (2012), the concept of “cinematic” discourse highlights film as a process of communication, viewing public screenings as inherently interactive events aimed at fostering cognitive and emotional connections with audiences.

Additionally, Kelly (1964) pointed out that the term "cinematic" embodies the virtues and emotional depth of films, suggesting that cinema conveys meanings that extend beyond simple entertainment. He further explained that when a film is described as "cinematic," it means that it adheres to certain principles inherent to the film medium. For a film to achieve this, its creators

such as the director, writer, cameraman, and editor must understand the unique possibilities of cinema. They should use their imagination to explore both established techniques and new forms of expression. The filmmaker's task is to convey their message in a manner that aligns with the medium's nature. If they approach their work skillfully and thoughtfully, they can reveal the true potential of film, showcasing possibilities that may not have been previously considered. This understanding embodies the positive essence of what it means for a film to be cinematic. He also stated that, the term "cinematic" carries a negative connotation, suggesting that a film should not attempt to replicate the effects of other art forms. For instance, a film does not qualify as cinematic if it merely presents a series of still images of great paintings or famous buildings, as this does not utilize the moving picture aspect of cinema. Similarly, while cinema can create the illusion of three-dimensional space, its flat, two-dimensional nature means that spatial arrangements in the real world may not translate effectively when filmed. Directors must carefully envision and arrange objects and actors to achieve the desired illusion on screen; otherwise, their work may serve as a useful teaching tool or record but will not be truly cinematic.

Kiwitt (2012) also points out that what sets cinema apart from other types of moving imagery is its artistic depth and the intricate processes involved in its production. This includes creative storytelling and logistical aspects, such as the assistant director's role in larger projects. Important factors that help define cinema are the medium, technology, and budget, whereas aspects like screen size and runtime carry less weight. The broader category of cinema includes edited and linear works narrative films, experimental pieces, and documentaries as well as music videos and various commercial or educational materials. A key aspect of cinema is its exhibition market, which emphasizes linear moving images shown to public audiences in venues, rather than private viewings. Editing plays a vital role, allowing for creative manipulation of audiovisual material from multiple viewpoints in a non-linear way. This distinguishes edited cinema as an art form from simpler methods that rely on continuous filming or limited audiovisual features. In essence, cinema embodies a complex interplay of artistic intent and technical expertise, establishing it as a distinct medium within the wider realm of moving images.

Richard Janney (2012) argues that films are deliberately designed to engage viewers, who play an active role in creating meaning alongside the filmmakers. This interaction cultivates a

shared understanding through a blending of viewpoints where the camera's perspective aligns with that of the audience. For Janney, this represents a practical view of cinema in which authorship, form, and audience engagement are interconnected rather than distinct. In this framework, components such as the storyteller (filmmaker), the audience (spectators), the medium (cinematic apparatus), the setting (movie theater), the shared space (the screen), and a common understanding are all linked and seen as integral to cinematic discourse. Similarly, Hadou and Makhoul (2024) emphasize that cinema has transformed from its beginnings in 1895 as a technological innovation into a unique art form that goes beyond simple representation.

Mohammed Al-Mutahr (2018) further describes cinema as both an artistic expression and an ideological construct, highlighting its intricate nature and potential to transform reality perceptions through various techniques such as camera angles, editing, and the use of color and sound especially with the advent of digital technology. He argues that cinema is deeply connected to ideology, reflecting the socio-political environments in which it is created. While the artistic aspect is crucial, many theorists, particularly Marxists and feminists, contend that films often disseminate the ideological narratives of dominant political powers. Marxists maintain that cinema promotes capitalist interests and sustains the ideologies of the ruling class, while feminists criticize Hollywood for perpetuating patriarchal themes that objectify women. Influenced by theorists like Antonio Gramsci and Louis Althusser, Al-Mutahr sees cinema's ideological function as a mechanism for maintaining control through both repressive and ideological state apparatuses. This perspective suggests that even entertaining films can distract viewers from important social issues. Furthermore, practices related to funding and censorship enhances ideological control, as films often reflect the ideologies of the state. Consequently, cinema is viewed as a multifaceted interaction between art and ideology, where artistic elements communicate deeper socio-political meanings, thereby framing film as a discourse that not only illustrates but also shapes power dynamics beyond mere artistic intent.

Wuss (2009) argues that cinema is fundamentally tied to human experience, suggesting that audiences are drawn to film because it expands and enriches psychological, cultural, and social understanding. Brown (2022) reinforces this by asserting that media representations shape how people interpret the world, noting that representation involves the encoding of meanings that influence perception even without direct experience. Laughey (2010) adds that media do not

mirror reality but frame it through selective perspectives shaped by socio-cultural contexts. Similarly, Sikov (2020) interrogates cinematic representation, emphasizing that “to represent” refers to conveying meaning through signs and symbols. He explains that while early film images appeared rooted in reality, they were always artistically mediated, shaping audience perceptions of reality.

Building on this, Ponzanesi and Mendes (2022) highlight the contributions of post-colonial scholars and filmmakers in challenging dominant cinematic representations and generating new aesthetic and political discourses around diaspora, ethnicity, nationalism, gender, and class. Stuart Hall’s work particularly *Cultural Identity and Cinematic Representation* and later *Encoding/Decoding* reoriented film studies by examining how identity, otherness, hybridity, and diaspora shape visual meaning, revealing the colonial narratives embedded within images. Fanon’s analysis in *Black Skin, White Masks* (1952) similarly shows how cinema, exemplified in Tarzan films, fosters inferiority complexes in colonized viewers, exposing representational violence and the fraught position of postcolonial intellectuals who must counter oppressive images while speaking for marginalized communities.

Colonialism’s impact on African-descended peoples is central to debates about representation. Although African nations gained independence in the 1960s, earlier cinematic depictions of Africans crafted largely by white Western filmmakers relied on exoticized and dehumanizing portrayals (Susan, 2006). Gurgler (2003) notes that European and American films often depicted characters of African descent as primitive, savage, or childlike. To counter these distortions, African cinema sought new narratives that reflected authentic identities. Med Hondo (2021) criticizes Western representations for erasing African cultural codes and histories. Pioneering filmmakers such as Ousmane Sembene, Med Hondo, Souleymane Cissé, and Haile Gerima, supported by contemporary political leaders used film as an instrument of decolonization, education, and critique, addressing colonialism, cultural conflict, independence, post-colonial disillusionment, identity, and women’s representation (Diopio, 2014).

Hudson-Weems (1996) argues that ideological and social transformation in Africa requires collaborative efforts by both men and women. Diop (1974) similarly stresses that women’s roles were foundational to African civilization before colonialism disrupted gender balance and imposed hierarchical systems. Dove (1998) contends that colonialism entrenched

domination over African men, women, and children, producing layered forms of oppression that persist both externally and internally. As a result, Hudson-Weems (1998) insists that neocolonialism, racism, and global oppression must be analyzed through the particular experiences of African women, whose realities differ sharply from those of Western women. Early cinematic portrayals of African women thus functioned as resistance to distorted images produced by European and American artists. Wa Thiong'o (1994) underscores that post-independence African artists sought to decolonize vision and reclaim the African image, using film as a dialogic tool to reconnect with African communities.

2.1.4. Cinematic Ideology

The term "ideology," introduced by Destutt de Tracy in 1797, was initially framed as a "science of ideas" focused on the interrelations among ideas and their sensory experiences, particularly in the context of the Enlightenment and the sociopolitical upheaval following the French Revolution (Kinloch, 1981). Over time, however, its significance shifted, becoming associated with conservative critiques of socially derived policies, often labeling them as revolutionary (Drucker, 1972). Karthik (2021) highlights the evolution of ideology through the works of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, with Antonio Gramsci contributing critical insights that expanded its implications.

Marx's articulation of ideology in *The German Ideology* (1845) characterizes it as the "production of ideas, of conceptions, of consciousness," reflecting the dominant ideas of the ruling class and functioning as a superstructure tied to material conditions in society (Lichtheim, 1965). This framing underscores ideology's role in maintaining the status quo, serving the interests of the bourgeoisie while obscuring the exploitative relationships inherent in class societies (Kennedy, 1979; Minar, 1961; Eagleton, 1991). However, Marx's later redefinition within a framework of dialectical materialism raises questions about the extent to which ideology can be divorced from power dynamics, suggesting that it is a mechanism for control rather than a neutral set of beliefs.

Gramsci cited in Stive Jones (2007) further developed the discourse by distinguishing between civil society and political society, asserting that intellectuals play a pivotal role in shaping societal beliefs and achieving hegemony. His notion that ideological consent is essential

for maintaining social order introduces a critical dimension, emphasizing the interplay between cultural influence and coercive state control. This perspective reveals the complexities of ideological formation, suggesting that while critical thinking is accessible, the intellectual landscape is often dominated by a select few who shape the narratives of power.

Althusser's (1971) contribution to ideology, characterizing it as a framework that molds beliefs and perceptions, challenges the notion of ideology as merely a concealment of truth. His distinction between the Repressive State Apparatus and the Ideological State Apparatus emphasizes how ideology actively constructs social realities, thus complicating the relationship between belief and action. Althusser's concept of "interpellation" posits that individuals are formed as subjects within ideological frameworks, reinforcing their roles in the social order. This insight sheds light on the mechanisms through which ideology influences individual identity and societal discourse.

The ongoing academic exploration of ideology reveals its multifaceted nature. Gerring (1997) describes ideology as a complex and adaptable concept, while Eidlin (2015) views it as a collection of thoughts that shape behaviors and ideas. Kinloch (1981) differentiates ideologies from religious belief systems by emphasizing their reliance on rational and empirical foundations. However, this rationalization raises critical questions about the legitimacy and universality of ideologies, particularly in their capacity to address social and political issues effectively.

Eagleton (1991) contributes to the complexity of defining ideology by examining its political dimensions and the identities of ideologists, while Nescolarde-Selva, Uso-Domenech, and Gash (2017) argue that ideologies manifest in diverse forms religious, philosophical, popular, and scientific playing a central role in shaping personal identities and fostering social cohesion. This recognition invites further inquiry into the ways ideologies function within various contexts, emphasizing their role in both legitimizing power structures and providing frameworks for understanding the social world.

A substantial body of research has explored ideology at the individual level, emphasizing the cognitive and attitudinal frameworks that shape personal views of society. Adorno et al.

(1950) define ideology as a structured ensemble of beliefs that inform perspectives on politics, religion, economics, and social relations. Loewenstein (1953) similarly describes ideology as a cohesive belief system guiding individuals' understanding of their societal roles. This perspective is bolstered by Campbell et al. (1960), who highlight the internal coherence of ideological systems that help individuals navigate complex social landscapes. Nescolarde-Selva, Uso-Doménech, and Gash (2017) suggest that ideology functions as a cognitive framework expressing both personal and collective beliefs, illustrating its dual nature as both personal and socially constructed.

Gerring (1997) argues that the complexity of ideology should be viewed as strength, proposing a "core" definition that captures its fundamental traits while remaining adaptable to various contexts. He distinguishes ideology from related concepts like worldviews, asserting its political implications and its role in social critique. Gerring posits that ideology can reflect dominant narratives or serve as a counter-hegemonic force for marginalized groups. Richard W. Miller (2005) advocates for a nuanced understanding of ideologies as patterns of thought, emotion, and conduct, which may include beliefs that can be substantiated or refuted by facts.

Romero analyzes ideology philosophically, emphasizing its complexity as a multi-dimensional system of beliefs and values aimed at societal change. He critiques traditional definitions that limit ideology to modern, rational belief systems, advocating for an agnostic approach that encompasses a broader range of linked beliefs. Romero highlights the potential for ideologies to become dogmatic if adopted uncritically, particularly in the context of social media, which can fragment beliefs based on identity rather than rational evaluation. He also explores the biological and psychological factors influencing ideological beliefs, arguing that while such beliefs are not predetermined, fostering critical thinking can mitigate harmful ideologies.

Gerring (1997) further posits that ideology is a dynamic system embedded in emotional and symbolic dimensions, shaping societal structures and facilitating mass mobilization. McLellan (1986) characterizes ideology as an elusive concept in social science, while theorists like Gouldner (1976) and Habermas (1970) argue that ideologies ground political action in rational principles. Gouldner views ideologies as secular and rational belief systems, while

Habermas emphasizes their connection to self-reflective understanding, suggesting that ideologies must persuade the masses to allow for alternative ideas.

Colin J. Beck underscores the importance of ideology in social and political movements, defining it as a system of overlapping beliefs and values. Swidler (1986) describes ideology as a self-conscious belief system offering unified answers to social action problems. Oliver and Johnston (2000) add a cultural layer to the discussion, noting the resurgence of ideology as a vital area of study in collective action post-"cultural turn."

Noel Carroll highlights the role of certain ideologies in perpetuating harmful stereotypes, particularly regarding race and gender. Neville and Hamer (2001) argue that gender ideologies are reinforced through negative portrayals of women and the superiority of men, reflecting the interplay of race, class, and gender in sustaining oppression. Van Dijk (1998) critiques conventional ideology studies for neglecting the role of language and communication in forming and perpetuating ideologies.

Hess (2005) generally identifies ideology as a relatively systematic body of ideas, attitudes, values, and perceptions, along with unconscious modes of thinking typical of a specific class or group at a particular time and place. This framework includes three main types of beliefs: Personal ideologies, which arise from an individual's experiences and influences; Cultural ideologies, which are constructed through various institutional sources such as norms, laws, and religion; and Dominant ideologies, which are widely accepted by the majority of society (American Film Science, 2005). Thus, the evolution of the concept of ideology illustrates a dynamic interplay among ideas, power, and societal norms. As a systemic cognitive property, ideology facilitates the transmission of beliefs while also serving as a battleground for conflicting values and interests that shape individuals' and communities' lived experiences. Consequently, a critical examination of ideology must account for its complexities, contradictions, and broader implications for social justice and equity in contemporary society.

In the context of the Global South, thinkers like Frantz Fanon and Amílcar Cabral provide insights into Marxist theory, emphasizing culture's role in independence struggles and the significance of cinema in shaping political and cultural narratives (Hailegeberiel, 1982).

Wijayakoon (2024) applies Marxist theory to film analysis, evaluating how films can uphold or challenge socio-economic systems. Gramsci's concept of hegemony further illuminates how cinema propagates prevailing ideologies, suggesting that film production is tied to capitalist practices, reinforcing capitalist narratives. Althusser (2001) asserts that art is intrinsically linked to ideological perception, revealing how artistic insights reflect ideological backgrounds.

According to Dayan (1974), the Cahiers School of ideological criticism, influenced by Althusserian Marxism and Lacanian psychoanalysis, sought to create a materialist method for analyzing cinema from 1969 to 1971, significantly shaping the understanding of the relationship between cinema and ideology. Key journals like *Cahiers du Cinema*, *Cinethique*, and *Tel Quel* played a crucial role in framing critical discussions in film studies during this period (Elsaesser & Hagener, 2010). Critics from these schools argue that while some see the ideological component of cinema as stemming from mechanically reproduced images, others like Grant (2016) perceive the camera itself as an ideological construct, representing the interests of the ruling class. Allen (2004) further critiques cinematic technology for conditioning audiences to accept bourgeois aesthetic codes, suggesting that mechanically reproduced images, often viewed as neutral, actually influence perceptions through contradictions within dominant ideologies.

Comolli and Narboni (1972) posit that cinema is inherently political, shaped by the ideologies from which it originates. They argue against the notion that the camera is an impartial tool, asserting that what it captures reflects the unarticulated world of prevailing ideologies. Althusser (1969) contends that ideologies are cultural mechanisms shaping individuals' understanding of reality, often distorting perceptions based on existing power structures. This critique extends to all filmmaking elements, where the representation of reality is filtered through ideological lenses. Grant (2016) notes that producing a film free of ideology is impossible, as the medium are compromised by bourgeois frameworks.

Rodowick (1988) asserts that cinema's representational systems are not neutral and reproduce dominant social class viewpoints, creating an illusion of coherence. Comolli and Narboni (1971) argue that cinematic ideology encompasses all aspects of film production, reinforcing ideological discourse. The filmmakers' challenge is to reveal this constructed nature of "reality" to disrupt cinema's ideological function. In line with Althusser (1971), they view

ideology as a system that shapes perceptions of reality, advocating for art to present ideology in a form that invites critical reflection.

Comolli and Narboni (1971) argue that every film is inherently political and shaped by ideology because it is produced within and influenced by the capitalist systems that dominate societies. Regardless of a filmmaker's intentions, cinema inevitably reflects the prevailing ideology of its cultural and economic context. They outline seven categories of films based on how they engage with ideology:

1. Category *A*- films consists of films that fully embrace dominant ideology, especially in classical Hollywood;
2. Category *B*- includes politically charged films that present a distorted version of reality;
3. Category *C* -features films with subtle political messages beneath seemingly apolitical stories;
4. Category *D* -mimics Hollywood styles while pretending to be politically aware;
5. Category *E*- includes self-reflexive but ultimately conservative films;
6. Category *F*- follows traditional narrative forms to deliver predictable political content; and
7. Category *G*- breaks away from conventional storytelling to offer alternative ideological perspectives.

In their view, cinema is not only a commercial product but also a key medium for spreading or resisting dominant ideas.

Pleynet (1978) and Comolli (1986, 2015) argue that film technology is never neutral, asserting that the apparatus itself is ideological. Pleynet links the camera's visual logic to Renaissance spatial perception, while Comolli insists that technological advances are shaped by economic and ideological forces rather than scientific objectivity. Similarly, Baudry (1974/1975) and Metz (1982) show how cinematic techniques produce illusions of neutrality that reinforce dominant ideologies. Drawing from Althusser's theory of Ideological State Apparatuses (1971), Allen (2004) argues that cinema structures spectatorship in ways that naturalize ideological

norms. Fisher (2009) and Kellner (1996) further contend that ideology functions most powerfully when embedded within the pleasures of cinematic aesthetics.

Mulvey (1975) expands this discussion by demonstrating that ideology permeates film through narrative, style, and character representation, either sustaining or contesting hegemonic norms. Batten (2023) emphasizes that films inevitably express ideology, whether consciously or unconsciously, while Flisfeder (2016) differentiates between ideological analysis—reading films as reflections of dominant values and cinematic critique, which aims to expose or challenge these values. Allen (2004) underscores that scholars must reveal the constructed nature of spectatorship and uncover the ideological forces shaping it.

Button (2023) categorizes cinematic ideologies into neutral, implicit, and explicit forms. Neutral ideologies appear in entertainment-focused films that avoid deeper social themes; implicit ideologies reflect the director's worldview and often surface through protagonist–antagonist conflicts; explicit ideologies openly attempt to persuade viewers, especially in genres like Westerns or patriotic films. Andradegroza (2013) clarifies that implicit ideologies operate subtly through cultural norms, whereas explicit ideologies articulate clear political messages. Turner (1999) adds that identifying ideology requires tracing how a film text relates to its cultural context rather than assuming a single fixed meaning.

More broadly, ideologies shaped by Enlightenment thought, refers to systems of beliefs and values that structure perceptions of society. Thinkers such as Marx, Gramsci, and Althusser emphasize its connection to power. Althusser (1969) argues that ideologies shape understanding by distorting reality in accordance with dominant interests, and in cinema this means filmmakers inevitably present the world through ideological lenses. Grant (2016) reinforces that no film can be ideology-free because cinema itself is rooted in bourgeois representational forms, a point echoed by Rodowick (1988), who argues that cinematic systems reproduce dominant social perspectives under the guise of coherence.

Comolli and Narboni (1971) assert that every element of filmmaking participates in ideological production, insisting that filmmakers must disrupt cinema's illusion of objective reality. Aligning with Althusser (1971), they argue that the task of art is not to mask ideology but to expose it

“presenting ideology in a non-ideological form” that invites critical reflection. Bitania Tadesse (2016) in her work that examined the revolutionary films of Ethiopia also notes that cinema shapes ideological interpretations of the nations’ past and present. She has highlighted that there is a close relationship between historical memory, cinema, and ideology.

Taken together, these theorists show that cinematic ideology refers both to conceptions of cinema as an art form and to the ideological frameworks embedded in film practice. Cinema inevitably reflects and circulates dominant cultural, political, and economic values, whether implicitly through representational norms or explicitly through thematic messages. As a result, understanding cinematic ideology requires analyzing how films communicate, normalize, or challenge the belief systems that shape both their production and their reception.

From the above discussion, we can conclude that the term "cinematic ideology" fundamentally refers to conceptions about the cinematic art itself and the ideologies reflected through this art. It encompasses a complex interplay of various ideological frameworks that influence how films are produced, received, and interpreted. Therefore, engaging with cinematic ideology involves navigating multiple layers of belief systems that inform not only the content of films but also their stylistic choices and narrative structures. Because, filmmakers, whether intentionally or not, contribute to this ideological discourse by filtering their narratives through prevailing social, cultural, and economic contexts, thereby reflecting and reinforcing dominant ideologies or challenging them. Because of this reason, these ideologies can manifest both explicitly, through overt themes and messages, and implicitly, through subtle cues and representations that shape audience perceptions. Ultimately, a comprehensive understanding of cinematic ideology requires recognizing the diverse and sometimes contradictory ideologies at play.

2.1.5. African Cinema(s): Historical Evolution and Global significance

According to Cham (2011), African participation in global cinema as storytellers of their own narratives began in earnest during the 1960s. Prior to that, the continent was largely a consumer of Western films that often misrepresented African identities and experiences. Despite numerous obstacles, African cinema has emerged as a critical platform for political, cultural, and

intellectual expression, offering counter-narratives that challenge Western-dominated representations and reflect the lived realities of African people. Barlet (2012) while outlining the evolution of African cinema from the 1960s to the 2010s highlights its shifting focus across decades. In the 1960s, post-colonial filmmakers emerged to counter colonial narratives and reclaim African identity and cultural values. The 1970s marked a period of Pan-African solidarity, with film festivals and organizations promoting unity and social change, led by figures like Ousmane Sembène. During the 1980s, attention turned to economic independence and the development of national film industries, though this period was also marked by growing disillusionment with political leadership. In the 1990s, filmmakers began exploring individual struggles within broader societal contexts, moving away from collective identities. The 2000s introduced a more introspective, human-centered approach, and by the 2010s, African cinema increasingly tackled global issues such as inequality, migration, and religious extremism. Overall, the trajectory of African cinema reflects a shift from overt political resistance to a nuanced exploration of human experiences, resilience, and cultural richness.

Kabore and Martin (2021) trace the beginnings of cinematic activity in Africa to 1895, when Felix Regnault filmed a *Wolof clay potter*. By 1896, film screenings had reached Egypt and South Africa, and by 1897, Tunisia and Morocco. However, these early cinematic ventures, often led by Western filmmakers, presented Africa as an exotic backdrop while reducing its people to passive or primitive figures. As Robert Stam notes, Africans were turned into "objects of spectacle," reinforcing colonial stereotypes of a "dark continent" and legitimizing imperialism through paternalistic narratives. Films like *Tarzan*, *Trader Horn*, *King Solomon's Mines*, *Mogambo*, *Safari*, and *The Snows of Kilimanjaro* exemplified this trend captivating audiences with impressive visuals while romanticizing colonial exploits and dehumanizing African characters. These portrayals had a lasting impact on global perceptions of Africa and its diaspora. this shows that during the colonial era, cinema played a significant role in advancing Eurocentric ideologies about Africa. As Dwaria (1984) explains, that the 1884 Berlin Conference, which initiated the "Scramble for Africa," was justified by the so-called moral obligation to "civilize" the continent a sentiment echoed by early filmmakers who feared the cultural impact of commercial films like those featuring *Charlie Chaplin* on African audiences. In response, during the colonial critique phase, filmmakers began using cinema to challenge these narratives. Rene

Vautier condemned colonialism in his documentary *Afrique 50* (1950, France), while Paulin Soumanou Vieyra and Mamadou Sarr explored diasporic identity and the symbolic displacement of Africa in *Afrique-sur-Seine* (1955). Similarly, Chris Marker and Alain Resnais addressed racism through their critical examination of African art in *Statues Also Die* (1963). These efforts marked a turning point, using film as a tool of resistance to confront colonial distortions and reclaim African identity (Kabore and Martin, 2021).

According to Olivier Barlet (2012), Emerging in the 1960s alongside the wave of African independence, African cinema quickly became a powerful postcolonial art form and political platform for self-expression. African cinema emerged in the 1960s as a distinctly postcolonial art form, providing a political platform for self-expression during the era of African independence. Ousmane Sembene's *Borom Sarret* (1963) marked a foundational moment, introducing themes of cultural alienation, exploitation, and the disillusionment of postcolonial realities. Kabore and Martin (2021) highlight key anti-colonial films of the era such as Sembène's *Emitai* (1971), Gillo Pontecorvo's *The Battle of Algiers* (1966), Sarah Maldoror's *Sambizanga* (1972), Med Hondo's *Soleil O* (1970), Djibril Diop Mambety's *Touki Bouki* (1973), and Gaston Kaboré's *Wend Kuuni* (1982). As the political and economic climate shifted, films like Souleymane Cissé's *Finyè* (1983) and *Yeelen* (1984), Hondo's *Sarraounia* (1986), Flora Gomes' *Mortu Nega* (1988), and Jean-Marie Teno's *Clando* (1996) explored themes of nationalization, independence, and growing disillusionment. Barlet and Claude Forest later identified the 2000s and 2010s as a moment of "aesthetic renewal and digital revolution," ushering in films like Mahamat-Saleh Haroun's *Bye Bye Africa* (1998) and *Un homme qui crie* (2010), Sembène's *Faat Kiné* (2000) and *Moolaadé* (2003), Abderrahmane Sissako's *Heremakono* (2003), *Bamako* (2004), and *Timbuktu* (2014), Haile Gerima's *Teza* (2009), Alain Gomis's *Félicité* (2017), and Mati Diop's *Atlantics* (2019). Cham (2011) adds that films like *La Noire de...*, *The Mask* (1979), *Harvest: 3,000 Years* (1978), and productions from Mozambique's National Institute of Cinema such as *Estas são as armas* (1979) and *Mueda: Memoria e Massacre* offered critical reflections on colonial legacies and liberation struggles. Françoise Pfaff's analysis of *Borom Sarret* and *Afrique sur Seine* emphasizes themes of existential and cultural alienation. Female scholars and filmmakers like Molaria Ogunyemi (1985), Buchi Emecheta (in Nfah-Abbenyi, 1997), and Molaria Ogundipe-Leslie (1994) have asserted a feminist position distinct from both Western and

African-American frameworks, highlighting concerns grounded in African realities. Ukadike (1994) further affirms that early African films like *Afrique sur Seine* and *Borom Sarret* offered authentic African perspectives that challenged colonial ideologies. Diawara (2010) notes that while early African cinema was shaped by a unified Pan-African movement, particularly through organizations like FEPACI, contemporary African cinema reflects a diversity of regional, aesthetic, and political expressions shaped by location, production contexts, and individual vision.

Ukadike (1994) underscores the depth of African cinema, arguing that it mirrors the intricate realities of the continent and necessitates thorough analysis that incorporates Africa's cultural heritage, critiques of colonialism and underdevelopment, traditional values, and ideological conflicts, especially regarding decolonization. He asserts that African cinema should be viewed through the lens of historical contexts involving colonialism, neocolonialism, and the cultural exchanges among indigenous, Arab-Islamic, and Euro-Christian influences. Cham (2011) echoes this sentiment, characterizing African cinema as a crucial cultural dialogue that serves as a political and intellectual arena for representing and reinterpreting African realities. He posits that filmmaking is both politically charged and imaginative, providing insightful reflections on the personal and collective experiences of Africans.

Ricci (2020) notes that contemporary African identity is shaped by the historical impacts of slavery and colonization which is supported by Joseph Ki-Zerbo highlighting the psychological repercussions of colonialism, such as internalized self-loathing and marginalization due to Western hierarchies. Based on this ground Hall (1997) emphasizes that dominant visual cultures often lead Black individuals to see themselves as "Others," a recurring theme in African cinema. Ukadike (1994) points out that Black African cinema faces unique challenges distinct from European or American films, primarily rooted in the enduring legacy of colonial rule and the ongoing struggle for self-determination.

Despite these challenges, Cham (2011) argues that African cinema has been a powerful tool for contesting Western misrepresentations and presenting authentic African narratives. Kabore underscores the ability of culturally grounded cinema to resonate universally by portraying deeply human experiences. Some filmmakers draw on oral traditions, indigenous

aesthetics, and symbolic language to create stories that bridge local and global contexts, enhancing the universal appeal of their work. Sturman (2007) identifies Pan-Africanism as a central theme in African cinema, with narratives deeply influenced by historical traumas such as slavery, colonization, and the transatlantic slave trade.

Ukadike (2020) notes that Black African cinema often tackles themes of colonialism, neocolonialism, and socio-political struggles, aligning with the goals of Third World cinema to decolonize consciousness and foster social transformation. This cinematic movement shares parallels with Latin American revolutionary films, such as Cinema Novo and the Third Cinema approach, emphasizing cinema as a tool against imperialism. Filmmakers like Ousmane Sembene, Eddie Ugbomah, Souleymane Cisse, and Haile Gerima utilize their unique styles to confront imperialism and social issues. In addition to this, he has noted that, despite facing structural and political challenges post-independence such as economic dependency and bureaucratic media control a small group of independent filmmakers continues to produce significant work that enriches African cinematic discourse.

In "*What is Cinema For Us?*", Med Hondo (2021) also added on the discussion the importance of African filmmakers concentrating on African and Arab histories to reclaim narrative control, while critiquing the prevailing influence of Euro-American cinema that has misrepresented their identities. He champions self-representation through storytelling that is deeply rooted in local cultures and histories, pointing out the neglect of women's voices in the film industry. Hondo advocates for a grassroots approach that empowers communities, particularly women, to share their varied experiences. By prioritizing women's stories, filmmakers can confront gender stereotypes and enhance the overall understanding of African identity and culture, making inclusive storytelling vital for a cinema that truly represents the continent's complexities.

Most scholars agree that identifying African cinema as a singular entity is unachievable, given the continent's diverse cultural interpretations. The debate over whether African filmmaking requires a distinct iconography or film language remains ongoing. Diawara (1994) argues against the necessity of an authentic African cinematic aesthetic, noting that such aesthetics can vary significantly, influenced by factors like political contexts, ideological

perspectives, and regional differences. His insights align with those of Minh-ha and Burton, who advocate for critical examination of film texts rather than strict categorization, acknowledging the complexities of global culture, especially as many African filmmakers have trained in Western film schools. Hamid Naficy further emphasizes the difficulty of classifying even national cinemas due to their inherent diversity. However, these scholars recognize that shared characteristics can still be found among the works of African filmmakers.

As African cinema evolves, it reflects shared experiences and the richness of diverse cultural contexts, often drawing from oral traditions, which are prevalent in many global artistic expressions. This interplay between past influences and contemporary creativity illustrates how tradition shapes artistic expression. Key figures in African cinema embody this fusion of heritage and innovation, highlighting the ongoing quest for identity within the global cinematic landscape. Historically, collaboration among filmmakers, particularly through movements like the Pan African Federation of Filmmakers (FEPACI) in the 1960s and 70s, has significantly influenced the industry. Today, African filmmaking is characterized by a multiplicity of voices and styles shaped by filmmakers' geographical contexts and experiences, while globalization, cultural integration, and colonial legacies continue to inform its form and content.

In general Alexie Tcheuyouape (2021) identified that African cinema is widely recognized for its diverse and non-uniform character, resisting conventional classifications. African film scholars such as Gabriel, Diawara, and Ferid Boughedir have sought to define African cinema by categorizing it in contrast to Western mainstream models by highlighting its unique production contexts and narrative styles. Gabriel (1982), adopting a neo-Marxist lens, identifies three phases: unqualified assimilation (Hollywood imitation), remembrance (films rooted in folklore), and combative cinema (ideological tools for liberation). Diawara (1992) presents a similar three-part framework: social realism (popular and entertaining films), return to source (mythical narratives centered on precolonial Africa), and colonial confrontation (aligned with Gabriel's combative cinema). In contrast, Malkmus and Armes (1993) recommend analysis on the content of individual films rather than overarching political ideologies. Boughedir (as cited in Givanni, 2000) emphasizes the tensions between tradition and modernity in African films. Additionally, Prescod (2000) calls for attention to audience reception, highlighting the importance of considering whom the films are made for. On top of this Naficy (2008) added the

idea of complexity of defining national cinemas, pointing out the internal diversity even within a single country's film output. This hybridity both cultural and intellectual challenges rigid categorizations and fosters the emergence of innovative cinematic forms. Collectively, these perspectives affirm that African cinema is pluralistic and defies a singular definition. The transnational and hybrid nature of African cinema makes it difficult to sharply distinguish it from Western cinematic traditions, especially given that many African filmmakers are trained in Western institutions.

Alexie (2021) adds that the analysis of African cinema has shifted from its earlier focus on colonialism and nationalism to a broader engagement with globalization and cultural exchange. Today's African filmmakers continue to redefine the medium, reflecting a dynamic and multifaceted artistic tradition. Ricci (2020) also stresses the importance of including African diasporic cinema in this discussion, as it reflects the transformative experiences of displacement, identity negotiation, and cultural blending. Diasporic filmmakers often address themes of alienation, belonging, and historical memory, using cinema as a medium of resistance against fixed identities. Sheila Petty further emphasizes that Black diasporic cinema offers a wide range of cultural critique; shaped by diverse voices navigating hostile or exclusionary environments.

Scholars indicate that African cinema is manifested with a variety of political, cultural, and ideological contexts, not only one authentic style, which is underscored by Diawara (1994). Therefore, the diversity in African cinema offers valuable perspectives on history, identity, and hybridity, while also enriching global film theory and cultural studies as well as deepens our comprehension of transnational storytelling, decolonization, and the transformative impact of visual narratives in a globalized world.

2.1.6. African Identity and Culture Ambiance

The notions of African identity and culture have been widely discussed mainly between scholars in literature, cultural studies, African studies, anthropology history and philosophy. In this regard, there is a general consensus among intellectuals that African identity is not predetermined and homogenous but it has historically been constructed and is being transformed continuously as a result of social interactions, cultural practices and lived experiences (Appiah, 1992; Hall, 1990; Masolo, 2004). On the same note, Malik and Farooq (2025) define the African

culture and identity as dynamic and diverse combinations of traditions, values, languages, and practices that have evolved over time, and define the social and spiritual life of societies. Based on oral traditions and community structures and history they create significance, integration, and connectedness throughout the continent. This shows that although there are multiple identities across Africa, there are some common factors that bring the people together regardless of the geographical labeling of the continent.

Identity as generally defined by Neweke (2018), is an ontological construct that connects essential properties with structural form, which is defined by what a thing is and how it is formed. This view is more complicated when dealing with African identity. Where essentialist views claiming a unified African identity exemplified by the pre-colonial way of living, the anti-essentialist ones focus on plurality, mix, and continuous cultural transformation (Tembo, 2016; Appiah, 1992). In this regard, Okolo (1987) identifies African identity in a relational logic of being-with where the individual is located in the extended family and in the ability to sustain a sense of being through the extended relations as manifested in hospitality, shared responsibility, extended family unit and the sense of belonging in the living and the spiritual world. Extending the discussion, Ikechukwu (2018) explains, though a the concept of single African culture is context-specific and multifaceted because African culture have their own identities but have common value systems, such as respect towards the elderly, adherence to traditions, communalism, and strong spiritual and moral relationships. This view shows, African identity is relational as it comes up in social groups as well as cultural systems and it is not a given and universal (Turner, 1987; Masolo, 2004). This opinion illuminates some essential characteristics of African socio-cultural life, such as the veneration of ancestors, child-rearing in common, and the infusion of the divine into ordinary life, and introduces a unifying sense of “Africanness” among various groups (Neweke, 2018). Nevertheless, this view is criticized due to its over-generalization and an idealistic depiction of African societies, without paying much attention to the internal diversity, transformational processes, and the effects of modernization and globalization. Dlanga (2011), in this regard, does not support fixed, essentialist definitions, but claims African identity as something fluid and multi-layered, as a process of being-with, in which belonging is both inherited and actively created. Additionally, Eegunlusi (2017) conceptualizes African identity as complex and multifaceted.

According to Neweke (2018), the concept of African identity is influenced by historical and epistemic crisis of slavery, colonialism, and neo-colonialism that disrupted the continuity of cultures and alienated Africans to their roots. The imposed displacement, as well as religious and cultural impositions, undermined the indigenous identities, and the discourses of the West distorted the African minds to appear irrational or primitive (Igwe, 2010). In his turn, Cheikh Anta Diop (1987; 1991) argues that the African identity may be based on the common origins, culture and outlook on the world, which was manifested in the political stability, social organization and in the communal, non-exploitative systems of precolonial African communities until the beginning of colonialism and its falsifying interpretations. However, as Sadias (1990) notes, common historical experience such as slavery, wars, lineage and colonial experiences still maintain common ground. In general, this view highlights that the crisis of African identity is both cultural and intellectual that necessitates restoring cultural integrity and epistemic autonomy. Therefore, we can understand that, colonialism and slavery influenced African culture and, identity and their inheritance continues to impact social relations, and collective memory.

The scholars also emphasize that African culture is the basis on which identity is constructed and reproduced. According to Falola (2003), culture refers to an invigorating system of beliefs, languages, institutions, and artistic practices that develops in a historical engagement. Likewise, Idang (2015) talks of the African culture as a whole system of social, moral, religious, political, and aesthetic values that define communal life. The association between culture and identity is also supported by communal thought. Constantine Mwikamba (1991) follows the African identity quest to intellectual trends, including Pan-Africanism, Negritude, African Personality, and Ujamaa which stressed on collective dignity and cultural reclamation. Relational principle is symbolized by Ubuntu, as explained by Blankenberg (1999) and Sesanti (2010), which states that personhood, is created through communal affiliation not personal freedom. Thus, despite the great variety of identities existing in Africa, there are some common features, which hold them together.

Thus, Eegunlusi (2017) claims that, in the integrated Anthropological, historical, philosophical and linguistic conceptualization of African identity is essential to understand the conception the diversity of Africa in terms of culture and identity accordingly. He has claimed that scholars like Diop emphasizes common origins of history, Eegunlusi underlines the fact that

diversity of Africa results in multiple and overlapping identities, which are shaped by the local histories and intercultural interactions. Tanla-Kishani (1976) condemns Africans to decolonial languages to reflect their own cultural realities.

In addition, Representation is also considered the way of understanding identity and culture in cultural studies. Hall (1990) understands identity as a collective cultural heritage as well as a process that is constantly being constructed through the discourses of history and representation. Other scholars like Kellner (2011) and Graeme Turner (2008) thus stress on the role of the media in creating and distributing cultural meanings. In film studies, analytical methods that concentrate on the structure of narration and cinematic practices, such as mise-en-scene, cinematography, and characterization enable film scholars to analyze the ways in which cultural identities are constructed and conveyed (Abrams, Bell, and Udris, 2001; Barsam, 2004). As such, Representation relates to African identity and culture as it influences the ways in which people, histories and values are characterized and perceived. It assists in maintaining a cultural heritage and strengthening the experience and identity of the people.

Cinema has become one of the major cultural modes of self-representation in Africa. According to Tekletsadik (2012), African cinema is a cultural text that societies use to define and represent identity whereas Teshome (1982) places African filmmaking in the wider context of the Third World cinematic movements to define the local cultural points of view. Salem (2012) also claims that the analysis of the African cinema pioneers, such as Ousmane Sembene, has proven to be important in determining how cinema can be used to understand and challenge the balance of power, claiming social change criticizing the status quo and investigate the manner to develop more reasonable social relations. By foregrounding the African identities, the filmmakers can challenge the negative stereotypes regarding African continent. A filmmaker Haile Gerima, in this regard, criticizes cinematic misrepresentation of Africa by using film as an instrument of control. He places cinema as strong weapon where culture can be seen as a form of resistance.

2.1.7. Pan- African cinema: Conception and Movement

Since the late 19th century, African intellectuals have emphasized the importance of a cohesive African identity as essential for true independence. Movements such as Pan-Africanism,

Afrocentrism, and Negritude, led by philosophers, artists, and political figures, sought to transcend tribal divisions and colonial borders in pursuit of cultural unity. Despite the continent's immense diversity of languages, religions, and traditions, these thinkers believed that a shared history of colonialism and resistance could form the basis for solidarity. They aimed to uncover a uniquely African cultural essence a deep, poetic spirit that could resonate from rural Congo to urban centers like Johannesburg and Dakar, forging a collective identity rooted in African values and experiences (McCall, 2007). Pan-Africanism, in particular, emerged as a unifying movement against slavery, colonialism, and racism, shaped by 19th-century North American and Caribbean thinkers who promoted a shared "Negro" identity, though often excluding North Africans (Appiah, 2009). As Maimela (1913) notes, the movement initially focused on establishing a unified African state but has since expanded to embrace cultural, literary, and artistic expressions that promote solidarity across the continent and the diaspora.

After World War II, Pan-African leaders began to adopt a broader, more inclusive approach to unity that was rooted in geographical aspects. W. E. B. Du Bois highlighted the important role of African Americans in challenging racial stereotypes and contributing to a global Black identity. The foundations of the movement were established with the 1900 Pan-African Conference in London, followed by various congresses spearheaded by Du Bois that focused on issues of colonialism and race relations (Appiah, 2009). Initially aimed at creating a unified African state, the movement gradually evolved to include cultural and artistic expressions that promote solidarity across continents. Hakim Adi (2019) outlines this ideological shift from its abolitionist origins to contemporary institutions like the African Union and its significance for modern movements such as Black Lives Matter. Theo Williams (2022) supports this perspective by demonstrating that Pan-Africanism goes beyond political objectives to include shared values, cultural practices, and evolving identities. Likewise, Adom Getachew (2019) notes the movement's persistent focus on collective action as a strategy for achieving both national independence and unity across the continent. Scholars such as Imaobong D. Umoren and Keisha N. Blain highlight the Black women has played critical yet often overlooked role of in shaping Pan-African ideas and activism.

The Pan-African Cultural Manifesto, established at the First All-African Cultural Festival in Algiers in 1969, highlighted the critical importance of culture in the context of liberation,

unity, and development. It characterized culture as being centered on people and grounded in their lived experiences and values, while denouncing the damaging effects of colonialism on African cultural identity. The manifesto called for the revival of genuine traditions, integration of modern science and technology, promotion of education in African languages, and active involvement of youth and women in safeguarding cultural heritage. This cultural perspective played a significant role in the rise of Pan-African cinema. Ferid Boughedir (2021) traces the roots of cinematographic Pan-Africanism back to 1969, with the creation of FESPACO in Ouagadougou and the Pan-African Cultural Festival in Algiers, though its foundations were laid earlier at the 1968 Carthage Film Festival (CFF) in Tunisia, which was established in tandem with the Festival of Black Arts in Dakar. Tunisia's unique cultural and geographical position facilitated the inclusion of both African and Arab nations, serving as a bridge between Pan-African and Pan-Arab cinematic traditions. According to Boughedir, cinematographic Pan-Africanism evolved into an important movement for intercultural dialogue, growing through festivals like FESPACO and CFF. These events not only fostered a new generation of African audiences seeking cultural representation but also provided platforms for political and social education, helping to overcome literacy barriers and promote solidarity across the continent.

African film festivals, which began to emerge in the 1960s, are noted as significant expressions of cultural ownership, political resistance, and empowerment, as highlighted by Miami (2019). Among these, FESPACO was created to link African filmmakers directly with their audience. At a time when many African nations were striving for decolonization, these festivals and conferences became vital spaces for filmmakers from across the continent to come together and articulate manifestos that defined African cinema on their own terms. These statements underscored the role of cinema in raising awareness, sparking discussions, and shaping African identity through narratives, aesthetics, and viewpoints that originated in Africa itself. These manifestos placed a strong emphasis on African audiences and resonated with the principles of Pan-Africanism, which promoted unity among Africans globally, serving as a fundamental ideology for liberation movements, despite varying degrees of political and economic success. FESPACO represented this vision by creating a platform that united filmmakers against the remnants of colonialism while celebrating cultural authenticity. Officially founded on August 27, 1980, in Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso, FESPACO became a foundational element of Pan-African cinema, showcasing films that portray African culture, identity, and

history. Martin et al. (2023) further highlight Pan-African cinema as a means of expressing African heritage and challenging neocolonial influences. At the 1969 Pan-African Cultural Festival in Algiers, Algerian President Houari Boumediene emphasized the transformative power of culture in his opening remarks, advocating for policies based on African values while cautioning against cultural imperialism. The significance of cinema in the political arena was reinforced in later gatherings, including the 1972 meeting of the Organization of African Unity (OAU) in Rabat, which supported FESPACO, and the 1974 seminar in Ouagadougou, which encouraged filmmakers to portray historical narratives about pre-colonial societies and the effects of colonialism. These meetings also advocated for government funding of cinema as a crucial educational resource. Furthermore, the international Pan-African cinema movement has connected filmmakers from the Caribbean, Brazil, and the global diaspora, fostering collaborations, resource sharing, and international distribution while addressing common issues like funding and visibility. Ultimately, this global movement not only celebrates African identity and collective heritage but also affirms the role of cinema in promoting justice, cultural pride, and solidarity across borders.

This initiative is supported by key meetings, including the Inaugural Declaration of the First Meeting of Filmmakers from Africa, Brazil, the Caribbean, and Their Diasporas in Havana, Cuba (2011), which recognized the importance of cinema in affirming national identities and fostering cultural independence. Another significant event was the Final Declaration of the Second Meeting held in Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic (2012), where participants emphasized collaboration and educational integration of cinema. The Final Declaration from the Third Meeting in Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso (2013) further reaffirmed these goals and proposed the establishment of financial support mechanisms for national cinema, advocating for a unified effort to promote African narratives on the global stage. Key figures in the movement include pioneering filmmakers such as Ousmane Sembene from Senegal, often referred to as the "father of African cinema," whose films highlight social issues and African identity. Another significant figure is Haile Gerima from Ethiopia, known for his critical narratives that encapsulate the African experience, particularly in the diaspora. Additionally, the works of Agnes Varda and other international filmmakers who engaged with African cinema have helped raise its profile on the global stage.

The conversations around Pan-African cinema would not be complete without addressing the role of women in this movement. Despite longstanding contributions to the audiovisual industry, women have historically faced significant barriers in terms of training, funding, and representation. During the African Women's Workshop at FESPACO in February 1991, professionals gathered to confront these challenges. They highlighted the urgency of amplifying women's voices and perspectives in media, recognizing their vital role as educators and cultural transmitters for future generations. The workshop resulted in the Statement by the African Women Professionals of Cinema, Television, and Video, which advocated for the inclusion of women's stories and perspectives in filmmaking. This commitment to forming a working group emphasized the need for strategies to overcome systemic obstacles, enhance training opportunities, and promote diverse narratives within Pan-African cinema. Thus Pan-African cinema is not merely an artistic expression but a movement intertwined with culture, identity, and advocacy for marginalized voices, particularly women. With pivotal declarations, influential figures, and significant events, this vibrant field continues to evolve, inspiring future generations to reclaim and reshape their narratives through the powerful medium of film. Williams concludes that the variety of perspectives surrounding Pan-Africanism illustrates it as a dynamic and evolving movement that continues to inspire worldwide solidarity.

2.1.8. Third Cinema: Aesthetics and politics

Any re-evaluation of the cultural politics of the 1960's must consider the influential Third World cultural movements, particularly the concept of "Third Cinema," which aimed to challenge the colonial dominance of Hollywood and serve the revolutionary needs of colonized peoples (Cooper, 1988). Emerging in a politically charged climate, Third Cinema reflects the socio-historical realities of "Third World" nations marked by poverty, government corruption, and neo-imperialism (Gabriel, 1993). In response to systemic oppression, radical movements, as articulated by Franz Fanon, sought to contest reactionary politics and advocate for marginalized voices. Third Cinema incorporates these revolutionary ideals into its artistic expression, aligning closely with political struggles.

This term represents a counter to dominant cinematic forms, with First Cinema embodying Hollywood's consumerism and bourgeois values, while Second Cinema consists of

European art house films focused more on aesthetic innovation than political engagement. In contrast, Third Cinema subverts conventional cinematic codes by embracing revolutionary ideals and promoting active viewer engagement (Gabriel, 1982; Marzana, N, 2009). Latin American filmmakers laid the groundwork for this movement, with Glauber Rocha advocating a "cinema of hunger" aimed at social justice (Rocha, 1997) and Julio Garcia Espinosa proposing an "imperfect cinema" that prioritizes content over technical perfection (Espinosa, 1997). Fernando Birri called for cinema to awaken revolutionary consciousness and facilitate societal transformation on multiple levels (Birri, 1997).

The foundational concept of Third Cinema was articulated by Fernando Solanas and Octavio Getino in their 1969 essay "Towards a Third Cinema," which sought to unify various counter-hegemonic movements, including "Imperfect Cinema" and "Guerrilla Cinema," into a transformative practice. Their ideas were further emphasized in the groundbreaking documentary *The Hour of the Furnaces* (1968) (Mike, 2001). Ultimately, Third Cinema has emerged as a significant form of experimental filmmaking in the Third World, driven by intellectuals dedicated to fostering critical dialogue and promoting radical social change, thereby redefining cinema as a powerful tool for resistance and empowerment (Cooper, 1988).

Solanas and Getino (1969) propose Third Cinema as a transformative film movement that arose in opposition to both First Cinema (Hollywood) and Second Cinema (art-house films), emphasizing the authentic realities of life in the Global South. This movement prioritizes socially relevant, politically engaged narratives that empower marginalized voices and challenge colonial legacies. Unlike First Cinema's commercial focus and Second Cinema's individualistic tendencies, Third Cinema embraces collective storytelling and often utilizes alternative distribution methods such as community screenings and digital platforms to engage directly with audiences and foster dialogue. Its aesthetic often combines documentary techniques and non-linear narratives, reflecting the complexities of post-colonial experiences.

According to Robin and Jaffe (1994), Solanas and Getino identify Third Cinema as a distinct form of filmmaking focused on social and political resistance against Western imperialism, racism, and neocolonialism. But Wayne (2006) notes that it transcends geographical origins, emphasizing institutional structures, working practices, and aesthetic

strategies aligned with the cultural politics of the Third World. It is characterized by an authentic representation of people striving to become agents of their own histories in the postcolonial context. As a cinema of decolonization, it promotes national liberation and opposes mythic narratives, racism, and bourgeois values. Its key objective is to inspire and educate audiences in the Global South to confront the political and cultural forces of oppression. Thus, Third Cinema is defined by its ideological stance and the consciousness it fosters, as emphasized by Gabriel (1982), who argues that its essence lies in ideological commitments rather than production context.

The influence of Third Cinema has extended beyond its origins, inspiring contemporary filmmakers to address socio-political issues and innovat storytelling methods that resonate with diverse audiences, emphasizing cultural authenticity and representation. Solanas and Getino (1970) argue for a revolutionary cinema that transforms from mere entertainment into a "guerrilla" medium actively participating in humanity's liberation. They criticize mainstream films for upholding bourgeois values and superficially addressing social injustices while catering to U.S. ideologies, suggesting that the belief that liberation films can only emerge post-revolution reflects a bourgeois mindset reliant on Hollywood models. Genuine revolutionary art, they assert, must break free from these constraints to effect real change, as reformist cinema often fails to create impactful narratives. Recent historical shifts influenced by global liberation movements underscore the necessity of militant cinema in facilitating revolution. Emerging filmmakers are creating works that engage with national realities and mobilize the masses, with intellectuals playing a crucial role by aligning their artistic commitments with broader liberation struggles against neocolonial ideologies that alienate them from their cultural contexts. The suppression of national consciousness by mass media highlights the urgent need for a decolonized cinema that articulates the struggles of oppressed peoples. Ultimately, revolutionary cinema must critique existing power structures while empowering communities to foster dialogue and action toward genuine liberation. In contrast, First Cinema promotes dominant ideologies through commercial entertainment that encourages passive spectatorship, while Second Cinema, though subversive, remains constrained within existing systems, prioritizing visual aesthetics over the needs of underdeveloped countries. Third Cinema, emerging from post-World War II nationalism and decolonization, seeks to engage viewers as active participants and

represent significant historical events relevant to the communities it depicts, embodying a "by the people, for the people" ethos, as highlighted by Gabriel (1982).

The manifestos by Solanas and Getino (1969) argue that cinema has been depoliticized and commodified by the dominant consumerist economic order, primarily benefiting major players in the global film industry, particularly Hollywood. Consequently, most films reflect the values of their corporate owners, reducing them to mere entertainment commodities while sidelining the cinematic contributions of the Third World. In response, Solanas and Getino advocate for a form of cinema that embodies struggles for liberation, rooted in the concept of the "Third World," which historically represents the lowest tier in the Theory of Three Worlds a framework established in the 1950s that classifies nations based on development status (Sison, 2006). This term encompasses colonized, neocolonized, and decolonized nations, highlighting structural disadvantages shaped by colonial histories and global inequities. Despite the collapse of the Second World in the 1990s, "Third World" remains relevant for describing ongoing exploitation and impoverishment amid globalization (Wayne, 2001). Third Cinema, while often employing realism and documentary aesthetics, differs from Third World Cinema, as it serves both as an aesthetic and political project aimed at challenging power structures. Filmmakers from the Global South and supportive voices from the Global North contribute to this movement, exemplified by Gillo Pontecorvo's *The Battle of Algiers*, which addresses colonialism and resistance effectively (Wayne, 2001). Additionally, Cham (1982) highlights filmmakers such as Osman Sembene, Haile Gerima, Med Hondo, and Mahama Johnson Traore from Africa as significant contributors to Third Cinema.

According to Teshome Gabriel (2011) The evolution of Third Cinema unfolds in three phases, starting with Phase I, where many Third World film industries, such as Nigeria's Calpenny and India's "Hollywood-on-the-Nile," uncritically assimilate into the Hollywood model, prioritizing commercial entertainment and escapism at the expense of addressing pressing social issues. Phase II shifts towards indigenization, with filmmakers asserting control over production and exploring cultural themes, as seen in movements like "cinema moudjahid" in Algeria and Sembene Ousmane's *Mandabi*. However, there is a risk of romanticizing the past without critiquing its regressive aspects, highlighted by Luis Ospina's critique in *Picking on the People*. In Phase III, filmmaking evolves into a community-driven public service, aligned with

Julio Garcia Espinosa's notion of "Imperfect Cinema," focusing on the lives and struggles of Third World peoples through films like Miguel Littin's *The Promised Land*. This phase recognizes film as an ideological tool that connects filmmakers with the masses, promoting a cinema that genuinely represents Third World experiences. The interplay between these phases highlights the grey areas where filmmakers often blend characteristics, exemplified by films like *Manthan* and *Xala*, necessitating new critical frameworks to fully appreciate the complexities of Third World cinema.

Teshome (1982) also identified prominent themes in third Cinema. He has identified that third cinema tackles the multifaceted oppression faced by Third World countries, intertwining themes of class, culture, religion, and gender in its resistance against imperialism and advocacy for social change. Class struggle is a predominant theme, depicted in films like *The Brickmakers* and *Colombia: The Film*, which highlights the disparities between poverty and excess, urging audiences to recognize both external and internal oppressors. Cultural preservation is also vital, as filmmakers like Satyajit Ray emphasize local traditions to forge national identity against imperialist influences. Music serves as a powerful vehicle for social commentary, seen in works like *Fenceremos*, where lyrics voice the struggles of the oppressed. Religion is critiqued in films such as *The Promised Land* and *The Last Supper*, which explore the contradictions between religious teachings and oppressive realities, suggesting that true liberation requires a break from these ideological shackles. Additionally, the role of women is highlighted in films like *Lucía*, which illustrates their evolving positions in society, emphasizing the necessity of gender emancipation alongside broader social struggles. Overall, Third Cinema calls for a transformative social action that addresses the interconnectedness of these themes in the pursuit of liberation. He has also added that Third Cinema is characterized by its incorporation of cultural elements that serve both as references and subjects, enabling audiences to personally connect with the narratives while tackling globally significant political struggles. These cultural markers act as entry points for viewers to engage with the films and recognize the historical forces shaping their societies. The primary goal of Third Cinema is to provide a rational interpretation of historically defined realities, helping audiences identify the sources of their oppression. This approach combines cultural identification with radical historicization, framing Third Cinema as a cinematic intervention aimed at fostering revolutionary social change.

Generally third Cinema is identified as is both an aesthetic and political project that has guided filmmakers across Africa, Asia, and Latin America. Initially defined in the 1960s and 1970s to unite filmmakers, its principles continue to influence contemporary filmmaking strategies. As political, social, and cultural landscapes evolve, Third Cinema adapts to reflect revolutionary sentiments, disillusionment with failed or co-opted revolutions, and ongoing frustrations with class, racial, and gender oppression, as well as persistent colonial influences from First World nations. Thus, Third Cinema's significance in film history and its capacity to deliver impactful social commentary aimed at inspiring change remain crucial (Solanas and Getino, 1969; Gebriel, 1982).

However, some scholars raise their criticism on the notion of third cinema assuming it may oversimplify the complexities within Third world people, particularly regarding the diverse experiences and perspectives of filmmakers and audiences in various contexts. Among them, Hess (1984) has raised his concern against third Cinema Advocates like Teshome H. Gabriel. He has mentioned that a specific leftist perspective pertinent to the Global South, arguing that this classification can exempt certain films from necessary political critique, particularly regarding issues like sexism and nationalism that require a more nuanced analysis. While they acknowledge themes of race and class through filmmakers such as Sembene and Sanjines, they fail to explore these complexities in depth. Hess emphasizes the importance of critically examining how filmmakers navigate the transition to capitalism, warning against uncritical romanticization of opposition culture. Extending this critique, Robin and Jaffe (1994) note that Third Cinema has emerged globally, producing works in Latin America, Africa, Asia, and marginalized communities within the First World, often existing on the fringes of mainstream Hollywood and European practices while facing exile and censorship. Consequently, Third Cinema's survival is precarious; especially as U.S. audiences are less receptive to its films compared to movements like Italian neorealism or the French New Wave. The struggle for recognition among women filmmakers within Third Cinema has been particularly challenging due to the movement's historical male dominance, mirroring gender dynamics in Hollywood and Europe. Initially, Third Cinema's focus on universal themes, such as Glauber Rocha's "cinema of hunger," often overlooked critical differences related to gender, race, and class. Although Third World women in the 1970s and 1980s faced oppression similar to their counterparts in the West,

their experiences were diverse and complex. The political consciousness fostered by Third Cinema encouraged these women to recognize their multifaceted positions within their communities, complicating notions of unity and authentic cultural expression in the context of foreign assimilation and acculturation.

2.1.9. Cinema in Ethiopia: A Brief Review

According to Aboneh Ashagrie (2016), Ethiopia, which was home to one of the earliest civilizations in the Axumite Kingdom, underwent significant cultural transformations after adopting Coptic Christianity in the 4th century AD. These changes persisted through the Zagwe Dynasty until the late 19th century, despite ongoing internal conflicts and ethnic tensions. A pivotal moment came under Emperor Menelik II in the 1890s, coinciding with the decline of feudalism and the adoption of Western capitalist practices, which led to the introduction of cinema in Ethiopia in 1897, shortly after the first film screening in Paris in December 1895 (Paulos and Aboneh, 2023). Following his victory over Italy at the Battle of Adwa in 1896, Menelik II prioritized modernization, implementing infrastructure projects like telephone networks and railways. A notable event occurred on April 9, 1897, when a Frenchman from Algeria screened *Jesus Walking on Water* at Menelik's palace, capturing significant attention (Thomas M., 2015a). This film initially sold to the Italian minister Ciccodicola and then gifted to Menelik, reinforced Orthodox Christian values among the elite. Menelik recognized the potential of cinema as a tool for enlightenment and adeptly used it to influence the clergy's perspectives (Thomas M., 2015).

Aboneh (2016) identified this early cinematic appearance in Ethiopia, as it emphasizing the tension between the waning feudal system and the rising capitalist model. Because the conservative nobility and clergy resisted the modernization efforts of Emperor Menelik II, perceiving secular education and cinema as threats; they derogatorily referred to movie theaters as "Ye Seitan Bet," translating to "House of Satan." Despite this opposition, theater owners successfully drew audiences by offering religious films for free, sparking public interest. In Ethiopia, cinema depicted religious stories, aligning with the traditional storytelling practices commonly found in Orthodox churchyards.

Thomas M. (2015) highlights that; urbanization and modern technologies fueled cinema's popularity, particularly during Teferi Mekonnen's regency, leading to the first Ethiopian-made film in 1916. And During Emperor Haile Selassie I's reign, film production flourished, starting with his coronation film and expanding to documentaries showcasing historical sites (Tamene, 2014). However, the Italian occupation from 1936 to 1941 exploited cinema for cultural promotion, establishing cinemas in major cities. However, during the Italian occupation from 1936 to 1941, the Italians exploited film to promote their culture, establishing cinemas in cities such as Addis Ababa, Dessie, Dire Dawa, and Jimma. Despite destruction during the Italian occupation, Addis Ababa emerged as a vibrant cultural center post-liberation, with cinemas transitioning from foreign to Ethiopian management. Notable venues like the Haile Selassie I Theater and Cinema Addis Ketema fostered a thriving cinemagoing culture, with eight permanent cinemas in Addis Ababa by 1978, primarily screening American and Indian films. The 1960s marked the start of feature film production with *Hirut, abatwa mannew?* (1964), but high production costs ultimately led to the bankruptcy of the National Film and Publicity Company, highlighting the challenges facing the industry.

Following the 1974 revolution that ousted Haile Selassie's feudal monarchy, the Derg military dictatorship nationalized commercial cinemas, transforming them into "People's Cinema" under strict censorship. This era saw a decline in cinema houses and a focus on Russian films promoting communist themes. Notable works from this period include Haile Gerima's *Harvest: 3000 Years*, which critiques feudalism, and other films that reflect on Ethiopia's social changes. The establishment of the Ethiopian Film Corporation in 1986 aimed to produce both propaganda and artistic works, resulting in documentaries and films like *Behiwot Zuria* and *Aster*. Filmmakers such as Gerima and Salem Mekuria sought to reframe Ethiopia's historical narrative, addressing the legacy of feudalism and the struggles of the past, as seen in Mekuria's *Deluge*, which personalizes the traumatic experiences of the Red Terror under Mengistu Haile Mariam (Tamene, 2014).

According to Aboneh Ashagrie (2024), Ethiopian television began during the reign of Emperor Ḥaylā Śəllase with technical support from Thames Television to broadcast the OAU summit on 1 May 1963, with regular broadcasting starting on 2 November 1964. In the early 1970s, the Emperor promoted Ethiopia as a filming location, attracting foreign productions such

as *A Season in Hell* (1971) and *Shaft in Africa* (1973), while American and Bollywood films became popular at Cinema Ethiopia. The second Ethiopian feature film, *Gumma/Blood Money* (1974), was the first in color and gained wide attention. Under the Derg (after 1976), nationalization and censorship restricted cinematic growth. A digital “video revolution” in the late 2000s renewed local film production, with films like *Kazkaza Welafen* addressing social themes. The yefiker genre resurged in 2013/2014, improving storytelling and tackling contemporary issues. *Lamb* (2015), the first Amharic film screened at Cannes, received international acclaim but highlighted audiences’ continued preference for melodrama. As Thomas M (2015b) notes, Ethiopian cinema’s recurring theme of fiker (love) reflects cultural values shaped more by Bollywood’s collectivist emotional narratives than Hollywood’s individualism.

After the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) took down the military regime in 1991, film production in Ethiopia nearly came to a standstill for almost ten years, resulting in the dissolution of the Ethiopian Film Corporation by 1999. In response, former members established the Ethiopian Film Production Association (AFPA). While other African film industries, like Nigeria's Nollywood, thrived due to the global spread of video technology, Ethiopia's film sector struggled due to its complicated sociopolitical history. Although the volume of film production has been low in comparison to the nation's rich cultural heritage, significant advancements have occurred, especially since 1985 when Amharic films began to reach audiences through CDs, marking a crucial development for the industry (Tamirat, 2014). According to Jedlowski (2015), the early 2000s saw a rapid growth in Ethiopia's local digital film sector, resembling trends in countries such as Nigeria, Ghana, and Tanzania. This revival includes important works as well as earlier films like Michel Papatakis’s *Gumma* (1974) and Solomon Bekele Weya’s *Aster* (1992). Staven Thomas (2020) further indicates that Ethiopian film production increased from less than one film per year before 2000 to 109 films by 2015, driven largely by the accessibility of video and digital technologies. This surge in filmmaking coincided with economic improvements resulting from the government's Industrial Development Strategy, which started showing positive effects in 2002 as Ethiopia evolved into an "activist developmental state," diverging from the neoliberal globalization model promoted by the International Monetary Fund (IMF). This transformation highlights the resilience of Ethiopian

cinema and its capacity to reflect and engage with the nation's intricate social and political realities.

Thomas S. (2020) also expands the discussion and identified that that Ethiopian cinema's distinctiveness from African Cinema. He has state that its uniqueness is situated within an ongoing debate about authentic African cinema amid globalization, stems from its unique historical context of avoiding colonization, which fosters a sense of national continuity. This is reflected in the use of indigenous languages like Amharic, Tigrinya, and Afan Oromo, allowing films to construct narratives that align with national ideologies and future aspirations. Unlike many African nations where cinema emerged under colonial imposition, Ethiopia integrated film into its modernization efforts initiated by Emperor Menelik II (Abebe, 2009). Furthermore, the late Prime Minister Meles Zenawi and advisor Arkebe Oqubay critiqued neoliberal policies from institutions like the World Bank and IMF, advocating for a model of alternative globalization where the state retains control over key economic sectors to promote local production. Locally financed Ethiopian films navigate the complexities of globalization by celebrating diverse indigenous cultures while critiquing elite policies (Thomas S, 2020).

The current body of scholarship regarding Ethiopian cinema has also focused on audience dynamics and institutional limitations as well as the increased role of women filmmakers. Jedlowski (2015) argues that commercial-generated locally-produced films are going towards commercial-oriented national audiences, whereas diasporic productions appeal to politically aware viewers internationally, but even despite such practitioners as Haile Gerima, Salem Mekuria, Zeresenay Berhane Mehari and Yared Zeleke Ethiopian cinema is still unknown to the rest of the world. In line with this point of view, Thomas (2020) demonstrates that women filmmakers as writers, directors, and producers have significantly contributed to the rapid growth of the industry since the beginning of the 2000s. Among the pioneers he singles out include Rukiya Ahmed and Helen Tadesse and the contemporary one including Arsema Worku, Kidist Yilma, Hermon Hailay, Mehret Mandefro, Eskedar Girmay, Keyirat Yusuf, Feven Tadesse and Jessica Beshir, who have made films that have discussed gender inequality, migration, health and social justice as the continuation of the work of Salem Mekuria. Besides that, Bitania Tadesse cited in Ellerson (2021) mentions women screenwriters, like Bisrat Gemechu, Ruth Mengsteab, Kidsan Tadesse, Mekdes Tsegaye, and Azeb Worku as the pioneers of the industry development.

Despite the international visibility created by films such as *Difret* and festivals such as the Cannes Film Festival which is discussed by Barlet (2014) international recognition, scholars note that Ethiopian cinema still remains limited in terms of its recognition on a global scale due to an inability to attract funding, a poor distribution network, and ongoing gender disparities.

Generally as Aboneh (2016) notes, the evolution of cinema in Ethiopia stands out among African countries, as it is not primarily associated with European colonization. Instead, it developed through diplomatic ties with Ethiopian royalty and the emergence of a capitalist framework during the Imperial period. Nonetheless, the industry has faced challenges due to a lack of financial, human, and technical resources, which has impeded its advancement in comparison to Francophone and Anglophone cinema that benefited from assistance from former colonial powers. He also identifies that, although Ethiopian cinema has made notable contributions to both African and global film, it is frequently overlooked in academic discourse, largely because of the belief that African cinema is mainly a byproduct of colonialism, which skews its historical perspective. This oversight limits a full understanding of cinema within a global framework. Recently, younger expatriate and Ethiopian scholars have started to fill this void, promoting a more diverse historical account of both African and global cinema.

2.1.10. Gaze: In context

The concept of the gaze has become a foundational analytical tool for understanding how power, identity, and representation function within visual culture. Its origins lie in Jean-Paul Sartre's formulation of "the look" (1950s), which explains how human beings shift from subjects to objects the moment they become aware of being observed. This philosophical insight laid the groundwork for later examinations of how looking structures dominance. Laura Mulvey's influential essay *Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema* (1975), expanded in later writings (1986), draws on Freud's theory of scopophilia and Lacanian psychoanalysis to argue that classical Hollywood cinema constructs a "male gaze," positioning men as active viewers and women as passive objects of visual pleasure. Simultaneously, psychoanalytic film theorists including Jean-Louis Baudry, Raymond Bellour, and Christian Metz (1970), as summarized by McGowen (2007), linked spectatorship to Lacan's Mirror Stage, suggesting that identification with on-screen images reinforces existing cultural ideologies.

Frantz Fanon (1967) introduced a racial dimension to the gaze, describing the white colonial gaze as one that objectifies Black bodies and imposes fixed stereotypes. Hayward (1996) elaborates on this by showing how pleasure in watching is shaped by intersecting racial and gendered assumptions, while Gibson (2003) demonstrates how the colonial gaze historically produced violence, such as lynching, by framing Black male bodies as threats to white femininity. Barlet (2000) and Bakari (2000) stress the need to decolonize the gaze, enabling African-descent audiences to reclaim, visual agency and reinterpret their own social realities. Ellapen (2006) further argues that the racialized gaze is central to understanding how Blackness is framed and consumed in cinema.

Bell Hooks's seminal essay *The Oppositional Gaze* (1992) directly challenges Mulvey's male gaze by arguing that Black women have historically been denied both representation and the right to look. Hooks highlights how, during slavery, looking itself became an act of resistance, and she critiques both mainstream cinema and Black male filmmakers for reproducing phallogentric and white-supremacist visual codes. She emphasizes that Black female spectators engage in an oppositional gaze rejecting stereotypical portrayals and demanding representations that acknowledge their agency. Hooks points to contemporary films like Jordan Peele's *Get Out* to illustrate ongoing negotiations of racialized looking. Judith Butler (1990s) extends these debates by exposing the limitations of traditional feminist theory yet affirming the value of female-authored works such as those by Patty Jenkins and Jane Campion which center women's interiority rather than objectifying them. Correspondingly, Ngugi Wa Thiong'o (2000) advocates for filmmakers to reclaim the gaze by engaging both behind and in front of the camera, ensuring that communities represent themselves rather than being mediated by external biases.

Collectively, these theorists Sartre, Mulvey, Baudry, Bellour, Metz, Fanon, Hayward, Barlet, Ellapen, hooks, Butler, and Wa Thiong'o demonstrate that the gaze is a powerful framework for analyzing how race and gender shape cinematic meaning. Their arguments reveal that the visual representation of women of African descent has historically been constrained by the intersecting forces of patriarchy, colonialism, and white supremacy, while also highlighting pathways for reclaiming agency, reshaping spectatorship, and constructing decolonized visual narratives.

2.2. Theoretical frame work

2.2.1. Africana Womanism: A Theory that Summons Male Alliance

Africana womanism is a theoretical framework introduced by Clenora Hudson-Weems, an African American theorist, activist, critic, and writer, during the late 1980s (Dahy, 2021). Emerging from the rich heritage of African womanhood, Africana womanism represents a genuine Afrocentric paradigm (Ahmed 2017). As Hudson-Weems (2001) explains, Africana womanism is an ideology designed explicitly for all women of African descent. Rooted in African culture, it prioritizes the specific experiences, challenges, needs, and aspirations of Africana women. It notably distinguishes itself from various forms of feminism by rejecting them as both racist and classist. Instead, it asserts itself as an independent theory meant for all women of African descent, grounded in the diverse cultures, experiences, aspirations, and needs found in African heritage (Makgato et al., 2018). Emphasizing African culture, it is established for women of African descent in response to the shortcomings of previous theories.

According to Hudson-Weems (1993), unlike white feminists who advocate for subjugation, Africana people do not view men as their enemy. For her, compared to white men, African descent men have never held the same institutionalized power to oppress African descent women. Africana women's struggle for independence and existence is a fight against the system that requires the participation of both men and women, regardless of their gender. She has added that the privilege enjoyed by white men is viewed as a political issue arising from persistent gender discrimination, rather than a personal concern for Africana women or men. Dahy (2021) argued that Africana womanism is an African-centered framework that focuses on the nuances of the African family, highlighting adaptable and harmonious relationships between men and women. In contrast to feminism and womanism, it also considers the intersections of race, class, and gender, stressing the significance of male alliances in tackling racial and class injustices to uplift women. It is a family-focused, race-empowerment concept that underscores the interplay of race, class, and gender (Hubbard, 2010).

Africana womanism highlights that Africana women inherit a set of eighteen characteristics, including self-naming, self-definition, family-centeredness, wholeness, authenticity, role flexibility, adaptability, genuine sisterhood, male compatibility, strength, and

respect, recognition of elders, ambition, mothering, nurturing, and spirituality (Alexander-Floyd and Simien, 2006). These eighteen characteristics come from the rich legacy of African womanhood and culture (Ahmed, 2017). The traits are cultivated within respectful relationships with African descent people which is a tradition passed down from their African heritage that challenges traditional gender norms by promoting a more inclusive and rightful society where both men and women can succeed. They are required for the solidity as well as the security of a family-centered community where African men and women are attributed with their fight against racial oppression (Dahy, 2021). Through emphasizing the interconnectedness of male and female roles, it seeks to create a harmonious balance that benefits the entire community.

To collaboratively address critical social issues affecting Africana individuals and society at large, Africana womanist thought holds the promise of bridging the gender divide and fostering healing for both men and women. Hudson-Weems (1993) also elaborated that a lot of the time the term “feminist” breeds intolerance towards men, which in turn fuels sexism and female bullying. While Africana womanists do not require it, white feminists believe that their completeness depends on separation from the male. It takes the active involvement of both genders to fight for freedom and dignity, and women’s relationships with men are “not adversarial or competitive” because it is a complicated and interwoven struggle. She further asserted that White women view sexism as the enemy and Black women are more concerned with the effect of racism on their lives, and the women’s movement has been attacked for taking a harsh stance against men. And “womanist” for her is defined as an “African woman (diaspora or continental) who is committed to her people and culture, the reclamation of her historical past, and Africana liberation movements worldwide” (pp. 61-68). Because of this reason, she sees a man not as an enemy to Africana women; rather, he is “the flip side of the coin” who collaborates with his female counterpart, the “original side of the coin,” to confront their shared oppression to establish family stability and maintain indigenous cultural autonomy (Hudson-Weems, 2001). According to Hubbard (2010), “being in ‘concert with males’ and being ‘male-compatible’ can be treated under the African-centered principle in female/male relations, complementarity, which is a major theme in Africana womanist thought”. Therefore, Africana Womanism advocates for an African-centered comprehension of Africana women's experiences and their historical and contemporary relationships with men within their communities. Despite its significance,

Africana womanism has faced criticism from scholars like Alexander-Floyd and Simien (2006), who contend that the theory assumes a composite African culture without adequately considering its historical context and interactions with other cultures. In contrast, Africana womanists argue that the theory acknowledges the distinct experiences of women of African descent, which are shaped by their historical and cultural backgrounds, influencing Africana women's identities and cultures.

According to Nitri (1993), after discussing the essence of Africana women and their situation in the introduction of the book *Africana Womanism: Reclaiming Ourselves*, it pointed out that any action about Africana women must consider the historical facts of control and cultural bias from Western societies, as well as the lasting effects of slavery, colonialism, and oppression. Women of African origin, whether in forced exile in Europe, Latin America, the United States, or even Africa, face distinctive challenges and adversities, often depicted as impoverished, struggling, and burdened with labor-intensive endeavors. She highlights that while the dismantling of slavery, colonialism, and apartheid is a documented historical process, the burden of oppression persists today. Women worldwide, irrespective of their continent or race, continue to endure sexist subjugation and exploitation. Because of this, Dahy's (2021) analysis identified the Africana womanist hypothesis as an Afro-centric ideology. She also assumes men as allies who can combat racial oppression, classism, and sexism while upholding cultural independence in collaboration with Africana women.

Consequently, Africana womanism is utilized for the analysis of Haile Gerima's works because of its roots in Africana culture and its depiction of a balanced relationship between African men and women, making it especially pertinent for films produced by a male director. Its concentration on African-centered narratives and its focus on the bond between Africana women and Africa, alongside the participation of men, make it a fitting framework for assessing the representation of Africana women. The women under consideration include the main characters in the films, embodying roles such as fighters, mothers, grandmothers, and nationalists and writings about women in film. The women in his films are illustrated as political activists, nationalists, historians (as observed in *Child of Resistance*, *Ashes and Embers*, and *Sankofa*), or dependable family leaders (as demonstrated in *Bush Mama*). These women display strong and commendable traits. These positive characteristics align with the eighteen unique futures of

Africana women suggested by Africana womanists, which adhere to positive traditional African values. Haile Gerima, a distinguished male filmmaker known for his portrayals of African subjects and people of African descent, particularly resilient Africana women, makes a persuasive case for exploring how male directors portray women from the same cultural context. The way his narratives challenge existing systems regarding Africana individuals underscores the need to analyze his films through an Africana womanist lens. Therefore, Africana womanism acts as an appropriate theoretical framework for the present analysis, aiming to evaluate a male filmmaker's work from an Africana womanist viewpoint.

At the heart of most of his films are Africana women whose heritage traces back to Africa, prompting a critical reassessment of his body of work through an Africana womanist theoretical perspective. Gerima stands out as a key figure deeply committed to depicting the lives and experiences of Africana women. In his 2023 writing, *Where Are the African Women Filmmakers?*, Gerima fervently calls for greater representation of African filmmakers who are capable of authentically exploring the intricate identities of women of African descent, thereby effectively confronting the neocolonial ideologies promoted by dominant cinematic narratives. He expresses his dedication to telling stories that highlight the lived experiences of women of African descent in his films, drawing significant inspiration from the female figures of his early life, especially his mother and grandmother. This viewpoint reflects an African understanding of gender relations that resonates with the goals of Africana womanists, who strive to promote genuine transformative change in the identities and realities of individuals of African descent.

2.2.2. Africana Womanism in Dialogue with Feminist and Womanist Discourses

The Africana Womanism and feminist approaches debates were not new after researchers observed that the existing theories failed in covering particular historical and cultural experiences of women of African descent (Dove, 1998). Instead of getting into these continued controversies, this study just explains where the feminist perspectives and Africana Womanism differ so as to present the analysis and the study framework. Feminists generally consider Feminism as worldview and way of life of women and men who, as individuals, groups and/or organizations, actively oppose social structures responsible for the discrimination against and oppression of women on the basis of their sex and gender. And it recognize the mechanisms of oppression,

they also aim at overcoming them (Arndet, 2001) most African woman concerned scholars have been highly criticized the concept and practice of Feminism as Eurocentric and mainly focuses on the social conditions of women within Europeanized societies and sought solutions within European patterns. Against this argument, she tries to justify that different types of feminism have been emerged and developed in diverse cultural and historical contexts since there are woman power differences. Supporting this argument, Thornham (1999) no single feminist theory can claim to speak for all. This indicates that anti-feminist positions are widespread in Africa. (Arndet, 2001)

However Cirkse and Cuklanzall (1992) have summarized the general characteristics of Feminist thoughts as they are unified by their common political stance for the emancipation of women's resources for the welfare of society. They assume that patriarchy has been identified by most feminists as an established institution that stands in the way of women's liberation, examine and explain the social relationship between men and women desire to improve the conditions of women in society. However, Most of African woman concerned scholars contend that, thoughts related to African woman unlike western Feminism should not only be focused on Gender issues, rather, they should consider the specific context of further political, economic, mechanisms of oppression such as racism, neocolonialism, (cultural) imperialism, capitalism, religious fundamentalism, and dictatorial and corrupt systems. Most Africans could not think its relevance for African way of life. As Arndet(2001) the term often equated with radical feminism and this in turn with hatred of men, penis envy, the non-acceptance of African traditions, the fundamental rejection of marriage and motherhood, the favoring of lesbian love and the endeavor to invert the relationship of the genders . They are concerned based on the reason, that feminism could challenge and transform predominant gender relationships.

Evaluating texts of African descendants through a feminist lens can be problematic, as Western feminism often overlooks the primary concerns of Black women, whose struggles encompass more than just sexism (Dahy, 2017). Makedze (2014) notes that, many theories relevant to texts originate outside the African context, which can undermine indigenous voices and lead to African works being dismissed for not adhering to Western norms. Scholars like Patricia Hill Collins, Angela Davis, bell hooks, and Alice Walker have developed ideologies such as Black feminism and womanism to address the unique experiences of Black women.

Clenora Hudson-Weems, who coined "Africana Womanism," emphasizes that this framework is distinct from Black feminism and Walker's womanism, tailored specifically for women of African descent (Dahy, 2017). Rooted in African culture, Africana Womanism critiques mainstream feminist theories for their Western-centric views and their neglect of issues like colonization and racism. Hudson-Weems (1993) argues that the Western feminist agenda is inadequate for Africana women, as it often fails to address the racial inequalities central to their lives. In one of her writings she (Hudson-Weems, 2001) claims that:

Neither an outgrowth nor an addendum to feminism, Africana womanism is not black feminism, African feminism, or Walker's womanism that some Africana women have come to embrace. Africana womanism is an ideology created and designed for all women of African descent. It is grounded in African culture, and therefore, it necessarily focuses on the unique experiences, struggles, needs, and desires of Africana women.

The primary distinction between Africana Womanism and feminism is reflected in the very name itself. Africana Womanists argue that "feminism" stems from the struggles of white Anglo-Saxon women and does not adequately reflect the realities of women of African descent. Clenora Hudson-Weems (1993) maintains that all strands of feminism mainstream, cultural, radical, or even Black feminism-are rooted in Eurocentric thought and therefore fail to capture the unique experiences of African and Black women. She critiques the term "Black Feminism" as assimilationist, suggesting that merely attaching "Black" to existing feminist frameworks is superficial and disregards African women's cultural and social contexts. This highlights the necessity for an independent ideology that authentically addresses the lived experiences and challenges of African and Black women.

A key distinction between Africana Womanism and feminism lies in how each prioritizes struggles. While mainstream feminism foregrounds sexism, Africana Womanism unlike Black feminism or Alice Walker's womanism centers racism as the most urgent issue, followed by class and then gender (Dehay, 2017). Even a black Feminist thinker Patricia Hill Collins (2003) confesses that white feminists often overlook their racial privilege by focusing mainly on gender oppression, and some African Americans dismiss poor white women as symbols of white

dominance. She emphasizes that oppression must be understood through the intersections of race, class, and gender, while also addressing internalized oppression to build genuine solidarity. In contrast to Black feminism, which tends to focus on patriarchy and often frames Black men as oppressors, Africana Womanism stresses the liberation of the entire Black community and situates racism, imperialism, and neo-colonialism at the core of its struggle. Al-Harbi (2017) Resistance in Africana Womanism encompasses more than gendered struggle; it involves challenging colonial legacies, cultural imperialism, and economic marginalization. Africana women are portrayed as proactive agents who resist structural violence within their societies. As Hudson-Weems (1993) explains, "Africana Womanism identifies the genuine enemy of Africana people, which is the system of oppression rather than the male counterpart".

Another significant dissimilarity between Feminism and Africana Womanism lies in their views on relationships with male counterparts. Feminism is often critiqued for fostering an adversarial view of men, portraying them broadly as patriarchal oppressors a framework shaped by white-centered experiences where white men historically held institutional power over white women. This dynamic, however, does not reflect the relationship between Black women and Black men, who have shared a history of collective oppression. Africana Womanism offers a different perspective, grounded in Afrocentric values, that emphasizes collaboration and solidarity between the sexes. Africana Womanism positions men as partners rather than adversaries, prioritizes family stability, and stresses community-centered liberation. According to Dahy (2017), it advocates flexible gender roles, women's autonomy within cultural contexts, and cooperative male-female relationships to challenge the racist system oppressing both sexes, ultimately centering the survival and welfare of the Africana family and community.

Additional difference between feminism and Africana Womanism is their approach to traditional gender roles and family dynamics. Feminism, as articulated by figures like Betty Friedan in *The Feminine Mystique*, often seeks liberation from roles such as motherhood and housewifery, viewing them as burdens imposed by patriarchy. This perspective shaped many white women's views, framing childbearing as restrictive. In contrast, Africana women face a different reality; due to systemic oppression of Black men, gender roles within African communities have never been rigidly defined. Black women often assume the role of breadwinners, as the patriarchal system has dehumanized Black men by limiting their access to

employment. Africana Womanism emphasizes collaboration with Black male counterparts and underscores the importance of a strong family unit in the struggle for liberation. Both Black men and women are victims of interconnected systems of oppression, including colonialism and slavery, which have shaped their experiences. Therefore, the notion of a perpetual struggle between genders is not applicable in this context. Instead, Africana Womanism celebrates the nurturing and mothering roles of women as vital for creating resilient families, which are essential for the broader fight for liberation among all African peoples. Unlike many feminist paradigms that focus on oppositional gender binaries, Africana Womanism promotes gender complementarity a cooperative relationship between men and women in the pursuit of justice and social well-being. Hudson-Weems (1993) notes, "The Africana Womanist acknowledges the role of her male counterpart in the fight against oppression. He is not her enemy but her partner in liberation".

Arndt (2000) notes that many Africans are also reluctant to identify as feminists, even while supporting gender equality, because Western feminism is often viewed as extreme and disconnected from African contexts. Critics argue that it neglects wider socio-political challenges such as racism, neocolonialism, and capitalism that deeply shape African women's lives. While African feminists recognize gender issues, they stress the importance of addressing them alongside other intersecting forms of oppression. In response, alternative frameworks have emerged Alice Walker's womanism, which highlights Black women's identities and collective survival (Walker, 1983), and Clenora Hudson-Weems's Africana Womanism, which specifically speaks to the experiences of women of African origin.

But, Africana Womanism critically distinguishes itself from Alice Walker's *womanism* in both focus and ideological grounding. Womanism which is a theory coined by Alice Walker in her essay *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens* (1983), evolved from the Black feminist movement and prioritizes both sexual and racial inequalities faced by women of color, emphasizing courageous and willful behaviors inspired by southern United States Black folk expressions. In the essays Walker defines womanists as "Black feminists or feminists of color," contrasting womanism's strength with the perceived dilution of feminism. It emphasizes inclusivity and allows alliances with white women, Hudson-Weems (1993, 1998) critiques as potentially diluting the specific cultural and historical experiences of Africana women. Africana

Womanism centers the collective liberation of African-descended women, prioritizes racism and classism over gender, and frames men as allies rather than adversaries. Grounded in the Afrocentric concept it emphasizes on self-naming, communal responsibility, family stability, cultural autonomy, and community-centered empowerment (Dehay, 2017). Thus While Walker's Womanism embraces universalism and includes white women as potential allies; Africana Womanism is more exclusive in its scope. Africana womanists critique this inclusivity, arguing that it dilutes the unique cultural identity and historical experiences of Africana women. As noted by Hudson- Weems "Africana Womanism is for and by Africana women, grounded in our own cultural realities and not derivative of Western feminist paradigms" (Hudson-Weems, 1998,). While some critics argue this focus may constrain individual aspirations, scholars including Maria D. Davidson and Scott Davidson (year) note that Africana Womanism provides a self-defined, culturally rooted framework that addresses the transnational and historical realities of Africana women, distinguishing it from both Walker's Womanism and mainstream feminist paradigms.

Africana Womanism, distinguishes itself from main stream feminism, Black and/ African feminism, and Alice Walker's *womanism* (1983) by centering the unique cultural, historical, and social experiences of Africana women rather than adapting Western or U.S.-centric frameworks. While Walker's womanism, emerging from the Black feminist movement, addresses both racial and gender inequalities and emphasizes inclusivity and alliances with white women, Hudson-Weems critiques this as potentially diluting Africana women's distinct identity. Africana Womanism prioritizes racism and classism over gender, positions men as allies, and emphasizes self-naming, self-definition, family-centeredness, and cultural autonomy (Hudson-Weems, 1993; 1998; 2006; Dahy, 2017). Scholars such as Zula Sofola, Nikol G. Alexander-Floyd, and Evelyn M. Simien (2006) acknowledge its contributions to challenging Eurocentric narratives and providing a culturally grounded framework for analyzing African womanhood in literature and film, including the works of Toni Morrison, Tsitsi Dangaremba, Ousmane Sembène, and Haile Gerima. However, critics including Patricia Hill Collins and Alexander-Floyd and Simien argue that Africana Womanism may underplay Black feminist thought and risk essentializing Africana women by overemphasizing traditional family and communal roles. Despite these critiques, Africana Womanism remains a self-defined, historically and culturally situated framework that

foregrounds the collective liberation, agency, and lived realities of Africana women (Beckmann, 2002; Hudson-Weems, 1993, 2004).

2.2.2.1. Key Characteristics of Africana Womanism

Africana Womanists advocate for a holistic approach that emphasizes the interconnectedness of identity, family, and community, collectively defining the roles and responsibilities of Africana women. By reclaiming their identities and relationships, they aim to bridge social gaps and foster a more inclusive and equitable society, ultimately enhancing the collective survival and empowerment of the Africana community (Dehay, 2021). In their pursuit of harmony in thought, Africana womanists highlight distinct traits rooted in the rich heritage of African womanhood and culture (Ahmed, 2017). These traits serve as essential components for evaluating Africana texts through an Afrocentric lens, effectively linking the ideas and actions of Africana womanists. This perspective promotes an African-centered approach, recognizing that Black women have historically survived by drawing on their strengths and coping mechanisms, formulating values and virtues that trace back to Africa. This foundation is crucial for identifying the characteristics of Africana womanism (Alexander-Floyd and Simien, 2006). To guide this process, Hudson-Weems (2001) identifies eighteen traits that characterize Africana womanism as follows:

1. *Self-Naming (Nommo)*: This African concept emphasizes the importance of authentic naming, which brings identity and existence. Proper self-naming is crucial for improving life for all.
2. *Self-Defining*: Africana women must define themselves to prevent others from imposing unfavorable definitions. This act is vital for overcoming obstacles that hinder personal and communal needs.
3. *Family-Centrality*: The Africana womanist prioritizes the family above individual concerns, recognizing that family well-being is essential for survival.
4. *Genuine Sisterhood*: This represents a deep, supportive relationship among women, where caring and loyalty are paramount, especially in difficult times.
5. *Strength*: Africana women embody both physical and psychological strength, with an emphasis on emotional resilience as key to community success.

6. *In Concert with Males in the Liberation Struggle*: Collaboration with men is essential for the survival of families and communities, emphasizing unity in the collective mission.
7. *Whole*: A sense of completeness is vital, representing a well-rounded individual who contributes positively to family and community improvement.
8. *Authenticity*: Living in alignment with one's culture fosters genuine happiness and success, allowing for the embrace of Cultural Love.
9. *Flexible Role Player*: Africana women balance roles at home and work, appreciating traditional roles while adapting to changing circumstances as needed
10. *Respect*: Mutual respect is foundational, requiring both parties to give and receive respect, enhancing community relationships.
11. *Recognized*: Acknowledgment among individuals is necessary for enhancing overall life quality, fostering a sense of belonging.
12. *Spirituality*: A strong belief in a higher power, such as God, is central to Africana Womanism, providing strength and guidance in life.
13. *Male Compatibility*: Positive relationships with men are essential for community continuity, with personal preferences respected.
14. *Respectful of Elders*: Valuing and learning from elders strengthens communities and honors the legacy of those who paved the way.
15. *Adaptable*: Flexibility to adjust to life's demands is crucial. Success doesn't rely on personal space but on collective family aspirations.
16. *Ambitious*: Ambition drives economic participation within the family, fostering collective success and empowerment.
17. *Mothering*: The role of a mother is crucial in shaping children into responsible members of the Africana community, focusing on their physical and emotional needs.
18. *Nurturing*: Closely tied to mothering, nurturing is essential for the development and well-being of children, emphasizing the importance of care within the family structure.

Africana womanism articulates eighteen characteristics that reflect the rich legacy of African womanhood and culture. These qualities serve as essential reference points for connecting to the community, drawing strength from African ideals and values (Ahmed, 2017). They emphasize a holistic framework that affirms both individual and collective identities while

highlighting the importance of community cohesion in addressing societal challenges (Dahy, 2021). This perspective allows for the assessment of Africana texts through an Afrocentric lens, bridging the thoughts and actions of Africana womanists to achieve a cultural textual analysis (Ahmed, 2017). According to Stephens, Keaveny, and Patton (2002), while these eighteen characteristics have overlapping ideas, they can be organized into six key concepts for analytical purposes. First, *Identity* reflects Africana women as self-namers who demand respect. Second, *Family* is central to their lives, encompassing the nurturing role of motherhood. Third, *Community* emphasizes collaboration with men and the assessment of authenticity based on cultural standards. Fourth, *Spirituality* involves recognizing connections to a higher power. Fifth, *Respect for Elders* is critical, as elders are seen as vital community figures. Lastly, *Adaptability* showcases their ability to navigate a society that often undermines their roles, demonstrating strength and resourcefulness.

Dehay (2021) asserts that the eighteen characteristics of Africana Womanism are intricately interconnected, focusing on identity, family, solidarity, and cultural heritage in the battle against systemic oppression. These traits can be categorized into four key areas. First, self-naming and self-definition are crucial for authentic identity, with Hudson-Weems emphasizing that proper naming empowers individuals to define themselves, a right historically denied by racial prejudice. Second, family is central to Africana Womanism, as women seek to reclaim the nurturing and security found in family-oriented communities, characterized by fluid gender roles that allow both men and women to contribute to collective welfare. Third, solidarity and partnership highlight the importance of Africana women and men working together against oppression, viewing each other as allies rather than adversaries; genuine sisterhood fosters stability and mutual support in the face of discrimination. Finally, the Attributes of strength, including respect, ambition, nurturing, and spirituality, are vital for a true Black female identity and serve as benchmarks for loyalty to the Africana community, reinforcing the resilience of family-centered networks in their collective struggle against racial oppression.

Alexander-Floyd and Simien (2006) provide a comprehensive analysis of Africana Womanism by categorizing its eighteen characteristics into three overarching themes: agency, alliances, and attributes claiming that it will provide analytical clarity.

1. **Agency:** The first theme emphasizes self-naming and self-definition as vital elements of African culture. (Hudson-Weems,1993) argues that self-naming is crucial for reclaiming identity and countering prevailing stereotypes. This focus on agency empowers Black women to articulate their experiences and positions Africana Womanism as a genuine response to patriarchy. By reclaiming their narratives, women of African descent can express their unique realities, reinforcing their identities and fostering collective action.
2. **Alliances:** The second theme centers on family and community, highlighting family-centeredness, wholeness, authenticity, flexible role-playing, and adaptability. Africana womanists prioritize these communal aspects over individual self-fulfillment, contrasting with mainstream feminism's often individualistic approach. This theme underscores the importance of authentic sisterhood among Black women and encourages collaborative efforts with Black men in the fight against oppression. By cultivating these partnerships, Africana womanists aim to build a supportive network that uplifts both genders in their shared struggle against systemic injustices.
3. **Attributes:** The final theme encompasses strength, compatibility with men, respect for elders, ambition, nurturing, and spirituality. Hudson-Weems (1993) emphasizes the distinct resilience of Black women, historically evident in their ability to navigate challenges. These attributes highlight the necessity of mutual respect and recognition within the Africana community, as well as the crucial nurturing roles women play. Spirituality is also significant, reinforcing connections to a higher power and cultural identity.

By categorizing these traits into three coherent themes, Alexander-Floyd and Simien present a holistic framework that not only delineates Africana womanism but also showcases its cultural importance and relevance in addressing the specific challenges faced by women of African descent. This organized method lays the groundwork for further investigation of Africana womanism in Africana texts.

2.2.2.2. Africana womanism: Theory and action

Hudson-Weems (1997), in *Africana Womanism and the Critical Need for Africana Theory and Thought*, insists on the inseparability of thought and action, urging Afro-centric

paradigms grounded in African culture and responsive to Africana issues. Rejecting Eurocentric frameworks, she aligns with Asante's (1987, 1991, 1992, 1994, 2003) conception of Afrocentricity as an intellectual and practical orientation that situates Africans as active agents of history and culture, countering distortions rooted in colonialism, slavery, and imperialism while emphasizing victorious consciousness. Afrocentricity, as defined by Karenga (1996), Ntantambu (1996), Mazama (2001), and Chukwuokolo (2010), is not anti-European but seeks to correct misrepresentations, affirm African contributions, and situate African people in their rightful cultural and historical contexts, recognizing multiple realities in a multicultural framework.

Wiggin (2021) stresses placing African ideals at the center of social, political, and economic analyses to illuminate suppressed contributions, while Ransby (2000) underscores the importance of recognizing Black people as cultural creators. Collectively, these scholars argue that Afrocentricity is both a philosophy and a practice rooted in African cultural values, demanding that Africana scholars produce authentic analyses of cultural texts through an Afrocentric womanist lens that highlights African agency, originality, and collective empowerment. In this regard Hudson-Weems (1997) calls Africana scholars to escape from the dominant western theories. She requested Africana theorists, not scholars who duplicate or use theories created by others in analyzing Africana texts in order to keep them both authentic and accurate in order to maintain their originality in meaning and value.

Hudson-Weems does not merely call upon others to create Afrocentric theories for understanding African history, cultures, and texts. Rather, she develops her own theory, *Africana Womanism*, which she situates within Africana thought-action-based paradigms that emphasize African-centeredness, cultural rootedness, and a commitment to the collective needs of Africana communities. She extends this framework to literary criticism in her seminal work *Africana Womanist: Reclaiming Ourselves* (Alexander-Floyd & Simien, 2006), where she applies its principles to contemporary Black literature.

Africana Womanism has since influenced diverse artistic and cultural forms, offering a valuable lens for examining the lived experiences of women of African descent. Hudson-Weems (1997) underscores the paradigm's integration of thought and action, a feature that has proven effective in analyzing modern Black narratives across fiction and nonfiction. For instance, Reem

El Berdesi (2022) employs the framework to analyze post-apartheid dramatic plays; Ndonibi (2023) applies it to the works of African women novelists; and El-Leil Dahy (2021) uses it to examine plays by renowned authors such as Aidoo, Emecheta, Darko, and Tess Onwueme. Similarly, Huff et al. (2018) explore its relevance within occupational science and gender studies, while Angela Cowser and Sandra L. Barnes draw on it in their research on Namibian shack dwellers. The framework's adaptability extends even further: Makaudze (2024) applies it to Shona children's games; Stephens, Keaveny, and Patton (2002) to poetry; Chikafa-Chipiro (2019) to the film *Black Panther*; and Aisha O. Alharbi (2024) to a Nigerian woman's novel. Collectively, these studies demonstrate Africana Womanism's vitality as a theoretical tool, highlighting its significance across multiple media and its power to enrich literary, cultural, and cinematic storytelling.

According to Ahmed (2017), Africana Womanism is grounded in unity of thought and action, embracing a communal and family-centered outlook that prioritizes the liberation of the entire Africana community rather than one segment. Distinct from Western feminism, Black feminism, African feminism, and Alice Walker's womanism, it is rooted in an African-centered ideology that foregrounds race, class, and gender while rejecting abstract theoretical approaches like deconstruction that overlook lived realities. Africana Womanism draws on eighteen characteristics that reflect the legacy of African womanhood and cultural traditions, serving as interpretive tools for Afrocentric textual analysis. Ahmed (2017) underscores its emphasis on unifying thought and action by applying cultural frameworks to the analysis of Africana texts, while Alexander-Floyd and Simien (2006) caution that for Africana Womanism to be fully effective, it must remain flexible and context-specific, attentive to historical and cultural particularities across diverse African societies. Thus, while Africana Womanism provides a powerful lens for examining family-centeredness, collective struggle, and self-definition, its critical utility lies in balancing universal Afrocentric principles with the plurality of African experiences.

Although Africana Womanism has been widely applied in literary and cultural studies, it remains underexplored in film scholarship. Yet its emphasis on cultural authenticity, family, and community offers a valuable framework for examining Haile Gerima's portrayals of African women as agents of change grounded in collective struggles. By situating gender within African-

centered historical and cultural contexts, the framework challenges Eurocentric feminist models and underscores both female agency and the significance of male alliance, as Mama (2003) emphasizes, in advancing transformative justice. Applying Africana Womanism to Gerima's cinema is therefore crucial, as both the theory and the filmmaker share a commitment to African-centered narratives, collective liberation, and authentic representation issues that will be examined in greater depth in the following chapters.

2.2.3. Africana critical theory: Understanding African Descent Intellectuals

Bogues, in his writing, *Black Heretics, Black Prophets* (2003), has identified that there is a tendency to treat Africana intellectuals as merely derivative of European thinkers. He has stated that Figures like C. L. R. James, Frantz Fanon, and W. E. B. Du Bois are often positioned as secondary, their originality overshadowed by the assumption that their ideas only gain significance through alignment with established European traditions such as Marxism or existentialism. This creates a hierarchical order that marginalizes Africana thought. Bogues argues instead that the study of radical Black intellectuals must take their work on its own terms excavating their original insights, questions, and contributions within their political and cultural contexts.

Against the exclusion of black thinkers in critical intellectual discourse Reiland Rabaka develop Africana Critical theory (ACT). According to Rabaka (2006, 2009), the intellectual contributions of Africana scholars and activists are essential for understanding contemporary social realities. Rabaka critiques mainstream critical traditions such as Marxism, feminism, and postmodernism for neglecting the originality of Africana thought, which offers unique insights into issues of oppression, liberation, and human struggle. Rather than limit critical theory to Eurocentric paradigms, he advocates for an inclusive framework that incorporates the radical ideas and revolutionary practices of marginalized communities across race, gender, class, and sexuality.

As Collins (1998) notes, critical theory encompasses bodies of knowledge and institutional practices that engage with the pressing questions faced by various groups in contexts marked by injustice. The essence of critical theory lies in its commitment to justice for all individuals and communities. Africana Critical Theory actively critiques and challenges the

power structures that marginalize and oppress, addressing critical race theory, systemic racism, and the damaging narratives surrounding race, gender, and class. It introduces ideologies and solutions aimed at dismantling these barriers to social justice and equality.

Moreover, Rabaka (2009) emphasizes that critical thinking should be a cornerstone of quality education, incorporating skills such as conceptualization, questioning, analysis, assessment, reasoning, and research (Claybrook, 2020). Africana thought, he argues, is uniquely equipped to interrogate the lived realities of African people and illuminate global crises in ways that other traditions may overlook. This multidimensional approach within Africana Studies allows for the application of its concepts across various disciplines while remaining anchored in the specificities of the African experience (Tillotson, 2016). By doing so, ACT not only enriches academic discourse but also fosters a deeper understanding of the complexities facing marginalized communities today.

Rabaka (2006) defines also ACT as a framework that highlights the often-overlooked contributions of continental and diasporan African thinkers to critical discourse. He critiques traditional Critical Theory, which originated at the Frankfurt School and was developed by privileged White men addressing social issues in Germany during World War II, for its initial lack of a global perspective on broader injustices. Although it evolved in the United States to include women's suffrage and civil rights, it still faced critiques for its limited scope. The integration of diverse perspectives such as Black feminist thought and critical race theory—is essential for expanding the canon, as these frameworks provide vital insights into contemporary issues. Modern interpretations emphasize subjective social observation, revealing the potential insularity of Critical Theory if it does not incorporate alternative viewpoints. This evolution underscores the importance of recognizing the complex legacy of critical thought and the valuable contributions of scholars of African descent, like W. E. B. Du Bois, in enriching critical discourse (Collins, 2024). Additionally, as Outlaw (2004) asserts, Africana thinking focuses on recovering the underappreciated contributions of individuals and cultures of African descent.

Grounded in the historical, cultural, and political struggles of Africana people, ACT adopts an Afrocentric methodological orientation that privileges ideologies and philosophies “born of struggle” (Asante, 1988, 1990, 1998). In aligning ACT with Afrocentric thought, Rabaka calls for Africana ideas and intellectual production to be placed at the center of inquiry,

thereby expanding and enriching the wider corpus of critical theory. Asante (1990) similarly stresses that Africology must be guided by an Afrocentric perspective, since any meaningful field of inquiry requires a solid theoretical foundation rooted in the experiences and philosophies of African people. Rabaka's reliance on Asante's framework underscores his insistence that ACT is firmly grounded in the intellectual and historical struggles of Africana communities and their Ideology (Tillotson, 2016).

Africana critical theory, as outlined by Rabaka. (2009), also interrogates contemporary structures of domination by building on the legacies of Africana scholar-activists such as W. E. B. Du Bois, Amílcar Cabral, Frantz Fanon, Walter Rodney, and Kwame Nkrumah, who critiqued the historical and ongoing subjugation of continental and diasporan Africans through slavery, colonialism, and imperialism. Defined as a theory critical of domination and discrimination in African life-worlds, it not only challenges imperialism but also reflects critically on earlier anti-imperial discourses to better confront oppression in the present and propose pathways for future liberation. In this respect, Africana critical theory resonates with Asante's (1992) call for Ideological and cultural re-centering, recognizing that Africans were displaced not only physically but also religiously and economically by European domination.

Aligned with the principles of Afrocentricity, ACT affirms African-inspired intellectual production as both method and praxis, turning to the long-overlooked radical thought of Africana men and women whose contributions prefigure and sustain contemporary Africana way of thinking (Asante, 1990; Rabaka, 2006). Unlike Eurocentric critical traditions that rely on their own canonical texts and intellectual thoughts to reinforce authority, ACT privileges Africana intellectual ancestors as its paradigms and points of departure, emphasizing that the existential dimension of Africana thought transforms despair into collective agency rooted in the shared histories of slavery and colonialism (Hernton, 1966; Gordon, 1997). Exemplifying this orientation by showing how Malcolm X's political thought fostered Black consciousness exposed persistent racism and exploitation, and underscored cultural self-determination as essential to liberation writers like Karenga, (1993); Smallwood, (2001); Stewart, (2001), Africana critical theorists showed how African intellectuals can contribute for intellectual discourse. In this way, ACT not only critiques systems of domination but also centers Africana

Ideological traditions as indispensable resources for advancing liberation and social transformation.

According to Bassey (2007), many intellectuals identify ACT as a neo-Black radicalism, but it is more than that ACT is a twenty-first-century outgrowth of the Black radical tradition, representing a trans-disciplinary project that transcends the narrow boundaries of traditional disciplines. It draws equally from the social sciences, the humanities, and grassroots radical movements, with a methodological emphasis on the dialectics of deconstruction and reconstruction, domination and liberation. Its central precept is a theory of liberation that links critique of oppression whether racial, imperial, capitalist, patriarchal, or colonial with the construction of alternatives for social transformation. Theory and praxis are therefore inseparable: ideas and action, words and deeds must be dialectically intertwined, as Africana thinkers such as Cabral argued, making theory a “weapon” in the ongoing struggle for revolutionary decolonization and re-Africanization. In this way, ACT resolves the longstanding dichotomy between “intellectuals” and “masses,” affirming that any Ideology of intellectuals should emerge from and return to the lived struggles of Africana communities. Like Gordon (1997) and Outlaw (1992-1993) argue, Africana philosophy or Black existential philosophy functions as a “gathering” notion that situates the diverse traditions, writings, and practices of Africans and their descendants as legitimate philosophical resources.

Bassey also articulates that Africana ACT serves as a systematic and dialectical reflection on domination and liberation within both continental and diasporic African life-worlds. It critiques oppressive structures while envisioning revolutionary alternatives rooted in Africana cultural, political, and philosophical traditions. The enduring aim of ACT is not only the decolonization of knowledge but also the radical transformation of society, positioning it as both an intellectual project and a praxis-oriented framework for liberation. Claybrook (2020) pointed out that critical Discourses from an African-centered perspective is an activity centralizing the role of African and African diasporic culture in knowledge construction in Africana Studies. Africana Studies, which Karenga (2010) describes as the critical and systematic study of the thought and practice of African people in the current and historical unfolding. But, he does not identify or critically engage the “other progressive theoretical and political currents” . Critical

theories are not simply a synthesis of radical politics and social issues, but also a combination of cultural criticism and history (Rabaka, 2009).

Thus Africana Critical Theory emphasizes the importance of Africana writers and critical thinkers as essential analytical tools for understanding the contemporary and future conditions of African people. By engaging with the works of figures like W. E. B. Du Bois, James Baldwin, and Audre Lorde, scholars can critically analyze the enduring impacts of historical injustices such as colonialism and systemic racism, while also connecting these insights to current struggles for liberation. Furthermore, the theory advocates for the inclusion of intellectuals of African descent within Africana Studies, highlighting the need to incorporate diverse perspectives and methodologies that reflect the rich tapestry of African thought. This inclusive approach not only enriches academic discourse but also challenges Eurocentric narratives, fostering a more robust understanding of social issues and honoring the contributions of all voices within the Africana community.

In this context, the inclusion of Haile Gerima's cinematic ideology is particularly significant. Gerima, as a filmmaker and cultural worker, offers a unique lens through which the complexities of African diasporic experiences can be articulated. His works, steeped in the traditions of African storytelling, challenge dominant narratives and provide powerful representations of black identity, resistance, and resilience. By studying Gerima's cinematic approach, scholars can further enrich the discourse on Africana thought, as it emphasizes the importance of visual culture in shaping cultural consciousness and fostering a collective identity. His emphasis on narrative and representation aligns with the broader goals of ACT, making his contributions vital for a holistic understanding of the Africana tradition and its implications for radical politics and social theory.

2.3. Review of Related Studies

This review of related studies examines books, critical articles, and dissertations on Haile Gerima's cinema, highlighting the diverse analytical approaches, from theological and feminist to Pan-Africanist and Third Cinema frameworks, while identifying significant gaps in the literature regarding the explicit articulation of his cinematic ideology and its intersection with Africana Womanist principles.

Two recent monographs have deepened critical engagement with Haile Gerima's cinematic legacy from distinct but complementary angles. Tekletsadik Belachew's *Stories from the Fireplace: Theological Meditations on Haile Gerima's Cinema* (2022) provides a groundbreaking interdisciplinary study that employs Gerima's films as tools for African theological reflection. Belachew situates Gerima's work within his Gondarian roots and the wider currents of African cinema shaped by figures such as Sembène and Med Hondo, while also foregrounding the influence of Gerima's father, Abba Gerima Taffere. The book reimagines cinema through the lens of Ethiopian Orthodox iconography, developing an "Afro-Ethiopic theology of icons" that bridges visual culture, spirituality, and political resistance. In dialogue with thinkers like Fanon, Cabral, and Mbembe, Belachew uses Gerima's images including the Sankofa bird as foundations for a theology that resists colonial distortions of Christianity, while at the same time acknowledging Gerima's own critiques of the destruction of African spiritual traditions under colonialism. His study is notable for challenging the assumption that African cinema and Christianity are necessarily oppositional, offering instead a provocative recuperation of ancient African Christianity as a resource for liberation. By contrast, Dominica Dipio's *Gender Terrains in African Cinema* (2019) adopts a feminist framework to examine gender dynamics in the works of key African filmmakers, identifying Gerima as central to discussions of women's representation in African cinema. Focusing on portrayals of girlhood, womanhood, and elderhood, Dipio situates Gerima's films within broader debates on African versus Western feminism, demonstrating how his cinema, like that of his contemporaries, engages questions of women's agency and communal identity. Taken together, Belachew and Dipio's studies underscore the richness of Gerima's oeuvre, highlighting its capacity to inspire theological, philosophical, and feminist critiques while positioning him firmly among the most significant cultural voices of African and diasporic cinema.

A wide range of critical essays and articles have examined Haile Gerima's filmmaking, underscoring his central role in both African and diasporic cinema. Cham (1981, 1984) situates Gerima alongside Ousmane Sembene, emphasizing their shared ideological and artistic commitments, while Howard (1985) foregrounds Gerima's self-defined project of creating a "cinema of transformation" centered on consciousness rather than violence. Several scholars highlight *Sankofa* as a key text: Coplan and Thompson (1996) and Petty (2008) explore its diasporic and Afrocentric resonances, Harris (2004) frames it as foundational to Pan-African

narratives, and Keeling (2007) reads it through Black Nationalist thought. Grayson (1998) and Kande (1988, 1999) offer divergent interpretations, with the latter critiquing the film's pan-Africanism as overly homogenizing. Other studies, such as Murashige (1997) and Wilderson (2010), turn to *Bush Mama* as a case of cinematic resistance and political unrest, situating it within broader struggles against oppression. Reid (2005) stresses Gerima's independence in production and distribution, a theme echoed in Ukadike's (2002) interviews and Thomas's (2010) insistence on Gerima's Pan-Africanist commitments. Pfaff (1988), Russell (1998), and Gray (1990) provide useful, albeit somewhat dated, overviews of Haile Gerima's career, while popular and journalistic sources (e.g., Gregory 1994; Spicer 2010; Salaam 1996) highlight his broad cultural impact. In his article *Imperfect Journey, Imperfect Cinema: "A Fast, 'Zinging' Shot Scares the Baboon!"* (2017), Belachew examines Gerima's documentary *Imperfect Journey*, focusing on the influence of Abba Gerima Haile's father, a traditional playwright, historian, and epic poet through selectively translated passages of his historical works in Amharic and English. Both Abba and Haile Gerima's texts are analyzed critically across historical, aesthetic, and thematic dimensions of *Imperfect Journey*, illustrating how the father's vision is transmitted and transformed in Haile Gerima's cinematic practice. Similarly, in *The Dead Speaking to the Living: Religio-Cultural Symbolisms in the Amharic Films of Haile Gerima* (2018), Tekletsadik Belachew explores the rich religio-cultural and folkloric elements in Gerima's Amharic-language films *Harvest: 3,000 Years* (1976), *Adwa: An African Victory* (1999), and *Teza/Morning Dew* (2008). Collectively, these studies portray Gerima as a filmmaker who challenges conventional cinematic forms to advance a radical Pan-African vision, while also engaging complex questions of representation, gender, and the interplay between confrontational and therapeutic imagery.

Several dissertations and theses have also engaged with Haile Gerima's cinema, particularly its liberatory, Pan-African, and womanist dimensions. Belachew (2012) offers a theological reflection on Gerima's cinematic storytelling and its representation of selfhood, while Gabriel's seminal dissertation (1979; republished 1982) situates Gerima's *Harvest: 3,000 Years* within the aesthetics of Third Cinema, praising its fusion of oral tradition and revolutionary form. Hamilton-Wray (2010) extends this trajectory by framing Gerima's work especially *Sankofa* as a liberating Black cinema. Similarly, Harris (2004) interprets *Sankofa* as the "mother text" of Pan-African narratives for its global articulation of Black resistance. Expanding the

critical lens, Waller-Peterson (2010) applies wom(b)anist theory to *Sankofa* alongside other Black women's texts, highlighting themes of ancestral mediation, violence against women's bodies, and communal healing. Collectively, these works underscore Gerima's significance as a filmmaker whose cinema operates at the intersections of liberation aesthetics, Pan-African resistance, and Africana womanist thought.

Haile Gerima's published writings articulate his cinematic philosophy and provide insight into his creative process, political commitments, and cultural vision. Beginning with his early reflections on *Bush Mama* (1977) and independent Black cinema (1982), Gerima consistently positions filmmaking as a form of storytelling rooted in community and resistance. His manifesto-like essay *Fireplace-Cinema* (1984) defines the filmmaker as nothing more and nothing less than a storyteller who bridges personal, historical, and global experiences. In "Triangular Cinema, Breaking Toys, and Dinknesh vs. Lucy" (1989), perhaps his most comprehensive theoretical piece, he outlines a model of cinema grounded in three interdependent roles: community, storyteller, and activist while also critiquing exoticized images of Africa and stressing the liberatory role of historical knowledge. His writings on *Ashes and Embers* (1991) emphasize environment—physical, sociological, and psychological—as central to character development, while in essays such as *In the Image of Africa* (1991) and *Images of Africa* (1995), he denounces paternalistic and censorious representations, framing *Sankofa* as a milestone in African and African American collaborative cinema. Later interventions, including "The Internal Dialogue of an African Filmmaker" (1996) and "Independent African American Cinema" (2001), reaffirm his stance that he is not an entertainer but a cultural worker, arguing for the creation of alternative infrastructures: training centers, production facilities, and collective distribution networks to sustain independent Black and African filmmaking. Across these writings, Gerima insists on cinema as an emancipatory practice, a site of struggle against colonial images, and a means to construct new cultural institutions rooted in African-centered values.

Existing studies on Haile Gerima's cinema ranging from theological reflections (Belachew, 2022), feminist analyses (Dipio, 2019), Pan-Africanist readings (Harris, 2004), and Third Cinema frameworks (Gabriel, 1979), have illuminated his political commitments, resistance aesthetics, and cultural vision, yet they do not directly engage his cinematic ideology through the lens of Africana Womanism. While feminist and womanist approaches acknowledge

women's presence in Haile Gerima's films, they overlook how his ideological writings and filmmaking practices align with Africana Womanism's principles of community-centeredness, family cohesion, male–female complementarity, and women's central role in Africana survival and liberation. Furthermore, this scholarship has not clearly defined his cinematic ideology, leaving a gap in understanding its philosophical grounding. This thesis therefore departs from earlier studies by applying an Africana womanist lens to Haile Gerima's ideology, showing how his portrayal of Africana women is essential to his cultural and political vision and reflects a distinctly Africana-centered framework not yet fully examined in film studies.

Generally in this chapter, the conceptual framework brings together a constellation of critical discourses, Africana womanhood in cinema, Black independent filmmaking, cinematic ideology, African cinematic history, Pan-African film movements, and the political aesthetics of Third Cinema, to put cinema into a larger context of knowledge systems of representation, identity, and cultural power. Instead of addressing these ideas as separated strands of theories, the researcher would consider them as connected analytical lenses through which one could view and analyze the cinema of Haile Gerima.

The stances of the researcher are that Haile Gerima is a product and active producer of these intellectual traditions: his films make appeal to Pan-African cultural awareness, critique dominant ideological hegemonies of the filming image, preempt historically marginalized gazes, such as the subjectivities of Africana women, and that his films are engaged in the radical political imagination of Black independent and Third Cinema movements. Simultaneously, the analysis of his cinema in these frames revitalizes the frames themselves and proves how the practices of Ethiopian and diasporic African cinema destabilize and diversify dominant scholarly discourses of the history of African cinema and its cultural identity and global importance. Therefore, this chapter claims that all of these ideas together comprise the epistemic landscape where his cinema is generated and read, and his work, in its turn, offers a critical place where these theoretical discussions can be reconsidered and expanded.

CHAPTER THREE:

3. RESEARCH METHOD AND METHODOLOGY

3.1. Research Design

Given that the data for this study consist primarily of cinematic structure and content, visual and narrative expressions, as well as theoretical writings, a qualitative research design provided the most appropriate methodological framework. Qualitative inquiry, as Denzin and Lincoln (2018) assert, emphasizes the socially constructed nature of reality and the interpretive relationship between the researcher and the subject, situating meaning within cultural and historical contexts. Merriam (2009) likewise notes that qualitative research seeks to understand how individuals construct meaning within their worlds, making it ideal for analyzing symbolic, ideological, and narrative forms such as cinema. This study therefore adopts a conceptual research method a form of qualitative inquiry that prioritizes logical reasoning, interpretation, and synthesis over empirical measurement. As Kothari (2004) and Jabareen (2009) explain, conceptual research focuses on the critical development of ideas and theories through analytical reflection and comparative reasoning. Within this framework, cinematic texts are treated as philosophical and ideological documents, allowing for a deeper examination of how film functions as a medium of thought and cultural critique.

In this context, the study critically examines Haile Gerima's films and writings to identify and interpret his cinematic ideology through the lens of Africana Critical Theory (ACT). ACT, articulated by scholars such as Lewis R. Gordon (2008), Reiland Rabaka (2009), and Molefi Kete Asante (1998), reclaims the intellectual legacies of W. E. B. Du Bois, Frantz Fanon, and Amílcar Cabral as foundational to global critical thought rather than peripheral to it. This theoretical perspective critiques the interlocking systems of racial, patriarchal, capitalist, and colonial domination while centering liberation as a process grounded in lived experience and collective consciousness. As Rabaka (2010) and Gordon (2021) emphasize, ACT embodies a decolonial reconstruction of knowledge, restoring Africana agency in both intellectual and cultural production. Accordingly, this study interprets Gerima's cinema and theoretical writings as expressions of this ideological reconstruction works that merge political philosophy with

cinematic aesthetics to articulate an Africana worldview rooted in historical memory and resistance.

Building upon this ideological foundation, the research integrates Africana Womanism, formulated by Clenora Hudson-Weems (1993, 1997, 2004), as a complementary interpretive framework for examining gendered representations and women's agency within Gerima's films and writings. Africana Womanism, unlike Western feminism, is a family-centered, community-oriented paradigm rooted in African cultural values, spiritual consciousness, and collective survival. It emphasizes self-definition, complementarity, and communal uplift, rejecting Eurocentric hierarchies that separate gender from race and class (Phillips, 2006; Nzegwu, 2006). Scholars such as Sofola (1993), Phillips (2006), and Ahmed (2017) affirm that Africana Womanism rejects Western gender binaries, emphasizing instead the interconnectedness of race, culture, and history in shaping women's experiences. Through this lens, Gerima's portrayals of women emerge as embodiments of cultural resilience, moral leadership, and social continuity figures who sustain the collective struggle for liberation. The integration of Africana Critical Theory and Africana Womanism thus allows this study to articulate a new theoretical synthesis an Africana Womanist Gaze- for interpreting Black independent cinema as a site of ideological and philosophical resistance grounded in Africana epistemology.

3.2. Sampling Technique

A purposive sampling technique was employed to identify materials most relevant to the study's objectives. Purposive sampling allows the intentional selection of data sources that best illuminate the conceptual focus of a study (Patton, 2002; Creswell and Poth, 2018). Accordingly, this research includes all films directed and produced by Haile Gerima, along with all his published writings, interviews, lectures, and online recordings. These materials collectively articulate his ideological vision of cinema as a revolutionary and liberatory medium.

This comprehensive approach ensures a full understanding of Haile Gerima's cinematic ideology, as his theoretical writings and film practice form an inseparable continuum. His essays *On an Independent Black Cinema* (1982), *Triangular Cinema*, *Breaking the Toys*, and *Dinklesh vs. Lucy* (1989), *In the Images of Africa* (1991), *Thoughts and Concepts: The Making of Ashes*

and Embers (1991), *The Internal Dialogue of an African Filmmaker* (1996), *Independent African-American Cinema: The Creation of Alternative Cultural Infrastructure* (2001), and *Where Are the African Women Filmmakers?* (2023) are treated as theoretical texts that inform his cinematic worldview. Each reflects his sustained critique of colonial image regimes and his call for a self-defined, community-rooted Black cinema (Diawara, 1993; Ukadike, 1994).

Out of his complete filmography, the following eleven films were analyzed: *Hour Glass* (1971), *Child of Resistance* (1972), *Harvest: 3000 Years (Mirt Sost Shi Amit)* (1975), *Bush Mama* (1978), *Ashes and Embers* (1982), *Wilmington 10 – USA 1000* (1979), *Adwa: An African Victory* (1999), *Imperfect Journey* (1994), *After Winter: Sterling Brown* (1985), *Sankofa* (1993) and *Teza* (2008) Each film is examined not in isolation but as part of a cohesive ideological trajectory that links Gerima's Ethiopian roots, diasporic consciousness, and global Black struggle. As Turner and Kamdibe (2008) observe, Gerima's body of work reflects a spiritual, intellectual, and historical journey through which he redefines African identity and cinematic sovereignty. By engaging both his films and writings, this study seeks to illuminate the full scope of Gerima's Africana worldview, showing how his creative and theoretical projects mutually reinforce each other within the paradigms of Africana Critical Theory and Africana Womanism. This comprehensive sampling ensures that the analysis captures the continuum of Haile Gerima's artistic evolution, ideological commitments, and gendered vision of liberation.

3.3. Data Collection Techniques

To answer the research questions, data were collected through film observation, document analysis, and semi-structured interviews, all of which are recognized qualitative tools for exploring complex cultural phenomena (Kabir, 2016; Creswell and Poth, 2018).

3.3.1. Primary Data

The primary data consist of the eleven films directed by Haile Gerima. Each was viewed multiple times to examine visual style, narrative structure, and ideological messaging. This process allowed for the identification of patterns in characterization, dialogue, and cinematic form related to Africana consciousness and womanist values (Nichols, 2010).

Additionally, a semi-structured online interview with Haile Gerima was conducted via WhatsApp. The flexible structure of this interview allowed for open-ended dialogue on his ideological perspectives and filmmaking philosophy while ensuring consistency with the study's central themes. According to Atkinson and Silverman (1997), such dialogic interviews enable a deeper understanding of the subject's reflective and affective dimensions, making them ideal for interpretive research of this nature.

3.3.2. Secondary Data

Secondary data for this study were drawn from Haile Gerima's theoretical writings, recorded lectures, public interviews, and online conversations. These sources offer critical insight into his personal reflections on independent cinema, decolonial filmmaking practices, and the representation of women within African contexts. In addition to textual sources, semi-structured interviews were conducted to further contextualize Gerima's work within the broader landscape of Ethiopian cinema. Semi-structured interviews are especially suitable for qualitative research because they offer a flexible framework that allows for in-depth exploration of participants' experiences and perspectives while maintaining thematic consistency. As Kvale and Brinkmann (2009) note, the semi-structured interview is "a conversation with a purpose," enabling the researcher to probe into complex and context-specific issues that structured interviews may overlook. Similarly, Rubin and Rubin (2012) emphasize that this method is particularly effective in capturing "rich, detailed, and nuanced" data that reveal how individuals make sense of their experiences.

One such interview was conducted with the President of Alatinos, the Ethiopian Film Association, who played a key role in organizing two pivotal forums focused on national cinema: the first at the Ethiopian National Theatre in 2001 and the second at the Pushkin Russian Cultural Center in 2015. These events convened Ethiopian filmmakers in collective dialogue on the challenges and possibilities of building a national cinematic identity. The discussions documented in video recordings serve as a vital source of reflection on Ethiopian cinema and its sociopolitical grounding. An additional interview was conducted with Tekletsadik Belachew, author of the only published book on Haile Gerima, which explores the theological dimensions of his films. This interview offered crucial insight into how Belachew interprets Gerima's

cinematic vision, particularly in relation to spirituality, resistance, and the African diasporic condition.

3.4. Data Analysis

The analysis of Haile Gerima's films and writings followed an interpretive qualitative framework, combining Africana Critical Theory (ACT) and Africana Womanism to decode the ideological and gendered content of his cinematic and theoretical work. ACT interrogates historical and structural dimensions of domination and liberation within Africana life (Rabaka, 2009; Gordon, 2008), providing the epistemological foundation to read Haile Gerima's cinema as a praxis of resistance and a critical engagement with colonial modernity (Asante, 1998; Rabaka, 2010). Africana Womanism (Hudson-Weems, 1993) complements this approach by centering African women's lived realities, emphasizing communal responsibility, family-centeredness, spirituality, and intergenerational agency (Sofola, 1993; Phillips, 2006; Ahmed, 2017). Through the integration of these frameworks, his films and writings are interpreted as acts of cultural resistance, ideological reconstruction, and African-centered knowledge production.

To ensure analytical rigor, a systematic data analysis procedure was employed, organized into six interrelated steps:

Familiarization and Immersive Viewing - Each film was watched multiple times to achieve an in-depth understanding of narrative structure, visual composition, character development, and thematic motifs. Simultaneously, Haile Gerima's essays, lectures, and interviews were reviewed to capture his theoretical intentions and ideological reflections. Immersive engagement ensured that emergent themes were situated within both the cinematic text and the filmmaker's articulated worldview.

Thematic Coding and Categorization- Using an open-coding approach, recurring themes and patterns were identified across films and texts. Coding focused on the representation of African consciousness, resistance against coloniality, and the depiction of women as agents of social and spiritual leadership. Codes were refined through constant comparison, clustering them into broader categories aligned with ACT's critique of structural domination and Africana Womanism's focus on communal and gendered agency.

Ideological Interpretation- The identified themes were interpreted through the lens of ACT to reveal Gerima's critique of colonial modernity and the philosophical underpinnings of liberation. Africana Womanism was applied to examine how women are portrayed as central to communal survival, cultural continuity, and political resistance. This dual-lens interpretation allowed for a nuanced reading of cinematic form, narrative strategies, and character agency as deliberate ideological constructs rather than mere storytelling devices (Asante, 1998; Sofola, 1993).

Comparative and Contextual Analysis- Themes extracted from films were triangulated with Gerima's theoretical writings to ensure coherence between cinematic practice and articulated philosophy. Comparative analysis highlighted shifts in ideological emphasis, narrative techniques, and gendered representation across his filmography, situating each work within the broader trajectory of Africana liberation thought.

Dialectical Synthesis- Finally, a dialectical approach was employed to resolve contradictions between colonial-imposed narratives and African-centered consciousness, revealing how Gerima's films function as acts of cultural and ideological reconstruction. This stage integrated findings into an overarching conceptual framework the Africana Womanist Gaze positioning Haile Gerima's work as both an artistic and epistemological intervention in decolonial activities.

This systematic procedure enabled the study to rigorously interpret Haile Gerima's cinematic and written work as complementary acts of resistance, cultural reclamation, and ideological articulation, grounded in a holistic African-centered epistemology.

3.5. Research assumptions

Philosophical assumptions guided this study by framing how reality, knowledge, values, and inquiry are conceptualized through an Africana-centered and decolonial lens. Grounded in Africana Critical Theory and Africana Womanism, the research recognizes reality as relational, communal, and historically situated, emphasizing interconnectedness and collective experience rather than isolated phenomena (Gordon, 2008; Hudson-Weems, 1993; Rabaka, 2009). Haile Gerima's films are approached as ontological reconstructions acts of reclaiming African subjectivity disrupted by colonial modernity and engaging with cultural memory, narrative, and

symbolism to restore African ways of being (Asante, 1998; Nzegwu, 2006). Within this ontological orientation emerges the notion of an Africana Womanist Gaze, a culturally situated way of seeing and interpreting that foregrounds communal ethics, spiritual consciousness, and gendered agency as integral to Africana existence. This gaze challenges Eurocentric and patriarchal visualas by centering Black womanhood, family, and community as interdependent forces in the struggle for liberation.

Epistemologically, the study views knowledge as experiential, embodied, and culturally rooted, privileging oral traditions, ancestral memory, and collective praxis over positivist detachment. Meaning emerges from lived experience and communal struggle, aligning with Collins (2000) and Phillips (2006) in affirming Black cultural knowledge systems. Through the Africana Womanist Gaze, knowing becomes an act of seeing from within the moral and spiritual dimensions of Africana life, where perception affirms historical consciousness, resistance, and healing. Haile Gerima's cinema is thus understood not only as representation but as an epistemological practice that theorizes liberation through film. The study is value-laden and positional, centering cinema, women, liberation, ideology, community, and cultural continuity. Methodologically, it is dialogical and reflexive, treating films and writings as sites where ideology, aesthetics, and historical consciousness converge. Rhetorically, it uses an Africana-centered, decolonial style that affirms African creativity and moral agency while resisting Eurocentric detachment. Together, these assumptions frame Gerima's cinematic ideology and the Africana Womanist Gaze as a womanist, decolonial, culturally grounded paradigm and a practice of African-centered liberation.

3.6. Ethical Considerations

The research adheres to the ethical standards of qualitative inquiry. Informed consent was obtained orally for the interview with Haile Gerima, Tekletsadik Belachew and Minilik Merid. All Haile Gerima films, lectures, and writings and other's works are fully credited in accordance with academic citation practices. Throughout the research process, reflexivity was maintained to ensure respect for Africana epistemological ownership and Gerima's intellectual property.

CHAPTER FOUR

4. EXAMINING HAILE GERIMA'S CINEMATIC IDEOLOGY

Haile Gerima has attracted a scholarly interpretations that situate him within African, African American, and Third world, Pan- African and Ethiopian cinematic traditions each studying a single work and making interviews based on a specific context. Tony Safford and William Triplett (1983) first recognized his uncompromising independence, while Nubia Kai (2013) emphasized his status as one of the most radical and innovative filmmakers of the African and African Diaspora worlds. Ross and Stone (2013) argue that his films consistently depict Black lives through a Pan-African lens, while Howard (1985) frames his work as a “Cinema of Transformation.” Hedges (1996) highlights his insistence on independence and political commitment, and Majumder (2018) locates him in the Los Angeles School of Black Filmmakers, noting his synthesis of Third Cinema with the Black Arts Movement. Building on this, Ross and Stone (2013) underline how his films reveal the violence of neocolonial impositions, while Thomas (2012) describes him as a Pan-Africanist visionary.

Other scholars highlight Gerima's diasporic connections and cultural dialogues. Belachew (2023) characterizes him as a versatile intellectual whose work spans filmmaking, teaching, and activism, while Raccki (2020) notes the African American community's role in affirming his confidence to claim his Ethiopian heritage as an aesthetic foundation. Yann Lardeau, writing in *Les Cahiers du cinéma*, views his films as rooted in Ethiopian perspectives while dialoguing with global anti-imperial struggles. Thomas (2013) situates *Teza* (2008) as central to his oeuvre and positions him within a counter-hegemonic tradition of decolonial cinema. Elsewhere, Thomas (2010) identifies him as a global African filmmaker of the Black Radical Tradition who produces, writes, directs, and distributes his own films. Field et al. (2015) in general propose that an analysis of narrative structure, style, and characterization is crucial to grasping gerima ideological commitments. Haile Gerima himself insists on this link between form and philosophy; as he stated in a 2025 interview, “If you need to better understand my Cinematic Ideology you must critically watch how I narrate my story.” Collectively, these assessments converge on Gerima as an innovator whose work embodies resistance, Pan-African solidarity, and cultural reclamation. This chapter builds on these interpretations to analyze Haile

Gerima's cinematic ideology, interrogating how his films, interviews, and writings construct a decolonial praxis that reclaims memory, resists erasure, and projects alternative visions of Black humanity.

4.1. Haile Gerima : A Brief biography

Haile Gerima, born in 1946 in Gondar, Ethiopia (Gerima, 2025), is an independent filmmaker, storyteller, screenwriter, director, and documentarian whose work focused African-centered narratives and Black independent cinema (Turner & Kamdibe, 2008; Belachew, 2022; Thomas, 2012; Gerima, 2025). Living and working primarily in the United States, he has deployed cinema as a counter-hegemonic practice, aim to reshaping representations of Black identity, challenging stereotypes, and advancing complex narratives that foreground an international Black perspective (Turner, 2008). His artistic and intellectual trajectory is inseparable from his upbringing in a culturally rich household. His father an Ethiopian historian, priest, and playwright produced politically charged dramas such as *ጎንደራ ቢጋሻው* and *የመከራ ደወል*, works that dramatize Ethiopia's resistance against Italian colonial aggression and inspired Haile Gerima to cinematic explorations of resistance and liberation (Belachew, 2013; Gerima, 2025). Equally formative were his grandmother's oral storytelling practices, which Haile Gerima has credited with nurturing his imaginative capacities and inspiring his later reliance on African oral traditions as cinematic form (Gerima, 2013; Howard, 1985). Haile Gerima him self has explained that his filmmaking is deeply shaped by his country's history, culture, and political landscape particularly the student movement of his generation (Gerima; 2003, 2025)

In addition to Ethiopian cultural traditions, Haile Gerima experienced cultural dislocation as a result of the Eurocentric education system in Gondar. Western cinema and missionary influence imposed western cultural values, fostering what he later described as an internalized sense of inferiority and the self-alienation of Ethiopian youth (Gerima, 2003). This crisis intensified when he immigrated to the United States in 1967 to study theater at the Goodman School of Drama in Chicago. Although initially drawn to acting, he came to recognize film as “the fastest, most devastating way to communicate” (Safford & Triplett, 1983).

His years in American theater revealed the structural racism of cultural institutions, where Black actors were relegated to marginal roles. Haile Gerima's alienation in this setting resonates with Herbert Marcuse's reflection on the estrangement of the artist in bourgeois society which is cited in Miles (2012) as:

When the artist, who had demanded that the private-self had a right to a life of its own, then steps out into the surrounding world, he endures the curse of a culture in which Idea and reality, art and life, subject and object, stand in stark opposition to one another. He finds no fulfillment in the surrounding world's forms of life with all their limitations; his authentic self and his desires find no resonance there; in solitude he stands over against reality.

For Haile Gerima, this alienation was not only personal but structural, reflecting the broader exclusion of Black creativity from dominant cultural institution. Reflecting on this experience, he remarked: "I never knew Apartheid and here it is (in the United States)" (Gerima, 1995). This awakening contrasted sharply with the idealistic portrayals of American life presented by Peace Corps volunteers in Ethiopia. It was precisely this dissonance between his authentic self and the cultural frameworks imposed upon him that propelled him toward a decolonial cinematic praxis, one that rejected Hollywood's assimilative logic in favor of new visual languages grounded in African epistemologies and collective memory.

In 1972, Haile Gerima transferred to UCLA, where he joined a collective of Third World film students who critiqued the Eurocentric canon and envisioned new cinematic languages. Alongside Charles Burnett, Julie Dash, and Larry Clark, he became a central figure in the "L.A. Rebellion" a movement dedicated to producing radical, independent films as alternatives to Hollywood's racialized narratives (Hedges, 1996). Inspired by politically engaged Latin American filmmakers and African pioneers like Ousmane Sembene and Med Hondo, Haile Gerima sought to ground cinema in African historical memory and decolonial aesthetics.

In reflecting on the early 1970s, filmmaker Haile Gerima describes a pivotal era for politically engaged cinema, especially for students of color at UCLA who were disillusioned with mainstream film education. Coming out of the 1960s and into the 1980s, Haile Gerima and

his peers rejected the dominant industry norms that were, as he puts it, “forced down your throat at UCLA.” They sought alternatives to Hollywood's narratives, yearning to see themselves in film “in a very human way, or even in a fighting or angry way.” This search led them to embrace Third Cinema films made by politically radical filmmakers from Africa, Latin America, and other parts of the world. Influential works included *Memories of Underdevelopment* by Tomás Gutierrez Alea, *Lucía* from Cuba, *The Jackal of Nahueltoro* from Chile, and the revolutionary films of Glauber Rocha and Ousmane Sembene. These films offered a counterpoint to dominant Western cinema, functioning not as entertainment but as tools of resistance. As Haile Gerima recalls, *The Hour of the Furnaces* by Fernando Solanas was “like a manifesto to us,” embodying the idea that “film is a weapon, not a toy (Gerima, 2015).”

A critical influence in this cinematic awakening was their teacher Alicia Taylor, who exposed students to this "outsiders' cinema." This exposure had a unifying and radicalizing effect, not just on Black students, but also on white students who became politicized through this engagement. Haile Gerima notes that while students at other white universities were absorbed in the works of Jean-Luc Godard, UCLA's radical students “were into some other people” whose films were more deeply engaged with anti-colonial and class struggles (ibid). This movement culminated in what he describes as an early version of a “rainbow coalition” that demanded institutional change. They negotiated with UCLA to preview films that reflected their identities and struggles. As (Gerima 1996) puts it, “we looked awkward,” because their cinematic tastes and values were not aligned with the industry norm, and they had to “prove to (their) teachers that there was a cinema of a different accent, a different temperament outside Hollywood.” Haile Gerima concludes with a sense of historical gravity, stating that this moment was “very crucial” for his development, and one that is “probably never to be replayed.” It was a unique convergence of political consciousness, cinematic discovery, and educational defiance that shaped a generation of insurgent filmmakers.

His early films, *Hour Glass* (1972) and *Child of Resistance* (1972) the latter inspired by the imprisonment of Angela Davis-established his thematic preoccupations with alienation, resistance, and transformation. His thesis film, *Bush Mama* (1976), dramatize the political awakening of a welfare mother in Los Angeles and functioning as an allegory for collective Black consciousness.

That same year, Haile Gerima produced *Harvest: 3,000 Years* (1976), an ethnographic film shot in Ethiopia just prior to the fall of Haile Selassie. Employing non-professional actors and a quasi-documentary style, the film depicted the endurance of Ethiopian peasants under feudal oppression, thereby combining his father's theatrical legacy with decolonial cinematic ethos. International acclaim for both *Bush Mama* and *Harvest: 3,000 Years* secured Gerima's reputation as a critical voice of the Black cinematic vanguard. His subsequent works including *Wilmington 10- USA 10,000* (1978), *Ashes and Embers* (1982), and *After Winter: Sterling Brown* (1985) extended his explorations of race, memory, and resistance.

His most recognized film, *Sankofa* (1993), deploys a trans-historical narrative that traverses contemporary and ancestral timelines to confront the enduring legacy of slavery. Rejected by mainstream distributors, Haile Gerima pioneered grassroots self-distribution, reinforcing his commitment to independent production. Later works such as *Imperfect Journey* (1994), co-produced with the BBC, and *Adwa: An African Victory* (1999), which documents Ethiopia's triumph over Italian colonialism, exemplify his historical reclamation project. *Teza* (2008), internationally acclaimed, foregrounds the intersections of Ethiopian and diasporic struggles, embodying his Pan-Africanist commitment to shared memory and solidarity. As Gerima himself noted, "I am now consciously trying to make a concrete link with my ancestors... My serenity comes from that search" (Gerima, 1995).

Parallel to his filmmaking, Haile Gerima has been a scholar and pedagogue. Teaching at Howard University since 1976 (Hedges, 1996), he has articulated critical theories of Black cinema through essays such as *On Independent Black Cinema* (1982), *Fireplace-Cinema (Gathering, Warming and Sharing)* (1984), *Visual Footprint: The Battle for the Film Frame* (1985), *Triangular Cinema, Breaking Toys, and Dinklesh vs. Lucy* (1989), *In the Image of Africa* (1991), *Spirit of the Dead* (1995), and *Independent African American Cinema: The Creation of an Alternative Cultural Infrastructure* (2001). His more recent work, *Where Are the African Women Filmmakers?* (2023), calls for gender equity in African cinema. His notion of "triangular cinema" a dialogic relationship between filmmaker, film, and community-exemplifies his rejection of Eurocentric auteurism in favor of a communal, participatory model of artistic production.

Together with his wife, Shirikiana Aina, Haile Gerima co-founded Mypheduh Films, one of North America's largest distributors of African and diasporic films, and Sankofa Video and Bookstore in Washington D.C., a vital hub for Black literature, cinema, and activism. Their production company, Negod-Gwad ("thunder" in Amharic), embodies their ethos of ancestral urgency (Belachew, 2023).

4.2. Haile Grima on Cinema

Haile Gerima's views on cinema emerge from the intellectual and historical traditions of anti-colonial and Pan-African struggle, where film is conceived not as a neutral aesthetic practice but as a quasi-autonomous dimension entangled with social and historical realities, a cultural and political weapon against colonial legacies and distorted Black representation (Gerima, 2008; 2010). Cham (1984) situates Haile Gerima alongside Ousmane Sembene within a genealogy shaped by Kwame Nkrumah, Frantz Fanon, Julius Nyerere, and Amilcar Cabral, while Hamilton-Wray (2010) records Haile Gerima's own admission of debt to Fanon, Cabral, Nkrumah, W.E.B. Du Bois, and Paul Robeson, thinkers who foregrounded cultural liberation, Pan-African dignity, and art as political weaponry (Chilcote, 1968; Habte Gebreil, 1982; Quirin, 2010; Rhodes, 2016; Wendling, 2018; Nabolsy, 2019; Dodoo, 2016). For Gerima, Hollywood represents "exploitation cinema" a "new hydrogen bomb" of epistemic violence that pacifies audiences and erases African visual identity (Gerima, 1986; 2008), echoing Belachew's (2022) critique of Eurocentric Afro-pessimistic traditions. Against this, he advances "triangular cinema," a collective model linking filmmaker, community, and critic, grounded in African oral traditions and communal storytelling (Turner & Kamdibe, 2008; Belachew, 2013), extending Sembene's revolutionary vision that cinema must clarify realities and restore dignity (Cham, 1984). His metaphor of *Dinknesh* vs. *Lucy* illustrates the violence of cultural erasure through Eurocentric renaming, resonating with Du Bois's demand to reclaim African history and Nkrumah's critique of symbolic domination, while his call for independent multimedia centers (Gerima, 1989) parallels Du Bois's advocacy for Black institutions and Robeson's insistence that art sustain human dignity. Acknowledging the dilemmas of African filmmakers as "nomads of African intelligentsia" reliant on Western resources (Gerima, 1996), he nonetheless insists on cultural sovereignty through critical engagement. Ultimately, Haile Gerima's radical Black aesthetic aligns with Fanon's "combative creativity," Cabral's emphasis on cultural liberation, and

Nkrumah's vision of Pan-African unity, positioning cinema as guerrilla art and communal memory, rejecting Hollywood's "toys of mystification" to forge a liberatory practice of resistance and transformation which will be discussed briefly below.

Haile Gerima has often been described as a "political filmmaker," yet he challenges this label, insisting that "all films are political, and all filmmakers are political." (Gerima, 2010) His politicization, he explains, stems not from advocating violent upheaval but from resisting "the mandates and assumptions" (Ibid) go for mainstream cinema and asserting his cultural identity so rather claim himself as a story teller (Gerima, 2025)

He reflects on his early influences, noting that traditional Ethiopian theater of which his father was a part might have offered him a revolutionary artistic path without ever leaving home. However, film gave him something theater could not: the capacity to "control [his] own story" (Gerima, 2010) and interject individual freedom into the storytelling process. At the same time, he became acutely aware of cinema's dangers. As he observes, mainstream film "monopolistically imposes itself on people as a kind of complete reality" and has the power to displace "a person's original and intuitive knowledge and temperament." (Ibid)

This realization was tied to his awareness of mental colonization during the era of the Black Power Movement, which, although he was not a direct member, forced him and others to confront the crisis of redefining themselves. Cinema, then, became both a political and personal tool: it allowed him to "redefine and reaffirm (his) right to speak, the significance of [his] accent and narrative temperament." (Ibid)

Ultimately, Haile Gerima views his films as imperfect but necessary attempts to draw from the "folkloric and cultural background" (Ibid) of his Ethiopian upbringing, while resisting the colonizing tendencies of mainstream cinema. As he puts it, "cinema's devastating capacity to colonize can be counter-utilized in a way that projects one's own human story without apologies." (Ibid)

4.2.1. Pan-African Thought

Haile Gerima conceptualizes cinema as a quasi-autonomous dimension, an art form that enjoys relative independence yet remains inextricably tied to social, cultural, and historical forces (Gerima, 2008; 2010). For Haile Gerima, cinema is never reducible to pure aesthetics; it must serve as a political weapon against colonial legacies, a means of reclaiming Black subjectivity, and a catalyst for radical transformation. Cham (1984) situates Gerima alongside Ousmane Sembene within the broader genealogy of African liberation thought, inspired by the writings of Kwame Nkrumah, Frantz Fanon, Julius Nyerere, and Amilcar Cabral. Haile Gerima himself acknowledged this intellectual debt:

I am nothing without Fanon. Frantz Fanon is my bible. Cabral is my bible. Nkrumah is my vision. Paul Robeson is my passion and rage. Du Bois is my intellectual.... As a filmmaker, especially at UCLA, I refurbished myself through the Pan-Africanist movement. That's where I come from. My energy comes out of that. So if I do exist (its) by their work, the seed they have unleashed a long time ago... I am, in fact, a very indebted person to those folks who wrote so much. Just to see the image of Lumumba makes me go forward and not backward.

The influences of these radical thinkers shaped his vision of cinema as political struggle. Fanon's (1961) theory of cultural decolonization—moving from assimilation to nostalgic returns, and ultimately to combative creativity aligns with Haile Gerima's view of filmmaking as guerrilla art, where the camera becomes a weapon (Habte Gebreil, 1982). Cabral, who emphasized that cultural liberation is foundational to political freedom (Chilcote, 1968; Nabolsy, 2019), resonates strongly with Gerima's aesthetic Ideology. Nkrumah's call for Pan-African dignity and unity (Dodoo, 2016) parallels Gerima's insistence on diasporic connections, while Du Bois envisioned Black liberation as inseparable from global struggles against colonialism (Quirin, 2010; Wendling, 2018). Likewise, Robeson embodied the principle that art must defend human dignity and serve social change (Rhodes, 2016). Collectively, these figures provided Gerima with the ideological foundation to reconceptualize cinema as both a cultural and political act.

Haile Gerima credits these intellectuals for shaping his perspectives on the way he understand black people as well as colonialism, slavery, and the quest for equality among these people of African descent. In this regard, Frantz Fanon, an Algerian thinker, critiqued imperialism and underscored the importance of race in colonial oppression, advocating for both psychological and material change as necessary for real transformation. He was actively involved in anti-colonial efforts until his passing in 1961 (Hansen, 2023). Frantz Fanon's guide to Third Cinema outlines three stages of cultural decolonization in the Third World. The first stage, unqualified assimilation, involves mirroring colonial culture without criticism. The second stage, return to the source, is nostalgic, focusing on childhood and a rich past. The third stage, fighting or combative, marks maturity with self-determination, often expressed through violence. These stages also reflect the evolution of film in the Third World: starting with a Hollywood-style model, moving to national cinema that doesn't challenge traditional filmmaking, and finally reaching a phase of cultural decolonization. This last stage calls for "guerrilla cinema," where the camera is seen as a weapon for change. The development of ideological awareness and cinema in the Third World are closely linked (Habte Gebreil, 1982).

Another significant figure, Amilcar Cabral, led a successful nationalist movement against Portuguese colonial rule and promoted cultural liberation through indigenous identity (Chilcote, 1968) and (Nabolsy, 2019). Kwame Nkrumah pursued African dignity and unity in the post-colonial context (Dodoo, 2016), while Paul Robeson advocated for human rights and anti-colonial movements through various artistic mediums (Rhodes, 2016). W.E.B. Du Bois who is one of the major American intellectuals of the 20th century, fought for civil rights and educational opportunities within the Black community, utilizing his writing as a means of political engagement (Wendling, 2018). His lifelong focus was on enhancing the lives of African Americans, but by the early 1900s, he grew increasingly convinced that advancements for African Americans would only be achievable alongside progress in Africa and the broader African diaspora (Quirin 2010). According to Reiland (2009), in the twenty-first century, Du Bois, (James), Fanon, and Cabral are noted for their contributions to the understanding of anti-black racism, (neo) colonialism, and a unique stage of global capitalist imperialism, utilizing this as a rare opportunity to deconstruct and reconstruct classical concepts while also creating new, contemporary traditions of thought and practice in radicalism, particularly black radicalism.

Haile Gerima (2008) conceptualizes cinema as a weapon, a site of cultural struggle through which Black subjectivities can be reasserted against the hegemonic dominance of Eurocentric film traditions. For Haile Gerima, cinematic practice is inseparable from political intervention: it functions as an antidote to the epistemic violence enacted through stereotypical, dehumanizing images of Black people that mainstream cinema has historically normalized. He argues that the persistent misrepresentation of Black communities can only be resisted by the reclamation of an autonomous aesthetic identity rooted in African cultural memory and diasporic histories (Gerima, 2010). Belachew (2022) advances this analysis by situating Eurocentric and Afro-pessimistic cinematic conventions within the logics of neocolonialism, arguing that they reproduce racialized stereotypes of African-descended men and women as part of a broader global system of symbolic domination.

4.2.2. Cinema as Weapon

Haile Gerima consistently describes cinema as a “new hydrogen bomb,” a destructive force when wielded by Hollywood to distort Black life, erode self-perception, and impose Eurocentric worldviews. He critiques mainstream cinema for its manipulation of time, sound, and editing to entrench racial stereotypes, echoing Perry’s (2019) observation that African American independent filmmakers—Charles Burnett, Julie Dash, and Haile Gerima among them—revised cinematic form to align with Black vernacular traditions. In films like *Sankofa*, he employs continuity editing and panning shots not to mimic Hollywood convention but to articulate a diasporic consciousness that defies Western linear temporality, foregrounding the simultaneity of Black past, present, and future (Perry, 2019).

Turner and Kamdibe (2008) emphasize that Haile Gerima’s cinematic approach draws heavily from oral traditions, especially the storytelling practices of his grandmother. Storytelling, for him, was never merely entertainment but a communal act of memory and empowerment. In this sense, his films transform cinema into an extension of oral culture, where narrative resists objectification and affirms agency. Haile Gerima (2025) also said that “my stories are inspired by my Grandmothers stories that she was telling as around the fire place while I was in Gonder”. Belachew (2022) underscores how this oral inheritance grounds his aesthetics in African

epistemologies, enabling him to oppose Eurocentric and Afro-pessimistic cinematic traditions that perpetuate neocolonial stereotypes.

4.2.3. Triangular Cinema and Critique of Hollywood

Haile Gerima develops his most sustained theoretical intervention in *Triangular Cinema, Breaking Toys, and Dinknesh vs. Lucy* (1986). Here, he critiques Hollywood as “exploitation cinema,” a colonial language that presents the unnatural as natural, while dismissing African American visual identity as “primitive” and “unartistic.” Its genres, stars, and tropes are “toys of mystification,” designed to pacify audiences and uphold Eurocentric dominance. Against this, Gerima proposes the model of *triangular cinema*, defined by the relationship between storyteller (filmmaker), audience (community), and activist (critic). This model demands accountability, cultural dialogue, and political engagement, transforming isolated artistic impulses into a sustained cultural movement.

Haile Gerima’s *Triangular Cinema, Breaking Toys, and Dinknesh vs. Lucy* (1986) provides a seminal critique of Western cinematic hegemony and a visionary proposal for an alternative Black and Third World film practice. For Haile Gerima, cinema is not merely an artistic form but a cultural and political battleground. He frames the African American struggle for cinematic expression within a broader history of oppression and resistance, remarking that the dominant U.S. power structure “consciously and unconsciously dismisses as ‘primitive’ and ‘unartistic’ any form of African American visual identity” (Gerima 1986). This structural exclusion, he argues, constitutes a form of censorship, whereby financial and institutional control limits not only production but also the development of an independent aesthetic voice.

Central to Haile Gerima’s theoretical contribution is his notion of “triangular cinema.” He identifies the absence of a constructive relationship between filmmaker, audience, and critic as the primary weakness of African American film practice: “the major factor in this crisis is the absence of new, constructive, progressive relationships between the three critical elements of the community that can strengthen and transform the cultural cinema movement” (Gerima 1986). In this model, the filmmaker (storyteller) must be accountable to the community (audience), while the activist (critic) mediates between the two, fostering dialogue, critique, and political awareness. Such a framework, Haile Gerima contends, can transform “sporadic, spontaneous

creative outbursts” into a coherent and enduring cultural movement (Gerima 1986). This vision departs from the atomized model of commercial cinema, which isolates both artists and audiences, replacing it with a collaborative, community-rooted process.

Haile Gerima’s critique of Hollywood cinema is equally uncompromising. He characterizes its stars, genres, and spectacular narratives as “toys” of mystification, designed to pacify audiences and reinforce Eurocentric values. According to him, commercial cinema “presents the most unnatural as natural; a colonial language invented only to benefit in all its aspects the Eurocentric world order” (Gerima 1986). The reduction of non-Western peoples to marginal, nameless figures what Gerima describes as being treated like “flies... identity-less from the individual to the collective” (ibid) is symptomatic of this dehumanizing cultural order? To counter this, he insists that filmmakers must “tear down” these toys and construct new forms of cinema that are demystifying, militant, and assertive of cultural identity.

Haile Gerima extends his critique of cultural imperialism through the metaphor of *Dinknesh vs. Lucy*, referring to the Ethiopian fossil renamed “Lucy” by Western archaeologists. He argues that renaming constitutes a form of violence: “Our ancestors have been renamed, our mountains, our rivers, our hills, our whole being have all been renamed to fit a Eurocentric world” (Gerima 1986). This renaming is emblematic of the broader historical processes of misrepresentation and erasure faced by African and Third World peoples. For African American filmmakers, this history translates into a struggle over self-definition: while some artists “begin to feel like illegitimate film-makers” due to lack of resources, and others assimilate to Eurocentric aesthetics, a resistant group persists in pursuing independence, declaring cinema to be “a battle for ideas, a struggle for which the camera should be of service as a weapon” (Gerima 1986). In this way, history functions for Haile Gerima as both a burden marked by erasure and a weapon for reclaiming cultural identity.

Haile Gerima advocates for collaboration between filmmakers, audiences, and activists to address these issues, suggesting that a “triangular relationship” is crucial for a dynamic film culture. This concept is presented in his 1989 seminal work, *Triangular Cinema, Breaking the Toys, and Dinknesh vs. Lucy*. He starts by characterizing what he calls “conventional cinema,” denoting Hollywood Cinema, asserting that it is “exploitation cinema” that obstructs the

formation of progressive relationships with the community. He also argues that creators within conventional cinema tend to be self-centered, psychologically impaired, and focused on individuality, which prevents them from conveying the necessary historical perspective that can energize the cultural progress of the masses. Belachew (2013) explores Gerima's Triangular Cinema model, highlighting its differences from traditional Hollywood films by emphasizing the essential links among the filmmaker, the film itself, and the audience. The primary focus centers on "Triangular Cinema," illustrating how the filmmaker (the storyteller), the audience (the community), and film critics (the activists) interact in a way that enriches the filmmaking process. This framework reflects African cultural values that view art as a vehicle for societal critique and emphasize the role of community in shaping artistic expression. From this perspective, independent filmmaking is seen as a means to actively engage with audiences.

In this regard, despite Haile Gerima placing his creation into the context of African cultural values and considering art as an instrument of social commentary and communication to communities, a paradox arises in the Ethiopian situation. Although his filmmaking ideology focuses on the independent cinema mode as the direct way of engaging and politically waking the viewers, a lot of his films filmed in Ethiopia are not available in the Ethiopian film market and cannot be watched by local people. This restricted circulation leaves a difference between his ideological purpose of community involvement and the reality of the audience reach. Even the researchers are sometimes forced to acquire his films with contacts in the United States as opposed to local channels, which casts doubt on the effectiveness of his films reaching the intended audience in Ethiopia.

The second theme, "Breaking Toys," addresses harmful stereotypes and dehumanizing images of Africans, likening them to nameless insects. It stresses the need to delve into one's cultural identity to counter these misleading portrayals. The text advocates for Third World cinema to clarify rather than obscure realities, empowering filmmakers to tackle both conceptual and practical aspects of their stories. It also critiques how commercial cinema influences audience self-worth, shaped by histories of colonization. Filmmakers are called upon to challenge oppressive aesthetics and create frameworks for active audience engagement while facing hurdles like censorship within a capitalist framework. Lastly, the discussion underscores the consequences of renaming and censorship, using the case of an Ethiopian woman altering her

name to highlight dilemmas surrounding cultural identity. It recognizes that dominant cultural narratives frequently monopolize resources, marginalizing Black perspectives. Despite these challenges, independent filmmakers produce works that resonate with their communities. The text outlines the responses to obstacles in the filmmaking landscape reduced confidence, adherence to Eurocentric standards, and a desire for cultural representation.

Belachew (2013) highlights how triangular cinema reflects African communal values, treating art as collective practice rather than individual expression. In this respect, Haile Gerima extends the revolutionary tradition of Sembene, who regarded cinema as a weapon for education and liberation (Cham, 1984). By centering critique, community, and activism, Haile Gerima envisions cinema as an arena of cultural contestation and political pedagogy, where art clarifies realities and restores dignity to Black life.

4.2.4. Toward Cultural Independence

Haile Gerima's *Triangular Cinema, Breaking Toys, and Dinknesh vs. Lucy* (1986) presents cinema as both a site of cultural oppression and a potential tool of liberation. For him, African American and Third World filmmakers cannot rely on dominant film industries, since "the power structure that sits on the funding panels...consciously and unconsciously dismisses as 'primitive' and 'unartistic' any form of African American visual identity." Instead, he insists that independence requires alternative cultural and institutional frameworks rooted in community, history, and activism.

Haile Gerima's metaphor of *Dinknesh vs. Lucy* illustrates his critique of cultural imperialism: the renaming of the Ethiopian fossil *Lucy* epitomizes how African heritage is appropriated and redefined through Eurocentric frameworks. Reclaiming *Dinknesh* becomes an act of resisting historical erasure, resonating with Du Bois's call to recover suppressed histories and Nkrumah's critique of neocolonial symbolic domination. Within this vision, cinema functions as a practice of cultural sovereignty and historical reclamation. In his 2022 conversation with Ethiopian filmmakers, Gerima extended this stance, insisting that filmmakers must begin from their local identity and develop an indigenous "filmmaking grammar." He asserted that technological advancement neither intimidates nor deters him; it does not interfere

with his pursuit of culturally rooted cinematic ideas. Participants echoed this position, affirming the need for a filmmaking practice grounded in Ethiopian realities (Minilik, 2025).

Haile Gerima also emphasizes the institutional dimensions of independence. In *Triangular Cinema* (1989), he advocates for the establishment of multimedia centers that would nurture indigenous film cultures, enhance visual literacy, and provide networks for low-budget production. Such institutions, he argues, would counter Hollywood's ideological and economic hegemony, echoing Du Bois's demand for autonomous Black cultural institutions and Robeson's call for art that sustains human dignity. At the same time, Haile Gerima (1996) reflects on the dilemmas of African filmmakers as "nomads of African intelligentsia," reliant on Western funding yet vulnerable to cultural compromise. Without critical engagement and institutional support, he warns African cinema risks isolation, misrecognition, and co-optation.

In due course, Haile Gerima's theoretical contributions articulate a radical Black aesthetic that refuses the separation of art and politics. Rooted in oral tradition, Pan-Africanist thought, and collective accountability, his cinema aligns with Fanon's and Cabral's call for culture as a weapon, Sembene's model of revolutionary film, and Nkrumah's vision of continental unity. Rejecting Hollywood's "toys of mystification," Haile Gerima advances a model of triangular cinema that redefines filmmaking as an act of liberation and historical reclamation. As he insists, "the artist must elect to fight for freedom or for slavery. I have made my choice. I had no alternative" (Gerima, 1986). His definition of cinema, as a quasi-autonomous dimension, affirms its power to both oppress and liberate, demanding that it be wielded in service of Black humanity and radical social transformation.

Haile Gerima's theoretical contributions offer a powerful framework for understanding cinema as a site of resistance and cultural transformation. His articulation of triangular cinema emphasizes accountability, collaboration, and the inseparability of aesthetics from politics. His sharp critique of Hollywood exposes the mechanisms of cultural imperialism that shape both representation and reception. However, his proposals remain deeply idealistic. The call for "guerrilla cinema" and for "breaking toys" is rhetorically compelling but offers limited practical strategies for building sustainable institutions. Moreover, his vision underestimates the difficulty of uniting filmmakers across divides of class, ideology, and geography. Nonetheless, his

insistence that, “the artist must elect to fight for freedom or for slavery. I have made my choice. I had no alternative” (Gerima, 1986) crystallizes his position: cinema must be consciously mobilized as an instrument of liberation.

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Haile Gerima (2008) conceptualizes cinema as a weapon, a site of cultural struggle through which Black subjectivities can be reasserted against the hegemonic dominance of Eurocentric film traditions. For Haile Gerima, cinematic practice is inseparable from political intervention: it functions as an antidote to the epistemic violence enacted through stereotypical, dehumanizing images of Black people that mainstream cinema has historically normalized. He argues that the persistent misrepresentation of Black communities can only be resisted by the reclamation of an autonomous aesthetic identity rooted in African cultural memory and diasporic histories (Gerima, 2010). Belachew (2022) advances this analysis by situating Eurocentric and Afro-pessimistic cinematic conventions within the logics of neocolonialism, arguing that they reproduce racialized stereotypes of African-descended men and women as part of a broader global system of symbolic domination.

Haile Gerima (2010) further underscores the devastating consequences of these representational regimes, noting that Africa’s negative global image has been largely manufactured by conventional cinema and mass media. He characterizes this cultural production as a “new hydrogen bomb,” signaling its destructive impact not only on international perceptions

of Africa but also on Black people's own self-understanding. Yet Gerima simultaneously insists on the possibility of resistance: through what might be termed a decolonial aesthetic dimension, he articulates an independent vision of Black cinema as a counter-hegemonic formation. Turner and Kamdibe (2008) observe that his work is grounded in Black consciousness and aims to render visible the complexity of Black experience, both within Africa and across the diaspora, thereby establishing cinema as a tool for cultural sovereignty and epistemic self-determination.

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In his 1996 essay, *The Internal Dialogue of the African Filmmaker*, he characterized himself as someone beyond a conventional film-maker. In contrast to those who seek to

entertain, he sees himself as a “film-maker” instead of an entertainer. He has mentioned that “am Ethiopian Black filmmaker (Gerima 2025) he also previously justified that “when I came to Ameriaca my Ethiopian Identity was not enough. Since I am in Africa I am Black so my black brothers and sisters has accepted me and should me my true Identity “ (Gerima, 2015). He regards the medium Cinema as a powerful tool, using it to tell stories through the art of cinema. He believes it is vital for people of African descent to integrate their human narratives into the cinematic framework of twenty-first century global culture. Consequently, the portrayal of African descendants on screen represents one of the most significant actions in securing a proper recognition of African cultures in world history. The struggle for control over their representation will intensify with the ongoing expansion and influence of television and video technology. They must successfully navigate this struggle and assert control over the various dimensions of their representation (Gerima, 2001), and he asserts that cinema can debunk misleading narratives that impact the Black community and can generate alternative perspectives. He regards cinema as a cultural tool that can empower those of African descent in their quest for equality and underscore their achievements (1985 with Howard, 37). In this context, (Habte Gebriel, 1982) states that Cabral and Fanon view "culture" as a historical byproduct, likening it to a "weapon" in the fight for independence, and this viewpoint resonates with the understanding of culture

Haile Gerima (1996) noted that Filmmakers, particularly from developing nations, cannot simply wait to express their creativity through film; they must also participate actively in dialogues and discussions to ensure that this experience is genuine and impactful. He underscores that his passion for storytelling through film is rooted in a struggle that serves as the cornerstone of the African film tradition. This connects to his concept of the “Sembene Ousmane Tradition”to him, it represents a struggle conveyed in a liberated, dialectical way, not merely aligning with a specific party, nation, or ethnicity, but instead examining all facets of one’s society (p. 145). Cham (1984) in support of this idea the works of Haile Gerima and Ousmane Sembene are intrinsically revolutionary and together signify an important portion of African feature films produced between 1960 and 1980. Haile Gerima remarked that he is a soldier of Sembene, stating, "I believe in Sembene, and his work guided me. I am one of his cultural descendants wielding a weapon we call the camera” (Gerima 2001). Haile Gerima also conveyed Sembene’s crucial inspirational influence on his filmmaking journey in a 1985 interview with

Harold, where he shared his excitement upon discovering Third World cinema, especially Sembene's films, which depicted Africans speaking their native languages rather than French, Portuguese, or English. They expressed themselves in African languages, carrying their psychological and sociological meanings. His feelings of restlessness were affirmed by these filmmakers as they shared a similar disquiet and this unrest demanded varied cultural expressions, mainly cinema that he felt driven to present. Gerima (2008) has expressed that since he began studying film, he has come to understand cinema as a formidable tool and has been investigating how to utilize it for the empowerment of conveying one's own narratives.

Ultimately, it underscores the importance for filmmakers of African heritage to develop their own cultural narratives and institutions to reclaim their history and identity. His Vision of independent Cinema is shaped by themes of identity, freedom, and remembrance. Haile Gerima (2013) has asserted that his focus lies in the history and culture of people of African descent, emphasizing the preservation of their humanity as a filmmaker. For him by sharing personal narratives, individuals can establish their place in history while paying tribute to the hardships faced by their ancestors. It is essential for upcoming generations to have accessible records that can aid their survival.

According to Haile Gerima (1989) to achieve these goals, independent black community should develop multimedia centers to support local culture. These centers would provide training and resources, linking creators for mutual support. High costs can be managed through community investment and service fees. Facilities will support all aspects of filmmaking, from preproduction to postproduction and exhibition, promoting visual literacy within the community. The centers aim to establish networks for low-budget films, offering an alternative platform for storytelling amid rising Hollywood costs. They will encourage efficient resource use and foster international connections among filmmakers of African descent. For Haile Gerima the ultimate goal is to restore cultural identity and ensure authentic representations of African American heritage through a united cultural institution.

Haile Gerima (2001) emphasized that, above all, emphasized that independent films ought to stimulate thought by delving into the nuances of black life and fostering political consciousness. He asserts that these films should expose the authentic nature of black existence and inspire viewers to engage actively. While discussing the advancement of independent black

cinema, he recounted various experiences from African filmmakers in his 1996 piece titled *Internal Dialogue of an African Filmmaker*, detailing the obstacles they encounter and the possible solutions, drawing from his own experience with the making of his film "Sankofa," which took him nine years to complete across several locations.

He characterizes African filmmakers as "Fulanis," as he describes similar to as to "nomads of African intelligencia", due to their necessity to travel widely to secure resources and produce films. This journey can create pressure to conform to the expectations of influential forces, making it challenging to portray their histories and cultural identities genuinely, particularly since many depend on funding from Western sources. Additionally, the lack of collaboration among African filmmakers and critics often results in significant films being overlooked in their own regions while they contend with the dominance of foreign productions. Filmmakers also navigate differing audience expectations shaped by colonial legacies. The influence of Hollywood complicates their quest for recognition (Gerima 1996). He pointed out the difficult dilemma African filmmaker's face: to cater to external interests or to pursue their true artistic vision, which can be eclipsed by the need to satisfy those in positions of power when they are funded by them (Gerima 1991a).

Thus, he advises filmmakers to portray Africa with dignity and authenticity, avoiding stereotypes and external domination (Ibid). Gerima also underscores the necessity of advancing critical analysis alongside film production, arguing that cultivating a supportive atmosphere for thoughtful critique can improve storytelling within African cinema, ensuring that films connect with audiences and accurately represent social issues. By welcoming feedback and fostering a lively culture of critique, filmmakers can craft impactful narratives that illustrate the richness of African experiences on a global level. He also believes that the narratives of African individuals should be rooted in their rich cultural legacy, highlighting past achievements while acknowledging historical oppression. Cinema can act as a countercultural voice, challenging negative representations prevalent in mass media (Gerima, 1996). For him, sharing one's story signifies marking one's place in the narrative of history, and doing so while honoring the struggles of our ancestors is vital for ensuring that future generations possess the documentation necessary to formulate their paths to survival. The history, culture, and socioeconomic well-

being of all people of African descent remain my primary focus, but above all, the preservation of their humanity is the driving force behind my work as a filmmaker (Gerima, 2013).

In discussing his hands-on experiences in independent filmmaking, he emphasizes that his film script focuses more on exploring intricate human experiences and inner conflicts rather than relying on the overt conflicts often found in mainstream cinema, which typically hinges on simplistic narratives of good versus evil. He crafts characters that evolve in response to their surroundings, often reflecting themes of class divisions and societal issues. Each character plays a vital role in the narrative, illustrating how their experiences are interconnected within the societal framework. He insists that actors must delve deeply into their roles to portray them authentically, with relationships propelling the story forward.

Thus, Cinema, for Gerima, is never a neutral art form but a cultural battlefield: a weapon of resistance rooted in oral traditions, accountable to community, and oriented toward liberation. By rejecting Hollywood's exploitation cinema and advancing a triangular model that unites filmmaker, audience, and critic, he redefines film as communal memory and guerrilla art. In this vision, cinema becomes not only a site of struggle against erasure and domination but also an act of cultural sovereignty, reclaiming history and affirming Black humanity.

4.2.5. Black Independence on Filmmaking

Brianna Perry (2019) identifies the rise of Black independent filmmaking as inseparable from a political reimagining of film form. Directors such as Charles Burnett, Julie Dash, and Haile Gerima resisted Hollywood's stereotypical portrayals of African descendants by grounding cinematic practice in Black vernacular traditions. As Perry notes, "Straddling Hollywood and autonomous production, African American directors revisit strategies for representation of blackness on the screen. Haile Gerima advanced this struggle in his essay *On Independent Black Cinema* (1982), arguing that mainstream films idealize society while ignoring the lived struggles of people of African descent. He maintained that Black filmmakers must treat cinema not as mere entertainment but as a tool that shapes values, identity, and collective struggle.

This position resonates with Habte Gebriel (1982), who, in his discussion of Third Cinema, emphasized that film inevitably embodies class viewpoints. Originating in the 1960s through Solanas and Getino's 1969 manifesto, *Third Cinema* called for politically engaged

filmmaking in the Global South that rejected Western conventions. By employing alternative distribution networks, non-linear narratives, and communal aesthetics, Third Cinema sought to safeguard cultural identity and contest imperialism. Haile Gerima, though not explicitly aligned with this movement, entered the independent film arena in the 1970s with a vision that paralleled Third Cinema's goals: building a cinematic practice for African-descended people rooted in their histories, cultures, and collective experiences. He stressed the necessity of community engagement, alternative production strategies, and the creation of Black audiences as critical elements of independence (Gerima, 1989).

In *On Independent Black Cinema* (1982), Haile Gerima acknowledged earlier pioneers such as Oscar Micheaux, who struggled to establish a tradition of Black filmmaking despite overwhelming social and psychological barriers. He noted two persistent challenges: the stranglehold of corporate control in the film industry, and the entrenchment of racist stereotypes that often depict Black people in subordinate roles, sometimes reinforced even by Black filmmakers. To counter these forces, Haile Gerima emphasized genuine independence, drawing on his own experience of self-financing his films through savings, loans, and outside jobs. For him, independence was not simply financial it was a declaration of cultural autonomy and political resistance, a refusal to compromise artistic vision within an industry hostile to Black subjectivity. According to Perry (2019) this ethos informs *Sankofa*, where Gerima deploys editing and camera movement to reject Western linear temporality, instead visualizing Black past, present, and future as simultaneous. In doing so, he articulates a diasporic consciousness that challenges dominant structures of race, gender, and class. For Haile Gerima (1983), independence means preserving creative control and aligning cinematic work with historical struggles for liberation. This requires filmmakers of African descent to anchor their narratives in memory, identity, and resilience, countering mainstream portrayals that trivialize or erase Black experience (Gerima, 1989).

Haile Gerima pays tribute to the previous Black independent filmmakers like Oscar Micheaux, Ousmane Sembene and Julie Dash as strong influences in his film practice. Nonetheless, the fact that he claims not to interact with modern black filmmakers who are not in Hollywood (Gerima, 1996; 2015; 2019), such as the ones in Ethiopia, because they may not sufficiently reflect their cultures is a critical methodological issue. Scholarly and critical

assessment usually entails the immediate work with the considered works. In the absence of watching and discussing such movies, the arguments about their cultural authenticity, or representational inadequacies, cannot be adequately proven. Critical evaluation is, therefore, better established on attentive observation, comparison and discussion with the current trends of cinematic practice.

Despite this, Haile Gerima further elaborated his ideology in *The Internal Dialogue of the African Filmmaker* (1996), where he distinguished between being a true filmmaker and a mere entertainer. He regarded cinema as a powerful cultural tool capable of preserving African humanity in a global media landscape that often erases it. In his view, representation was itself a battlefield: television, video, and film would either perpetuate stereotypes or become instruments of cultural sovereignty (Gerima, 2001). Drawing on Cabral and Fanon's notion of culture as a "weapon" in liberation struggles (Habte Gebriel, 1982), Haile Gerima saw cinema as central to reclaiming African history and asserting subjectivity.

His praxis was profoundly shaped by Ousmane Sembene. Cham (1984) situates both Haile Gerima and Sembene within the revolutionary core of African feature film, while Haile Gerima himself described Sembene as a mentor, declaring, "*I am one of his cultural descendants wielding a weapon we call the camera*" (Gerima, 2001). In a 1985 interview with Harold, he reflected on the liberatory power of hearing Africans speak their native languages onscreen in Sembene's films, affirming his own restlessness and desire to produce culturally authentic cinema. Turner and Kamdibe (2008) similarly highlight his debt to African oral traditions learned from his grandmother's storytelling as a foundation for his cinematic language.

Despite this vision, Haile Gerima recognized the systemic challenges faced by independent Black and African filmmakers, whom he described as "nomads of African intelligentsia" (Gerima, 1996). Reliance on Western funding often pressured them to conform to external expectations, diluting authenticity. Hollywood's dominance and the lack of strong intra-African networks meant that even significant films risked invisibility within their own contexts (Gerima, 1991a; 1996). To address this, Haile Gerima (1989) called for the creation of multimedia centers that could provide training, foster visual literacy, and develop networks for

low-budget films. Such institutions, he argued, were vital to sustaining independent Black cinema against Hollywood's economic and ideological monopoly.

In his essay for *Black Cinema Aesthetics*, Haile Gerima critiques the tendency of Afro-American artists to present narratives that cater to white America's fascination with the negative aspects of Black life. While working on his film *Ashes and Embers*, Haile Gerima underscores the need to break free from the exploitative portrayals of "Blackness" perpetuated by years of mass media, which lead to a distorted understanding of authenticity that disenfranchises Black Americans. He also challenges the reliance on a white "point of entry" in filmmaking, noting that distributors often deem films about Black experiences uncommercial if they don't cater to white perspectives. For him, the essence of political engagement in Black cinema lies in how films position their audiences.

Haile Gerima's cinema is as much a critique of narrative form as it is an intervention into narrative subject. In his 1993 address at the University of Cape Town conference *Appropriations: New Directions in African Cultural Studies?*, he cautioned against "academic tourism" in the study of African cinema, insisting that criticism must develop in dialogue with production and avoid assimilation into dominant ideological frameworks. This insistence underscores Haile Gerima's larger concern: the politics of representation lies not only in *what* stories are told, but in *how* they are communicated.

Sankofa (1993) screened at that same conference, exemplifies this dual commitment. The film resists the dominant "plantation school" of cinematic discourse, which reduces slavery to regression and victimhood, by foregrounding complex acts of resistance and reclamation. While the North American slave past is often narrated as a uniquely American story, Haile Gerima reframes it from an African-centered perspective treating slavery as both a historical rupture and a site of diasporic reconnection. Crucially, this reclamation is not limited to content but extends to form: through narrative discontinuities, overlapping diegeses, and disjunctive temporalities, *Sankofa* refuses linear mastery. Instead, it forces both protagonist and spectator into what Haile Gerima calls an "imperfect" journey transformational precisely because it unsettles conventional cinematic modes.

Black independent filmmaking as a struggle for identity, memory, and liberation, His vision emphasizes the necessity of self-reliant production, the cultivation of critical communities, and the creation of films that honor the dignity and humanity of African-descended people. For him, cinema must preserve historical consciousness, challenge stereotypes, and serve as a weapon in the fight for cultural sovereignty. As he insisted, independence is not merely economic but a radical act of reclaiming narrative power and restoring African and diasporic humanity in the global cinematic imagination.

4.2.6. Imperfect Cinema: “Perfect” and “creative”

Haile Gerima situates his work within the framework of “imperfect cinema,” a concept first theorized by Cuban filmmaker Julio García Espinosa. He has stated that “you can find me in each of my films but imperfectly” (Gerima, 2016, 2025), underscoring the fact that his cinematic journey has always involved struggle and innovation rather than imitation. For him, imitation particularly of Hollywood cinema is “not creative” and “not innovative,” even if it appears “perfect.” He insists that true creativity emerges from imperfection, because “imitation is perfect” but lacks originality. In contrast, imperfect cinema embraces risk and inventiveness.

Espinosa himself clarified that “imperfect cinema never intend(s) to mean bad films” (as cited in Habte Gabriel, 1986,). Rather, imperfection signals a refusal to mimic established models and an insistence on pursuing aesthetic independence. As Belachew (2021) notes, imperfect cinema is a search for identity, a rejection of epistemological arrogance, and an act of creating something new. Similarly, Belachew (2017) emphasizes that the notion of imperfection challenges the dominance of imitation and instead insists that as Haile Gerima (2016) claims “good art itself is innovative, not imitation”

This emphasis resonates with Frantz Fanon’s observation that “each generation must discover its mission, fulfill it or betray it, in relative opacity” (Fanon, 1963). As an independent filmmaker, Haile Gerima has taken this mission to heart. He has consistently refused to compromise the stories he inherited, instead offering counter-narratives, counter-stories, and counter-images as weapons of resistance. His eleven films, alongside more than fifteen unpublished manuscripts, represent what he calls an *imperfect journey* (Belachew, 2021)

Haile Gerima explicitly acknowledges Espinosa's influence, echoing the Cuban filmmaker's concept of imperfect cinema as a *journey*. Espinosa contrasts "perfect" cinema, which he defines as "technically and artistically masterful" but ideologically evasive, with "imperfect" cinema, which highlights "anti-illusionist" elements and reveals the processes that generate social problems (Espinosa, 1969). He argues: "Imperfect cinema finds a new audience in those who struggle and it finds its themes in their problems" (Ibid). For Gerima, this resonates with his own critique of cinema as a travelogue and of critics as "intellectual tourists" (Gerima, 2016). To journey imperfectly, then, is not only an aesthetic but also an ethical imperative, one that resists colonial hegemonies embedded in the culture of tourism.

Espinosa further clarifies that "imperfect cinema must above all show the process which generates the problems" (1969). It stands in opposition to a cinema that celebrates only results, that illustrates pre-packaged ideas, or that indulges in narcissistic self-contemplation. As he explains, "to analyze, in the traditional sense of the word, always implies a closed prior judgment... To analyze is to block off from the outset any possibility for analysis on the part of the interlocutor" (Ibid). Imperfect cinema instead opens space for audiences to participate critically in meaning-making.

Haile Gerima carries this idea forward in his own filmmaking practice. He insists: "My cinemas are imperfect but they tell my story" (Gerima, 2025). For him, the obstacle to "perfect" African cinema is not artistic but structural: "To make a perfect cinema Black people should be financed accordingly [and] allowed to tell stories of their own without any hindrance" (Gerima, 2025). Thus, imperfection is not a deficiency but a political condition shaped by systemic inequities. Echoing Belachew (2021), he insists that African filmmakers must find their identity through cinema, embracing imperfection both in form and in content. Universal themes love, hate, war may appear in African films, but the cinematic grammar, language, and style remain rooted in African particularity.

Espinosa's manifesto emphasizes this flexibility: "Imperfect cinema can make use of the documentary or the fictional mode, or both. It can use whatever genre, or all genres. It can use cinema as a pluralistic art form or as a specialized form of expression. These questions are indifferent to it, since they do not represent its real alternatives or problems, and much less its

real goals” (Espinosa, 1969). What matters is not technical perfection but cinema’s role as a weapon of struggle, testimony, and transformation.

Finally, both Haile Gerima and Espinosa insist that imperfect cinema is “perfect in innovation.” By rejecting imitation and exposing process rather than polished results, it empowers filmmakers and audiences alike to reclaim cinema as a space of collective struggle, cultural memory, and liberation.

4.2.7. Black Experiences on African lenses

Haile Gerima’s work exemplifies a radical reimagining of cinema as both a cultural weapon and a tool of liberation. Through his African lens, Haile Gerima not only critiques Eurocentric misrepresentations of Black life but also advances a cinematic language rooted in African traditions and diasporic consciousness. He affirmed in an interview his approach “emphasizes Black stories, voices, and perspectives, offering an antidote to the Eurocentric, often stereotypical portrayals of Black people in mainstream films” (Gerima, 2008, p. 970). His films *Bush Mama* (1976), *Sankofa* (1993), *Ashes and Embers* (1982), and *Harvest: 3000 Years* (1976) explore themes of slavery, diaspora, resistance, and communal struggle, reflecting his conviction that cinema must serve as a site of historical recovery and cultural empowerment.

Central to Haile Gerima’s Pan-African vision is the recognition of a shared struggle that transcends national and continental boundaries. In a 2013 interview, he underscored the parallels “between the struggles of Black people in Ethiopia and those in the diaspora, emphasizing a shared experience of violence and oppression” (Thomas, 2013). This insistence on transnational solidarity situates his cinema within the long history of Pan-African consciousness. Historically, Pan-Africanism has strengthened Afro-descendant cultural identities through religion, music, dance, and oral and written traditions, while reconnecting dispersed communities across the Caribbean, the Americas, and Europe with their ancestral homeland. It has also been central to struggles for human rights, economic justice, and liberation for Africans, Afro-descendants, and Third World peoples. Yet, under conditions of U.S. hegemony, hyper-capitalism, and multinational dominance, the currency of Pan-Africanism is challenged by the continued fragmentation of Africa itself. Ali Mazrui’s *The African Condition* (1980) captures this dilemma

in a “seven-tiered pyramid of fragmentation” that highlights the divisions undermining African unity (Ratclif, 2009). Haile Gerima’s cinema, however, seeks to counter this fragmentation by narratively re-connecting Africans and Afro-descendants, insisting on the continuity of their struggles and the necessity of solidarity.

Haile Gerima’s films enact this Pan-African narrative strategy by resisting Hollywood’s individualism and privileging communal storytelling. In *Sankofa*, his use of “relay character development” links characters across time and space, dramatizing the interconnectedness of African and diasporic lives (Turner and Kamdibe, 2008). His reliance on oral histories, ancestral memory, and traditional Ethiopian influences his father’s nationalist plays and his grandmother’s folktales anchors this method in African epistemologies. As Steve Howard (1985) argues, Haile Gerima’s cinema is one of “consciousness and transformation,” foregrounding both the trauma of oppression and the possibilities of collective agency. By dismantling Hollywood’s “toys” its stars, spectacles, and genres, which he calls “a colonial language invented only to benefit in all its aspects the Eurocentric world order” (Gerima, 1986) he calls for a guerrilla aesthetic that empowers the oppressed to reclaim their image and history.

Despite its visionary scope, Haile Gerima’s project confronts structural challenges. His call for “guerrilla cinema” and insistence on total independence remain difficult to realize in the face of financial exclusion and distribution barriers. His own experience with *Sankofa* highlights both the difficulties and possibilities of building an independent Black film movement. Nevertheless, his proposal for a triangular relationship between filmmaker, critic, and audience reflects his belief that cinema must be community-driven. As (Gerima, 1986) affirmed “the major factor in this crisis is the absence of new, constructive, progressive relationships between the three critical elements of the community that can strengthen and transform the cultural cinema movement”.

In sum, Haile Gerima is a Pan-African visionary who re-centers Black experiences in African lenses, bridging the historical and contemporary struggles of Afro-descendants worldwide. His films demonstrate that cinema can be both a mirror of collective memory and a weapon of liberation, confronting the fragmentation of African and diasporic life with a vision of solidarity, cultural independence, and transformation.

Haile Gerima's filmography (Which we will discuss briefly below) operates as both evidence and extension of this project. Films such as *Sankofa* and *Bush Mama* exemplify a radical African lens, foregrounding slavery, diaspora, and Black resistance as constitutive of modernity itself. In a 2013 interview with George Thomas, Gerima highlights the structural parallels between the struggles of Black communities in Ethiopia and those in the diaspora, a thematic concern powerfully dramatized in *Teza*. By tracing these interconnections, Gerima situates cinema as a medium of transnational solidarity and historical continuity, illuminating shared experiences of racial violence, political dispossession, and systemic oppression. This trans-historical framing aligns his work with broader de-colonial intellectual projects that seek to provincialize Eurocentric epistemologies and restore African and diasporic agency.

For Haile Gerima, cinema must thus operate as a counter-image practice, one that dismantles the colonial regime by projecting unapologetic representations of Black humanity. As he earlier argued, "cinema's devastating capacity to colonize can (also) be counter-utilized in a way that projects one's own human story without apology" (Gerima, 1995). His critique identifies Eurocentric representation as one of the most violent cultural accomplishments of colonial modernity: the systematic construction of Black men and women as existing outside the boundaries of the human. By mobilizing cinema as a de-colonial weapon, Gerima demonstrates how independent Black filmmaking can reconfigure both aesthetics and politics, producing counter-hegemonic visual ties that affirm Black presence, dignity, and futurity.

He also asserts that promotes pan-Africanism in his works. As defined by Rabaka (2020), pan-Africanism is a movement founded by Africans for the benefit of Africans, including those from the diaspora, in response to European dominance and imperialism. Scholars agree that its focus is on the social, economic, cultural, and political freedom of African peoples. A shared belief that underpins Pan-Africanism is the unity and collective future of Africans and individuals of African descent. In his 2013 work, *The Director's Note*, Gerima (1982) asserts that his films are intended to showcase the history, culture, and welfare of all people of African descent, with the preservation of their humanity being a central motivation. For him, filmmakers need to confront their frustrations regarding societal injustices, channeling that anger into creativity to foster meaningful expression.

Aligned with this notion, Thomas (2012) in another piece analyzes Haile Gerima's films, emphasizing his role as a visionary in Pan-Africanism and claims that, In *Ashes and Embers*, a veteran of the Vietnam War is plagued by distressing flashbacks that evoke visions of historical icons like Patrice Lumumba and Malcolm X, prompting inquiries into the essence of these images. *Child of Resistance* reflects on the challenges faced by Angela Davis, casting revolutionary figures as martyrs amidst a looming danger to Black activists. *Bush Mama* features a crucial altercation in a bar in Watts, where discussions surrounding violence and its repercussions take center stage. Additionally, Haile Gerima pays tribute to Malcolm in *After Winter: Sterling Brown* and arguably encapsulates his spirit in *Sankofa*. Importantly, his film *Harvest 3000 Years* provides an unexpected platform to delve into Pan-African ideas, presenting a transformative perspective. As noted by Belachew (2018), Haile Gerima, an independent filmmaker, embarked on a journey where he steadfastly refused to compromise the narratives he encountered, instead offering counter-narratives, counter-stories, and counter-images that accurately portray the reality of people of African descent. Gerima is a filmmaker whose documentaries and dramas unveil symbolic truths, using monumental cinema as a tool for resistance and a pathway to self-healing. Haile Gerima (1991a) also articulated that when we have the chance to create with the powerful and expensive medium of film, we must approach it with a solid and critical awareness of the history of stereotyping the African race in cinema.

4.2.8. Aesthetics as Liberation

The question of aesthetics in Black cinema must be understood within the history of oppression, subjugation, and resistance. Haile Gerima (2016) argues that Black film movements are inherently resistant, forged out of the creative energy of survival. Once appropriated by white cultural structures, however, this resistance is neutralized. For Haile Gerima, African Americans carry a “genomics of memory,” a living archive of slavery, subjugation, and survival that fuels a distinct imaginative power. As he observes, “when you are not allowed to express yourself you become imaginative”; thus, the oppressed retreat “into the upper stairs of the human mind” to cultivate imagination itself. Jazz exemplifies this aesthetic: improvisational, imperfect, and deeply communal, it embodies a collective scream born from subjugation. In this sense, Black filmmakers may appear as individuals, but they are bound together by collective memory and

historical struggle, such that every cinematic gesture becomes both personal and communal (Gerima, 2016).

Haile Gerima's vision directly contests Eurocentric aesthetic norms. He critiques the dominance of the "three-act play" structure, derived from European theater and reinforced by Hollywood, as a formula that stifles imaginative freedom. Instead, he calls for cinema rooted in lived experience, memory, and collective struggle. For him, aesthetics is not a detached sphere of taste but a weapon of survival and resistance. This position resonates with Clyde R. Taylor's critique of aesthetics as a Eurocentric construction falsely universalized through cultural institutions such as museums, universities, and the Academy Awards (Taylor, 1998). For Taylor, Black cinema's power lays less in formalist innovation than in its politics of representation the ability to confront stereotypes and affirm collective identity. Tommy Lott (1998) makes a similar case, arguing that debates over Blaxploitation films should defer to political stakes rather than aesthetic judgments.

This critique parallels broader dismantlings of aesthetic ideology. Pierre Bourdieu's *Distinction* (1984) revealed how aesthetic judgments reproduce class hierarchies through "cultural capital." George Dickie (1964) discredited aesthetic-attitude theories, while Tony Bennett (1990) labeled aesthetics "useless knowledge," and Laura Kipnis (1986) called for a "post-aesthetic theory." Susan Kappeller (1986) further critiqued aesthetic "disinterestedness" as a mask for ideological control. These interventions echo Gerima's rejection of prescriptive forms, though their focus is sociological and philosophical rather than experiential and collective.

Herbert Marcuse as translated by Douglas Kellner (2007), in contrast, provides a framework that converges with Gerima's insistence on art as liberation. In *The Aesthetic Dimension* (1978), Marcuse describes art as occupying a paradoxical position: it both estranges and affirms the social order. Beauty, for Marcuse, cultivates imagination, memory, and fantasy, preserving the image of liberation by dramatizing denied desires and utopian longings (Marcuse, 1978; Schoolman, 1976). While art cannot directly enact revolution, it sustains the consciousness of alternatives. Black music and poetry, he argues, embody this radical aesthetic most powerfully, fusing memory of slavery with rebellion against ongoing oppression (Marcuse,

1978). Yet, echoing Gerima, he warns that white appropriation risks commodifying Black forms into spectacles that pacify rather than mobilize.

The Marxist debates on revolutionary art sharpen these tensions. Lukács privileged the realist novel as proletarian form, while Brecht insisted on radically open epic theater; Benjamin (1936) saw film as the technological art that could transform perception, and Bloch emphasized utopian imagination as the essence of art. Schoolman (1979) framed art's estranging power as its normative function, while warning against its pacifying role. Haile Gerima's call for a "collective approach to individual freedom" aligns with these debates but is rooted specifically in Black subjugation and diasporic memory.

For Haile Gerima and the so-called L.A. Rebellion filmmakers including Charles Burnett, Julie Dash, Larry Clark, Kathleen Collins, and others this vision of aesthetics as liberation was cultivated through encounters with global "outsider" cinemas. At UCLA in the 1970s, they turned not to Godard but to the films of Ousmane Sembène, Tomás Gutiérrez Alea's *Memories of Underdevelopment* (1968), the Cuban film *Lucía* (1968), Glauber Rocha's Brazilian cinema, and Solanas and Getino's *The Hour of the Furnaces* (1968), which functioned as a manifesto for film as weapon. This transnational dialogue confirmed that aesthetics could not be reduced to style or taste, but was inseparable from politics, history, and resistance.

In sum, Haile Gerima's aesthetics as liberation converge with Taylor's politics of representation and Marcuse's emancipatory aesthetics, while extending them through the specificity of Black historical memory. Against Eurocentric claims of universality, Haile Gerima insists that aesthetics emerge from the lived experiences of oppression, rupture, and survival. Far from "useless knowledge" (Bennett, 1990), aesthetics becomes an imperfect, resistant, and collective practice a cultural survival strategy that insists on the possibility of liberation.

4.2.9. Demystification of Cinema and Black Women

Haile Gerima situates the place of women in cinema within a broader critique of how mainstream filmmaking has historically functioned. In his 2016 discussion on Black Aesthetics at UCLA, Haile Gerima recalled his early days as a film student learning technical processes like shooting and negative cutting. At that time, he and his peers were intimidated, believing that

such practices were the exclusive domain of white filmmakers (Gerima, 2016). This mystification of cinema technology, Gerima argues, was not neutral it was a racialized and gendered mechanism that reinforced exclusion. For him, the task of demystifying cinema became a central part of his personal and political journey: reclaiming the tools of filmmaking and liberating them from the aura of white, male dominance (ibid).

When Haile Gerima began teaching, he translated this ethos into practice by distributing technical responsibilities equally among his students, regardless of gender. This produced a revealing outcome: many of his women students excelled as cinematographers once freed from the false notion that camera work was a male domain. By making filmmaking a collective and communal activity, Haile Gerima undermined hierarchical assumptions about who “had the right” to handle the camera (ibid). He insists that cinema, when stripped of mystification, becomes a shared struggle, not a battlefield of gender exclusion. As he puts it “Why not struggle together to make collective cinema?” For Haile Gerima, no white filmmaker can or should imagine his mother’s story. Demystification therefore means reclaiming cinema as a space of self-representation, resistant to colonized thinking and capable of producing unapologetically human stories (Gerima, 2016).

This vision aligns with his broader notion of “*breaking the toys*” dismantling the colonial logic embedded in cinematic practice itself. In his view, every image must be answered by a counter-image “(Gerima, 2010) which can be identified as decolonizing the filmic image. Cinema’s devastating capacity to colonize can, paradoxically, be turned into a counterforce when wielded to project one’s own history and humanity. Yet Haile Gerima remains clear-eyed: whether male or female, to be an African filmmaker is an oppressive undertaking. Infrastructure is fragile, funding is scarce, and filmmakers live a nomadic existence (Gerima, 2021). Within this precarious reality, women often face a double burden excluded not only by the neocolonial structures of global cinema but also by the patriarchal biases of local film cultures.

Haile Gerima’s critique of women’s representation in African cinema identifies three recurring tendencies. First, women are objectified as sexual commodities, reduced to shallow targets of male desire and violence a legacy of both feudal patriarchy and neocolonial exploitation. Second, the nationalist-patriotic mode idealizes women as symbols of purity dutiful

wives, nurturing mothers, or narrowly professional figures like nurses or secretaries thereby reinforcing inequality under the guise of cultural pride. Third, more progressive portrayals attempt to place men and women together within broader social struggles, but these remain largely constructed through male perspectives, leaving women's own voices marginalized (Gerima, 2021). Across all three trends, the persistence of patriarchal framings is striking, as is the near-total absence of women filmmakers themselves.

Yet Haile Gerima acknowledges the exceptions: pioneers like Safi Faye (*Letters from My Village*, 1975) and Sarah Maldoror (*Sambizanga*, 1972) carved out profound contributions to African cinema despite their marginalization. Their work demonstrates that women filmmakers bring not only new perspectives but also the possibility of reshaping cinema's ideological and aesthetic frameworks. Still, their underrepresentation underscores Haile Gerima's 2021 warning: African cinema cannot go on "with business as usual" without confronting the systemic exclusion of women.

This critique resonates deeply with Haile Gerima's own personal memories. As a child, he grew up around the fire listening to his grandmother's stories of heroes and heroines, of good and evil, of struggle and survival. Those evenings, before electricity reached his home, were his true philosophy class a school of values and memory. But with the arrival of film, radio, and television, the cultural role of women storytellers was violently disrupted (Ibid). Where feudalism once dictated women's role as transmitters of tradition, neocolonialism introduced cinema as an instrument of domination that displaced them entirely.

Haile Gerima insists that as long as women are excluded from cinema the most powerful medium of modern storytelling what is expressed will remain "half true and lopsided." The history of Western cinema itself bears this lesson: it is a century-long history of women's exclusion, of their overthrow from the role of storyteller (Ibid). To demystify cinema, then, is not only to reclaim it from colonial hands but also to restore women to their rightful place at the center of cultural narration.

4.3. Anaizing Haile Gerima's films and understanding his cinematic Ideology

4.3.1. Haile Gerima's Film making process

For Haile Gerima, filmmaking begins with a rigorous confrontation of the historical stereotyping of African-descended peoples in cinema. In line with Frantz Fanon's (1967) critique of the colonial image which positions Black subjects outside of humanity Gerima insists that "filmmakers must confront the long history of racial stereotyping in cinema and allow this critical awareness to shape every stage of production" (Gerima, 1995). Filmmaking, for him, is not a neutral craft but a political responsibility: from conceptualization to script-writing, character construction, editing, and distribution, the task is "not merely to construct narrative but to unmask ideology." In this way, cinema becomes a site of reclamation, what Fanon called a process of "disalienation" through culture. Haile Gerima's project also parallels Ngugi wa Thiong'o's *Decolonising the Mind* (1986), which rejects Eurocentric forms in favor of languages, landscapes, and histories rooted in African experience. Just as Ngugi resists the cultural impositions of colonial literature, Haile Gerima rejects Hollywood conventions, working instead toward a cinematic language that emerges from Black communities themselves.

Central to this practice is script development. As Gerima (1991) explains:

During the script-writing process, I spend a great deal of time on what are known as environment and character development. The characters' development and growth are achieved by my consistently analyzing, redefining, molding, and fashioning their individual characteristics and the circumstantial environment in which they are to interact. As a result the environment is believable and the characters are multi-dimensional and deeply reflective...Because the script is the critical floor plan from which the moving picture is going to derive its direction, it is at this early stage that vigilance against stereotypes and false cinematic conventions must begin.

For Haile Gerima, environments are never decorative but layered terrains where social contradictions inscribe themselves into lived experience. He identifies three essential dimensions physical, sociological, and psychological that inform both character and narrative. In *Ashes and Embers* (1982), Los Angeles emerges as a segregated urban landscape saturated with false cultural imagery; the countryside evokes ancestral grounding; Washington, D.C. exposes Black marginality at the nation's political center; and Vietnam registers the psychic trauma of imperial war through the disoriented veteran Nad Charles. These environments enable what Gerima

(1991) calls “multi-dimensional and deeply reflective” characters, representational figures embedded in “a military brigade with all their class stratification, created to serve my philosophical objectives”.

Such figures, while representational, resist abstraction: they embody unrealized freedoms and suppressed histories. In this sense, Haile Gerima’s aesthetic aligns with Herbert Marcuse’s (1967) argument that art inhabits a distinct “aesthetic dimension,” where form and content coalesce to imagine alternative modes of existence. His characters are not merely symbolic, but part of a cinematic tapestry that asserts the humanity of Black life against its erasure.

Haile Gerima’s relay-character technique in *Sankofa* further disrupts Eurocentric individualism, foregrounding collective subjectivity and intergenerational memory. This formal strategy draws on African oral traditions and testimonial practices, creating counter-archives to the silences of Western history. His Ethiopian heritage is crucial here: the nationalist plays of his father and the folktales of his grandmother serve as aesthetic resources, “quilted in the tapestry of the narrative” (Gerima, 1991), offering decolonial forms that reassert memory, dignity, and collective survival.

Haile Gerima's perspective on portraying African people in film stems from a struggle against their inaccurate representation in Western cinema. (Gerima, 2001) argues that mainstream media presents Black individuals as disconnected from universal human experiences, which results in harmful cultural perceptions. This inaccurate portrayal often reduces their profound emotional and intellectual existences, treating them as mere objects. Contemporary cinema must evolve to narrate the overlooked stories of the Black community. Filmmakers play a crucial role in enhancing the understanding of the humanity of people of African descent and advocating for their liberation. Thus Haile Gerima (2013) proposed that African descendent filmmakers cannot express their suppressed stories using the very frameworks that have inflicted their suffering. In his experience he claims that exploring themes of identity, liberation, and remembrance defines his vision of what independent cinema should embody.

Haile Gerima situates his filmmaking within a politics of resistance, shaped both by material struggle and theoretical conviction. Though his films circulated widely in Europe, particularly Germany where audiences “are at least debating and struggling fiercely against racism and fascism,” he contrasts this with the silence of the U.S., where “poor people and homeless people are dehumanized” and “racism is the toxic that is going to destroy this country” (Gerima, 1996). His commitment to cinema, even at the cost of “almost starving his family,” emerges from a belief in film’s potential for healing.

Haile Gerima’s practice fuses spirituality and improvisation. In Jamaica, actors prayed to sustain production, while in Ghana libations sanctified the shoot. These experiences convinced him that film “has to relatively free itself from the script,” since scripts are only “the floorplan” of the cinematic journey. *Bush Mama* exemplified this discovery: “film is not linear...most of the linear things you had in your script were conventions that you need to question” (Gerima, 1996). For him, this principle defines African cinema: the filmmaker must not only serve society but claim “the right...to experiment.”

The struggle to complete films highlights systemic marginalization. Funders repeatedly offered “noose money just enough to hang you, not enough to finish your project,” while distributors dismissed his work as “another slavery story” (Gerima, 1996). Hollywood’s rejection of Black revolt narratives, he argues, denies them the historical legitimacy granted to other revolutions. This critique informed Gerima’s theorization of *independent Black cinema* in *On an Independent Black Cinema* (1982) and *Triangular Cinema* (1986). His project, as Turner and Kumbi (2008) note, fuses Third Cinema with the U.S. Black Arts Movement, articulating a practice of alternative cinema (Majumder, 2018).

In terms of narrative movement, Gerima (1991) rejects Hollywood’s formulaic reliance on binary conflicts arguing instead for a cinema attuned to the “unseen galaxy of inner contradictions” that structure human life.

Dominant exploitation cinema relies far too heavily on overt conflict. Rooted in bad guy-good guy, black hat-white hat, the literal translation of conflict has become in the 1980s a standard means of organizing

contemporary movies. We are subjected so frequently to this sort of vulgarity that the appreciation of the masses of people has been deadened to a more subtle and complex presentation of true conflicts. If, as independent filmmakers, our interest is to tap the depth of the human soul, the growth and transformation of human beings, then we must shed light on the often invisible galaxy of inner contradictions that characterizes the individual in modern society. Conflict and contradictions are, after all, part of the fundamental laws of movement.

This insistence on contradiction positions Haile Gerima in dialogue with Fanon, who saw colonial society itself as riven by violence and contradiction, and with Marcuse, who argued that art's power lies in revealing the possibility of new realities. For Haile Gerima, conflict is not spectacle but revelation it exposes the fractures of lived existence and points toward the possibility of transformation.

Haile Gerima's rejection of Hollywood's "bad guy-good guy, black hat-white hat" binaries (Gerima, 1991) positions him alongside Fanon, for whom colonial life is structured by contradiction, and Marcuse, who saw art's role in revealing new realities. Conflict in Gerima's films is revelation rather than spectacle, illuminating "the unseen galaxy of inner contradictions" that shape modern Black life. His triangular cinema Gerima (1986) further situates Africa as a node of diasporic entanglement, where "local struggles reverberate across global spaces" (Mbembe, 2007). Works such as *Ashes and Embers*, *Sankofa*, and *Teza* embody this vision, staging dislocation across Ethiopia, Europe, and the Americas to expose how slavery, colonialism, and migration inscribe Black consciousness.

Haile Gerima's methods reinforce these commitments. Scriptwriting is iterative and dialogic (Gerima, 2016), acting relational rather than individual (Gerima, 1991), and casting privileges nonprofessional authenticity over star-image (Gerima, 1991b; 2013). Editing remains central "the shot a filmmaker shot is correct when he sees it in the editing room" (Gerima, 2016) because it generates unforeseen meanings.

Sankofa (1993) epitomizes his alternative praxis: produced over eight years with multinational crews, the process itself became collective memory. Burkinabe collaborators claimed, “This film is ours,” while Puerto Rican crew recognized that “in our veins the African blood still flows.” For Gerima, such moments embody “socialism and democracy” in filmmaking (Gerima, 1996), transforming cinema into both cultural reclamation and diasporic solidarity.

According to Gerima (1996) two of his films aired in Germany, and he has had debates with German audiences. His films have been shown all over Europe both on television and in theaters, and this gives me the credentials he need so that people will trust me with a project. He like going to Germany because they are at least debating and struggling fiercely against racism and fascism. He has also stated that In “America” everybody is silent about the oppression and the bad condition of people who are outsiders. Nobody seems to care. Intellectual academicians are rationalizing with social theory what amounts to the life and death of 60 to 70 %of the American population. Poor people and homeless people are dehumanized in the country. Racism is the toxic that is going to destroy this country. And people should be happy he tries to use my meager resources, almost starving his family, to make a film about healing. One should always have to struggle to get his/her films completed. In Jamaica when he and his crue ran into financial difficulties, the actors were praying, a sort of spiritual pleading with God to enable him to finish the film.

In Ghana too, every day before shooting, libation was poured. People thought they were making history. Despite the absence of money, it was made with spiritual power. So they had to make many compromises, but in the end this strengthened the film. A very important thing he learned at an early stage is how much the film has to free itself from the script. When it leaves the airport, its flying and one can only see the floorplan of the film in the script.

Haile Gerima’s praxis foregrounds process over product, privileging collective participation, improvisation, and spiritual grounding in opposition to industrial norms. Scriptwriting, he insists, is provisional “a floorplan” rather than a blueprint (Gerima, 2016) while acting and casting emphasize relational truth and nonprofessional authenticity (Gerima, 1991b, 2013). Editing becomes the locus of discovery, where “two shots coincide or juxtapose and make a synthesized thing” unforeseen in the script (Gerima, 2016).

This aesthetic of improvisation is inseparable from the political economy of his practice. Facing what he calls “noose money” grants sufficient to begin but not finish projects Gerima situates his marginalization within a wider refusal to support films that portray Black struggle without sensationalism (Gerima, 1996). Yet these constraints catalyze creative reorientation: *Bush Mama* (1975) revealed to him cinema’s non-linearity, while *Sankofa* (1993), forged through prayer, libation, and multinational collaboration, and became both a film and a ritual of diasporic solidarity (Gerima, 1996).

Haile Gerima also critiques Euro-American intellectual and distributive frameworks that dismiss African revolts as irrational eruptions, denying them the historicity accorded to European revolutions. For him, cinema must resist this epistemic violence by serving as both cultural reclamation and democratic experimentation. As he concludes, each film is less a finished product than an “imperfect journey,” an exploration where the filmmaker remains a spectator to his own unfolding creation (Gerima, 1996).

Expressing such thought goes back on his early 1980s writings. Based on this believe he has forwarded his notion of alternative independent cinema that he believes can help all African descendent and or Black people. In 1982 writing he has introduced the notion of and significance of independent on his writing entitled *on an Independent Black Cinema*. Then he elaborated more on his next 1986 writing *Triangular Cinema, Breaking the Toys, and Dinknesh vs. Lucy* and other consecutive writings lectures and interviews. According to Turner and Kumbi (2008) His works has successfully combined the ethos of the Third Cinema movement of Africa and Latin America and the Black Arts movement of the US. And works manifest his quest for the formation of independent alternative cinema practices (Majumder, 2018)

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contemporary movies. We are subjected so frequently to this sort of vulgarity that the appreciation of the masses of people has been deadened to a more subtle and complex presentation of true conflicts. If, as independent filmmakers, our interest is to tap the depth of the human soul, the growth and transformation of human beings, then we must shed light on the often invisible galaxy of inner contradictions that characterizes the individual in modern society. Conflict and contradictions are, after all, part of the fundamental laws of movement.

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Haile Gerima's triangular cinema model (1986) situates Africa as a node of global interconnection, where local struggles reverberate across diasporic spaces. Rejecting Hollywood's universalizing narratives; he grounds his art in historical specificity, producing films that address both the intimate contradictions of Black life and the entangled conditions of modernity. In this sense, his work aligns with Mbembe's (2007) view of African identity as forged through circulations across time, space, and history rather than fixed within national borders. Films such as *Ashes and Embers*, *Sankofa*, and *Teza* embody this entanglement, positioning Black characters within overlapping geographies Ethiopia, the Americas, Europe while tracing the inscriptions of slavery, colonialism, and migration on Black consciousness.

Haile Gerima's methods reinforce this vision. Scriptwriting, he insists, is dialogic and iterative, always subject to rewriting and collective input (Gerima, 2016). Acting is relational rather than individual: characters gain meaning through interaction, embodying both personal struggle and collective experience (Gerima, 1991). Casting privileges nonprofessional authenticity, resisting the artifice of star images (Gerima, 1991b; 2013). Editing remains central that a space where unforeseen meanings emerge "the shot a filmmaker shot is correct when he sees it in the editing room" (Gerima, 2016) transforming accidents and mistakes into discoveries.

This experimental ethos was crystallized in *Bush Mama* (1975), where production crises forced Haile Gerima to abandon linear conventions and embrace improvisation. He describes this as a turning point, affirming that African filmmakers must not only serve society but also claim the right to explore and interrogate cinematic form itself. Each film thus becomes an “imperfect journey,” an ongoing process of transformation for artist and audience alike.

The collaborative production of *Sankofa* further illustrates this praxis. Made over eight years with multinational crews, the film’s creation itself became a ritual of collective historical consciousness. Burkinabé collaborators claimed, “This film is ours,” while Puerto Rican crew members affirmed that “in our veins the African blood still flows.” For Gerima, such moments embodied “socialism and democracy” in filmmaking (Gerima, 1996), transforming cinema into both cultural reclamation and diasporic solidarity.

Haile Gerima also resists the lure of mainstream audiences and distributors, insisting that African-descended viewers cannot passively consume films laden with ideological biases (Gerima, 1982; 2013). Independent cinema, he argues, must challenge perception, provoke thought, and inspire action rather than merely entertain. In this way, his cinema becomes both an alternative practice and a decolonial pedagogy, insisting on Africa’s centrality to global modernity while forging spaces of solidarity across the diaspora.

In terms of distribution Haile Gerima’s distribution of *Sankofa* stands as a radical intervention into the political economy of cinema. Denied access to mainstream distribution channels, he and Shirikiana Aina established Mypheduh Films and turned to “four-walling” renting theaters outright and retaining revenues. Beginning with an unprecedented 11-week run in Washington, D.C., the film traveled through more than fifteen U.S. cities, ultimately grossing over \$2.2 million (Freied et al., 2015). This practice not only demonstrated the viability of grassroots circulation but also challenged the Hollywood monopoly over what stories could be seen and valued. In effect, Haile Gerima’s strategy enacted the same decolonial logic at the level of circulation that his films pursue narratively: reclaiming space, refusing mediation through dominant institutions, and asserting an independent African diasporic cinematic presence.

Haile Gerima has steadily fought against the temptation of market-driven film production and mainstream distribution on the belief that African-descent audiences cannot passively accept the films determined by the stronghold of ideological biases. Instead, he considers independent cinema as a critical form of practice that problematizes perception and challenges thought and promotes political awareness instead of entertaining the audience. In reality, however, his work occasionally seems to serve more audiences and institutions in the United States than his wider audiences, which he often refers to as his core constituency of African descent people in the continent of Africa, Latin America, and Europe. As his writings, lectures, and interviews are spreading over multiple sites, some of his movies have become inaccessible to the African population and even the Ethiopian audience. Such restricted availability begs the question of the effectiveness of his practice of the cinema in reaching the communities, which he intends to awaken and engage.

Despite this fact, Haile Gerima's cinematic ideology generally synthesizes Black radical politics rooted in structural liberation and critique of racial capitalism, Pan-African vision, Ethiopianist autonomy affirming spiritual and cultural sovereignty, as well as Third Cinema praxis grounded in decolonial aesthetics and collective authorship. It envisions film as a decolonial weapon that transforms both the form and the function of modernity itself. Haile Gerima's cinema is not merely anti-colonial but world-making an insurgent pedagogy of remembrance, contradiction, and hope.

The above analysis reconstructs Haile Gerima's cinematic ideology as a synthesis of Black radicalism, Ethiopianism, and Third Cinema aesthetics what may be termed Revolutionary spiritual and cultural sovereignty in line with Pan- African vision. Emerging from the Black intellectual traditions of Fanon, Cabral, and the Black Radical Congress, Haile Gerima's thought translates the political imperatives of decolonization into a filmic praxis of cultural sovereignty. His cinema rejects the colonial logic of representation embedded in Hollywood's visual grammar and reimagines filmmaking as a process of liberation grounded in collective history and aesthetic imperfection.

Haile Gerima's ideology inherits from Black radicalism the demand for structural transformation and from Ethiopianism the spiritual drive toward autonomy and resurrection. Like

the Ethiopianist break from missionary domination, Haile Gerima's refusal of Hollywood's cultural hegemony constitutes a secular continuation of that quest for self-definition. His Pan-African dialectic bridges continental and diasporic struggles, redefining the Battle of Adwa and the trauma of slavery as interconnected sites of resistance and memory.

By theorizing independence as both economic and epistemic autonomy, Haile Gerima advances a radical Pan-Modernism that does not reject modernity but reconstructs it from the vantage of Black experience. His cinematic philosophy thus articulates a decolonial humanism one that fuses art, politics, and spirituality into a revolutionary praxis of remembering and remaking the world with which we can strengthen our argument in the next chapter by analyzing his individual film

4.3.2. Films Context

"In my movies everything am about is in imperfectly" (Gerima, 2016)

It is witnessed in the above discussion that Born in Gondar in 1946, Haile Gerima was introduced to theater through his father, an Orthodox priest and anti-colonial fighter, and to oral storytelling through his mother and grandmother. His childhood was marked by both indigenous cultural forms and imported American cinema (e.g., Westerns, *Tarzan*), experiences that later fueled his rejection of Hollywood narratives. After moving to the U.S. in 1967 to study theater, Haile Gerima was confronted with racial segregation and exclusion in the performing arts, which led him to embrace filmmaking as a political weapon. Supported by African American communities, he immersed himself in the writings of Osman Sembene, Frantz Fanon, Du Bois, Amilcar , Cabral Kwame and Nkwurmah. But through his films we will he has also other Black influencers like Black Nationalist Angela Davis and Malcolm X. Los Angeles School of Black Filmmakers do not only help him to work and create a group with Charles Burnett, Larry Clark, Julie Dash, Billy Woodberry, and Ben Caldwell but also help him to read and meet those black activists and read their work that has influenced his films that we are going to discuss briefly.

From *Hour Glass* (1971) through *Child of Resistance* (1972) and *Bush Mama* (1976), Haile Gerima developed an aesthetic of resistance deeply indebted to Black radical voices such as Angela Davis and George Jackson (*Soledad Brother*, 1970). As Rose M. Brewer (2003) argues,

Black radicalism constitutes cultural, intellectual, and action-oriented labor rooted in anticolonial and antislavery struggles, while Winterhalter (2021) situates it within emancipatory traditions shaped by W.E.B. Du Bois, Frantz Fanon, Aimé Césaire, Léopold Senghor, and C.L.R. James, whose Africana critical theory insists that critiques of society must address capitalism, racism, sexism, and colonialism in their intersecting forms. Pan-Africanist thought articulated by Marcus Garvey (1967/1923), George Padmore (1972/1937), and Kwame Nkrumah (1998/1963) provided additional grounding, influencing liberation struggles in Africa (Mandela, 1994; Nkrumah, 1998/1963), shaping Malcolm X's Pan-Africanism (Malcolm X, 1970), and inspiring Rastafarianism's links to the Mau Mau (Campbell, 1997; Edmonds, 1998). Rejecting liberal integrationism, this radical tradition framed Western society as structurally racist and called for independent Black institutions and self-determination, spanning movements from Black Power (Carmichael, 1971), the Black Panther Party, and Angela Davis, to Negritude, Afrocentrism, Black feminism, Black liberation theology, and Black Lives Matter, with *Race & Class* serving as a key journal. Figures such as Quobna Cugoana, Ida B. Wells, Julius Nyerere, Walter Rodney, and Bob Marley (Heresy, 2004) further illustrate the breadth of Black radical thought, while Deseriee Kennedy (1998) underscores its long-standing role in democratic transformation. Early diasporic solidarity, epitomized by Ethiopianism and the 1895 victory over colonial invasion (Campbell, 1997), underscores the global resonance of these traditions, which directly shaped Gerima's early cinematic vision.

Haile Gerima's early films, produced during his UCLA years and in the context of the L.A. Rebellion, illustrate this radical grounding. The L.A. Rebellion filmmakers sought to create a cinema reflective of the lived realities and struggles of Black communities in both the United States and Africa. As Field et al. (2015) note, tensions between "I" and "we" shaped the group's creative process, as individual artistic visions coexisted with the collective aim of establishing a new cinematic language for Black liberation. Françoise Pfaff hailed *Child of Resistance* as "one of the most stylistically dares films of Black African cinema," while Greg Thomas situated Gerima's early trilogy as inseparable from Black militant thought. Subsequent works including *Harvest: 3000 Years* (1976), restored by Martin Scorsese's World Cinema Foundation; *Wilmington 10–USA 10,000* (1979); *Ashes and Embers* (1981); and *Sankofa* (1993) extended his focus on historical memory and cultural liberation, with *Sankofa* inspiring the Sankofa Cultural

Center he co-founded with filmmaker Shirikiana Aina (*Through the Door of No Return*, 1997). Later films such as *Imperfect Journey* (1994), *Adwa, an African Victory* (1999), and *Teza* (2008) deepened this commitment by interrogating colonial violence, exile, and identity through nonlinear, memory-driven narrative forms.

Regarding Haile Gerima's cinematic ideology, African cinema scholar Cham (1983) argued through his analysis of *Harvest: 3000 Years* that the ideological force of Haile Gerima (and Ousmane Sembene) does not lie in overt moralizing or mouthpiece characters but in the structural logic of the films themselves, which operate as "living dramatizations of ideology." His films embody a structure of opposites rich versus poor, exploiter versus exploited, progressive versus reactionary that exposes the systemic organization of colonial and neocolonial oppression. Unlike bourgeois aesthetics, which posit reality as chaotic and artistically arbitrary, Gerima's works represent African society as already structured by deliberate systems of domination. For Cham, Gerima's achievement lies in using cinematic form itself to reveal the organized nature of oppression and to compel audiences toward resistance, even while the risk of binary simplification remains. Films such as *Harvest: 3000 Years* and *Bush Mama* thus dramatize exploitation and domination while foregrounding the imperative of struggle, embodying the oppositional logic at the core of Haile Gerima's radical cinematic project.

Taken together, Haile Gerima's Ethiopian upbringing, rooted in oral traditions, anti-colonial resistance, and the tension between indigenous storytelling and imported Western cinema and his immersion in the Black radical tradition situate his films as both personal and politically transnational, providing the framework to analyze how his cinematic practice narrates struggle and embody an oppositional ideology that confronts domination while envisioning liberation which is going to be analyzed below.

4.3.3. *Hour Glass* : Haile Gerima's First film

Hour Glass is a 13-minute, 16mm film written, directed, and produced by Haile Gerima in 1971 while a student at UCLA. It marks his first completed film and already carries the stylistic and ideological characteristics of his later work. Rather than relying on a conventional

narrative arc, the film embraces montage, allegory, and sound dissonance to stage a cinematic awakening of Black consciousness.

Synopsis:-The film follows an unnamed Black male college student-a basketball player for a predominantly white audience- who begins questioning his role as an entertainer in a society structured by racism. His journey of self-awareness unfolds through encounters with radical literature and the voices of revolutionary leaders such as Martin Luther King Jr., Malcolm X, and Angela Davis. The opening image sets the tone: a Black man stands on a basketball court with a noose around his neck. This powerful juxtaposition collapses histories of lynching with the present commodification of Black athletic bodies. The sequence shifts into a basketball game where cheers from white spectators blend with the pounding acoustics of the court, intensifying into a spectacle of exploitation. When the protagonist collapses, two white patrons deliver a gladiatorial “thumbs down,” linking university sports to ancient rituals of radicalized violence.

4.3.3.1. Narrative structure and Black Radical Thoughts

According to Jing (2023), film is an immersive medium that combines visual, auditory, and performance elements to create powerful narratives that entertain and provoke reflection. Central to this experience is narrative structure, which includes character development, plot progression, dialogue, symbolism, and visual composition, engaging intended to engage the audience intellectually and emotionally. Classical narrative principles, as noted by Saberi (2023), emphasize chronological order and linear progression, demanding the stories relies basically on accurate representation of the plot points and gradual development. Characters are supposed to push the story forward by taking action in proper time as the story progresses. Jing also (2023), noted that narratives are made to make viewers engage with characters whose arcs reflect the complexities of the human experience, make film both a cultural mirror and a vehicle for exploring universal themes like love, resilience, and justice. Ultimately, film's significance lies not only entertainment but also in its transformative Aesthetic capacity to shape collective memory and broaden cultural understanding, reinforcing its enduring role as an art form that transcends time, space, and language.

In this regard, *Hour Glass* as a film relies on montage, symbolism, and sound dissonance to depict the protagonist's awakening to Black consciousness. The fragmented structure mirrors the fractured reality of Black life in America, where the subject must negotiate between imposed identities and suppressed histories.

The film employs non-linear sequencing, juxtaposing basketball court scenes with dreamlike, allegorical images and voiceovers from revolutionary figures. The absence of dialogue from the protagonist emphasizes his role as a symbolic body- an athletic figure burdened by the "noose" of systemic racism and commodification. The soundtrack, a collage of The Last Poets' spoken word, Martin Luther King Jr., Malcolm X, Angela Davis, and Elaine Brown, functions as both historical archive and revolutionary call, binding the protagonist's inner turmoil to broader political struggles.

The opening image is both visceral and allegorical: a young Black man, a noose around his neck, stands on a basketball court. This collision of lynching's historical terror with the contemporary commodification of Black athleticism collapses temporal boundaries, situating sports spectacle within a genealogy of violence. The court, filled with the sounds of bouncing balls and white spectators' cheers, becomes a site where the Black body is simultaneously celebrated and annihilated. When the protagonist collapses and two white patrons render the gladiatorial "thumbs-down," Haile Gerima exposes racial capitalism's economy of consumption, discipline, and disposal. On the ground, over these images, we hear the dissonant voices of Black revolutionary figures Malcolm X, Martin Luther King Jr., Angela Davis reframing his collapse not as personal failure but as an allegory of collective struggle.

Malcolm X's insistence on the inseparability of nationalism and revolution resounds: "When you want a nation, that's called nationalism... The American Revolution was white nationalism. The French Revolution was white nationalism... All the revolutions that are going on in Asia and Africa today are based on what? Black Nationalism. A revolutionary is a Black nationalist." Here, Gerima sutures the spectacle of racial exploitation to a discourse of radical self-determination. Juxtaposed with King's more integrationist vision "*I have a dream that one day this nation will rise up and live out the true meaning of its creed...*" the film stages a sonic

debate central to Black radical tradition, refusing to collapse the tension between assimilation and revolution.

Gerima intensifies this historical layering in an allegorical sequence: a naked Black boy lies in a barren room as an older white woman strips his blanket, each time revealing portraits of Malcolm X, Martin Luther King Jr., and Angela Davis. The act literalizes the stripping of Black innocence, but the boy's defiant grip on Davis's image dramatizes resistance as the inheritance of memory. This allegorical unveiling recalls Frantz Fanon's insistence, in *Toward the African Revolution* (1964), that colonial power both assaults and inadvertently generates revolutionary consciousness.

The protagonist's dormitory becomes a counterpoint to the commodified court. Here, in rapid montage, we glimpse works of W. E. B. Du Bois, Fanon, Eldridge Cleaver, and Immanuel Wallerstein. Reading itself becomes a symbolic act of decolonization: Du Bois's *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903), with its enduring metaphors of double-consciousness, the veil, and the color line, frames the psychic fractures of Black life; Fanon's *Black Skin, White Masks* (1952) exposes the internalized wounds of colonial racism; Wallerstein's *Africa: The Politics of Independence* (1961) historicizes the struggle against neocolonialism; Cleaver's *Soul on Ice* (1968) situates incarceration and sexuality within the larger matrix of racial oppression. These texts are not inert props but counter-narratives, aligning the protagonist's intellectual awakening with the lineage of Black radical thought.

Haile Gerima's use of sound is equally radical. Layered speeches from Malcolm X, King, Davis, and Elaine Brown refuse narrative clarity, instead evoking what Fred Moten might later call the "cacophony" of Black radical aesthetics a demand for active engagement rather than passive spectatorship. Sound becomes political form, dramatizing the impossibility of a singular voice in the face of collective struggle.

The concluding sequence resists closure. The protagonist, still burdened by the noose but carrying his books, boards a bus that moves from affluent white suburbs toward South Central Los Angeles. Elaine Brown's "*Seize the Time*" (1969) underscores the journey, situating his revolt within the collective militancy of the Black Panther Party, whose "wants" and "beliefs"

articulated demands for freedom, employment, housing, education, and an end to capitalist exploitation and police brutality. The final image he entering a doorway into darkness denies resolution. Like the radical tradition it invokes, the film insists on unfinished struggle, refusing Hollywood's closure in favor of revolutionary possibility.

The concluding sequence resists closure. The protagonist, burdened by the noose yet carrying his books, boards a bus from the white suburbs to South Central Los Angeles. The soundtrack swells with Elaine Brown's "*Seize the Time*" (1969), in which she sings:

Seize the time, the time is now! oh! seize the time / and you know how...
You worry about liberty, because you've been denied.
Well, I think that you're mistaken or then you must have lied,
'Cause you do not act like those who care / You've never even fought!
For the liberty that you claim to lack / Or have you never thought to...
Seize the time, the time is Now ! Oh, seize the time / And you know
how...

The song's insistence on militancy situates the protagonist's journey within the collective struggle of the Black Panther Party, founded in Oakland in 1966 and later chaired by Brown (1974–77). His physical relocation from white suburbia to Black Los Angeles becomes an allegory of political relocation from passive complicity to insurgent militancy. The final image, where he enters a doorway into darkness, refuses narrative resolution. As Haile Gerima resists Hollywood closure, he aligns his protagonist's fate with the ongoing, unfinished project of Black liberation.

Thus, *Hour Glass* operates both as personal transformation and collective thought. By juxtaposing Du Bois's "double-consciousness," Fanon's psychoanalytic critique of colonialism, Wallerstein's analysis of neocolonialism and Cleaver's prison writings with the voices of Malcolm X, King, Davis, and Martin Luther King, Haile Gerima situates his film squarely within the Black radical tradition. Through montage, dissonance, and refusal of closure, the film not only depicts but enacts the politics of decolonization, affirming cinema itself as a revolutionary weapon.

4.3.4. *Child of Resistance*

Child of Resistance (1972) is , a 47 minuet 16mm, black and white, film written and directed and produced by Haile Gerima when he was a student in UCLA, produced while he was a student at UCLA, is one of the most striking works to emerge from the Los Angeles School of Black Filmmakers, later known as the “L.A. Rebellion.” It is a politically charged experimental film that reflects the radical spirit of the Black liberation struggle of the late 1960s and early 1970s. It draws inspiration from the televised arrest of Black intellectual and activist Angela Y. Davis. It guides viewers through a metaphorical and symbolic journey of a woman imprisoned due to her commitment to social justice. According to West (2016), Davis is a noted figure for her involvement in the revolutionary movements of the 1960s and her continued dedication to marginalized communities. Her influence has been crucial during tumultuous political periods, particularly in resisting neoliberal policies. Davis's activism and scholarship addressing issues related to women, workers, and people of African descent, as well as her critiques of the prison system, have significantly impacted contemporary justice movements. Davis gained international prominence following her arrest in 1970, during which she spent sixteen months in prison before being acquitted in 1972 a journey supported by the global "Free Angela Davis" campaign (Davis, 2000). Her experiences highlight the broader historical injustices faced by Black individuals, cementing her status as a pivotal voice in the struggle for liberation.

Synopsis :- *Child of resistance* is a film which tells a story of unnamed Africana woman confined in a plain jail cell, where she reflects on the degradation and mental colonization faced by the Black community within a Eurocentric context. Her imprisonment serves as a metaphor for her rejection of systemic oppression, contrasting her awareness with those who remain metaphorically "blindfolded." It portrays the imprisonment resulting from her dedicated pursuit of social justice through the use of voice-over dialogues, symbols, and a sequence of abstractly depicted daydreams and nightmares.

4.3.4.1. A Cinematic Allegory of Black Radical thought to Resistance

The influence of Angela Davis on *Child of Resistance* is central not only because her arrest inspired Gerima to write the film, but also because her political thought shapes its thematic core. Davis's writings provide a crucial interpretive framework, particularly *If They Come in the*

Morning (1971), where she emphasizes the political function of incarceration: “Jails and prisons are designed to break human beings, to convert the population into specimens in a zoo obedient to our keepers, but dangerous to each other” (Davis 1971). Haile Gerima translates this insight into cinematic form by placing his protagonist in a stark, barren cell, where her interior reflections dramatize the psychic violence of imprisonment.

The prisoner echoes Davis’s critique as she resists the labels imposed upon her: “We all are inside, outside makes no difference. Malcolm is right; we all are in the same boat. Most of the shuffling outside are just jobbing in a bunch of colonies. The mind is a colony. I am here because I refused to be a colony... the brain is chain”. In these words, the protagonist emerges as a Davis-like figure, embodying not only the personal degradation of incarceration but also the broader psychic colonization of Black communities under racial system.

As Cornel West (2016) argues, Davis’s critiques of prisons and neoliberal policies have profoundly shaped contemporary justice struggles. Gerima’s film reimagines these critiques as visual allegory. The plain jail cell with its toilet, sink, and ever-present white guard recalls Davis’s own confinement, yet the protagonist’s voice insists on resistance: “At least I have my brain. I can’t fuck up my brain no, I can’t do that”. Even in captivity, consciousness becomes a terrain of struggle, underscored by her reflection: “I hear my mind thinking this... it is ticking like a clock”.

Through these moments, Haile Gerima transforms the prison cell into more than a site of physical confinement; it becomes a metaphor for the colonization of Black identity under Eurocentric systems of knowledge. In doing so, the film asserts that liberation requires not only the dismantling of material structures of domination but also the reclamation of consciousness from the forces that seek to discipline and fragment it.

The primarily unfolds mainly within the confines of a plain solitary jail cell, centering on this unnamed woman who contemplates the perceived degradation and mental colonization of Black race, particularly in a Eurocentric context. She contends that her imprisonment is a result of her rejection of this colonization, positioning herself in contrast to other Black individuals who are metaphorically ‘blindfolded’ by systemic oppression. She articulates that her presence in

this facility serves as a platform for voicing her dissent against a society marked by racial and sexual oppression.

Beyond the jail cell, the film explores two additional settings. The second space is idealistic settings like bar and other unrecognizable places surreal portrayals that reflect the character's thoughts on the historical and ongoing struggles of Black people. The third space is a long corridor that leads to unknown out where the character runs through around the end of the film symbolizing her aspirations for ultimate freedom.

The narrative structure of the film employs an anachronic approach, oscillating between the protagonist's current state of isolation in her jail cell and vivid daydreams or nightmarish visions. These sequences feature Black men and women adorned in opulent attire, accompanied by vibrant jazz, cruising in luxurious cars, and socializing with white party-goers on one side, while a group of white individuals gazes upon her from the other. In a dreamlike scene around the beginning, the prisoner enters a bar busy with both Black and white customers led by her guard. A significant moment occurs when the camera descends to reveal that every Black person depicted is physically shackled to one another, binding them by their feet and hands. Despite their captivity, they appear oblivious to their situation, focusing solely on their perceived "social status," as noted by the Black women prisoner's identification (Thomas, 2013). The initial casual interaction between Black and white individuals quickly transforms into a disturbing tableau, wherein white individuals objectify Black bodies, engaging in lewd behavior while the white males maintain a façade of nonchalance, seemingly reveling in the intrigue.

Following this impactful introductory scene, the film gives see close-up of the protagonist's face, transitioning to a point-of-view shot as she surveys her cell, noting a discarded shoe, a toilet, a derelict sink, and the white guard passing by. Then the viewer will be introduced to a dark, assertive voice-over, emanating from the imprisoned African woman, whose identity remains undisclosed throughout the film.

The film unfolds across three surreal spaces: the stark solitary cell, a decadent barroom, and an endless corridor. These settings collapse the distinction between dream and reality, producing what Field, Horak, and Stewart (2015) call a style "heavily symbolic to the point of

surrealism, parodic, caricatural, (and) poetic.” The non-linear narrative oscillates between imprisonment and vision, refusing Hollywood continuity and realism.

The bar sequence is perhaps the most haunting. At first, Black patrons appear to enjoy freedom, drinking and dancing with white companions. Yet as the camera tilts downward, chains are revealed binding their wrists and ankles. The prisoner observes that they are “blindfolded,” unable to recognize their captivity. This allegory recalls Davis’s warning against “the false comfort of participation in a decaying consumer society” (Davis 1971). Similarly, the endless orange-lit corridor, where the protagonist runs without progress, symbolizes the inescapability of systemic oppression a visual metaphor for what Davis describes as “a system whose intent is to repress and contain rather than rehabilitate” (Davis 1971).

In another surreal sequence, the prisoner observes Black men attempting suicide with syringes and plastic bags. Her voiceover indicts white epistemology: “European man never examines himself. Never throughout history. Instead always Black man. Always a Black man’s fault... Man’s brain is what he is after now”. Here Haile Gerima visualizes the psychological warfare of colonialism, exposing how Black life is dissected and identified while whiteness remains unquestioned.

The protagonist’s assertion “We are all prisoners of war” and “Malcolm is right” resonates as a direct cinematic echo of Malcolm X’s framing of Black life under white supremacy as a condition of permanent captivity. In a 1964 speech, Malcolm declared: “You and I have never seen democracy; all we’ve seen is hypocrisy. We’re the victims of America’s democracy. We are prisoners of war” (Malcolm X, 1964). This framing recurs throughout his speeches, where incarceration operates both literally and metaphorically. In *Message to the Grassroots* (1963), he insists: “If you’re born in America with a black skin, you’re born in prison”; in *The Ballot or the Bullet* (1964), he underscores the depth of systemic exclusion: “We’re not Americans; we’re the victims of America. We don’t see any American dream we’ve experienced only the American nightmare.”

Haile Gerima translates these insights into cinematic allegory. From the opening cell monologue, “My people and me Black men and Black women prisoners of a long fight. Look at

the history: constant war” to the devastating scene near the film’s conclusion, where the protagonist attempts to intervene as another Black prisoner takes his own life, the narrative foregrounds the psychic and political toll of captivity. Her repeated reflection, “We are all prisoners of war,” collapses individual suffering into a collective condition, mirroring Malcolm’s insistence that the Black experience in America is defined not by citizenship but by occupation.

Where Malcolm deploys the language of war to strip away the illusions of democracy, Gerima extends this rhetoric through cinematic form. The stark confinement of the jail cell, the endless corridor, and the surreal dreamscapes all function as visual metaphors for systemic entrapment. By weaving Malcolm’s political analysis into the textures of non-linear narrative and symbolic imagery, *Child of Resistance* transforms his oratory into a cinematic language of resistance.

Spatially, Haile Gerima collapses distinctions between dream and reality. The non-linear narrative oscillates between oppressive present and visionary sequences, refusing Hollywood continuity in favor of surreal montage. In the disturbing moment when the protagonist witnesses Black men attempting suicide dramatizing what Thomas (2013) describes as “neo-slavery,” the psychic toll of captivity under capitalism. Her monologue intensifies: “European man never examines himself. Never throughout history ... Instead always Black man. Always a Black man’s fault... Man’s brain is what he is after now”. This speech, part lament and part indictment, articulates the colonial logic of domination that identifies Black life while evading self-critique. The corridor sequence, in which she runs endlessly without escape, crystallizes this condition. The spatial repetition becomes an existential metaphor for systemic entrapment- what Davis describes as “a system whose intent is to repress and contain rather than rehabilitate” (Davis 1971).

As Field, Horak, and Stewart (2015) note, *Child of Resistance* operates not as biography but as allegory, deploying parody, caricature, and surreal poetics to articulate collective struggle. Its fragmented narrative, dreamlike sequences, and refusal of Hollywood realism mark it as a work of militant, anti-colonial cinema. By collapsing dream and reality, the film insists on the entanglement of present oppression and historical resistance. Howard (1985) analyzes the film as a deeply emotional work driven by the anger surrounding Davis’s arrest. This anger proved

essential for Haile Gerima's artistic innovation, enabling him to resist Western norms and pursue new creative avenues. Therefore while inspired by Davis's imprisonment, we can say that it is less a biographical portrait of her than an allegorical meditation on Black life under racial capitalism. Through surreal imagery and non-linear narration, Haile Gerima conveys the insight voiced by Davis, Malcolm X, and others that Black existence in America is marked by captivity but sustained by resistance. The protagonist insists, "The only choice I have is to keep carrying the struggle on. It is my responsibility carried on and on and on." Her further declaration stated that "inside, outside makes no difference... we all are in the same boat", underscores that liberation is both collective and historical. Thus we can say that by rejecting Hollywood realism, Haile Gerima reimagines cinema as a weapon of struggle.

3.4.5. *Harvest: 3000 Years* (ምርት ሷ ሺህ አመት)

Haile Gerima's *Harvest: 3000 Years* (1976) stands as a seminal work in Ethiopian and African cinema, recognized as the first Amharic-language feature to gain international acclaim. Produced during Haile Gerima's time at UCLA, the film is notable for its explicit ideological content and political commitment, focusing on the collective aspirations of the Ethiopian people, contrasting sharply with the more personal themes of his later works (Thomas, 2013). Nadia Field et al. (2015) regard it as a "world-class masterpiece," marking it as a significant entry in politically engaged filmmaking.

Set against the backdrop of the 1974 overthrow of Emperor Haile Selassie and the rise of the Soviet-backed Marxist-Leninist Derg regime, *Harvest* was created during a time of profound historical upheaval. Haile Gerima returned to Ethiopia to produce the film shortly after the Derg's establishment, a regime later associated with widespread famine and human rights abuses, complicating the film's reception (Majumder, 2018). Although the film adopts a timeless quality, its themes resonate deeply with Ethiopia's transition from monarchy to military dictatorship. According to Thomas (2013). Released during this turbulent period, *Harvest: 3000 Years* was sometimes perceived as sympathetic to the Derg, further complicating its reception due to the regime's later atrocities

For Haile Gerima, the project was also deeply personal. He recalls: “The first film I made in Ethiopia, *Harvest: 3000 Years*, shows you the actual footprints of my youth, of where I grew up with my father and the rest of my family” (Gerima, 2010). In this sense, the film represents both a political allegory and an autobiographical return, merging national crisis with personal memory.

Synopsis:- The film depicts the struggles of a peasant sharecropper family in rural Ethiopia, exposing the brutality of feudal exploitation under the domination of an absentee landlord and his servants. Its central figures, Beletech and Kebebe, operate as both narrative agents and allegorical types. Beletech, a young girl who resists patriarchal constraints, embodies the gendered dimensions of oppression and the dream of liberation. Kebebe, the dispossessed “madman,” functions as a social critic and prophet, denouncing the landlord’s greed with a clarity others ignore. Their tragic fates Beletech’s drowning while attempting to save a cow and Kebebe’s desperate killing of the landlord followed by his own suicide underscore the impossibility of redemption within the existing order.

4.4.5.1.Narrative Structure and Revolutionary Ideas

Harvest: 3000 Years begins with a peasant family waking at dawn to start their daily labor, before shifting to the landlord being served by his attendant and introducing Kebebe, the “madman,” as he washes his sock-covered feet in a stream. The film cycles through these three situations, narrating the story of exploited peasants under the landlord, interspersed with Kebebe’s revolutionary ideas. Although the characters are introduced separately, their stories unfold in a cyclical structure centered on the number three and triangular visual motifs, culminating in a climactic ending.

The narrative moves between vignettes of rural life: the landowner commands his workers harshly while his servant Kentu dreams of inheriting his master’s shoes; a neighboring family tends cows and sells grass at the market; and Kebebe, deemed “mad” by locals, berates the landlord for his exploitation.

Cinematically, the portrayal of these groups varies; the family's scenes are rendered in a documentary style with untrained actors, closely mirroring the reality of village life, reflecting

Haile Gerima's anthropological goals of capturing oral traditions. In contrast, the landlord's depiction is more fictionalized, resembling a movie set, while Kebebe's sequences, though also fictional, are filmed in real public spaces, linking his character to the documentary realism of the surrounding environment. The film employs a non-linear, atemporal narrative, breaking away from classical Hollywood storytelling. Dream sequences appear intermittently, revealing the characters' fears and desires and contributing to the film's meditative atmosphere.

The opening scenes recognize the futility of negotiation within capitalism, asserting that cinema is fundamentally linked to revolutionary action. These intimate, handheld shots connect the audience deeply to the peasant family's struggles. In stark opposition, the landlord is depicted dozing in his opulent home, oblivious to the plight of his workers. This imagery emphasizes social inequalities and resonates with Frantz Fanon's reflections on colonial dynamics, portraying the complex relationships between oppressors and oppressed.

Beletech, the young daughter of the local family, works hard tending cattle and making charcoal from cow manure. She plays with local boys, resenting her treatment as a girl. Her prophetic dreams feature the landowner and his son forcing her family under the oxbow to plough the land, where they ultimately break free and overthrow him. Towards the film's climax, one of the cows wanders into a flooding river, and Beletech drowns while trying to save it. Kentu later expresses meager condolences from the landowner, revealing his own dissatisfaction with life.

In *Harvest: 3000 Years*, individual acts of violent resistance take precedence over support for the existing party-state, highlight human agency. Kebebe, a village madman whose land was taken by the landlord, passionately criticizes the landlord and urges villagers to rise up. Despite ultimately facing capture and death for his militancy, he inspires Berihun, the landlord's son. Beletech, Berihun's sister, rebels against traditional hierarchies that hinder her aspirations for education and independence. Her defiance is symbolized in a dream where she envisions her parents struggling under the weight of a plow, representing the dehumanization of their labor. This dream underscores the interconnectedness of gender hierarchies and political-economic issues surrounding property ownership.

The film presents a stark dichotomy between the feudal landlord and the oppressed peasant family, effectively illustrating the exploitative nature of feudalism in Ethiopia. Through primary polarities such as the lazy, wealthy landlord and the hardworking, suffering peasants Gerima critiques systemic injustices inherent in this social structure. Secondary polarities further enrich the narrative, exploring individual experiences within this oppressive system, such as Berihun's dreams versus his parents' fears of separation, and the budding male chauvinism among boys contrasted with Beletech's defiance. These relationships serve not as mere subplots but as integral components reinforcing the film's ideological focus on liberation from oppressive systems. Haile Gerima's approach mirrors the linear storytelling characteristic of African oral narratives, emphasizing social critique without convoluted subplots, thus enhancing the urgency of his message about the need for awareness and resistance against systemic exploitation.

The film also features a song performed by Haile Gerima's father that reflects the poverty of the people. In Ethiopian oral traditions the number three carries deep cultural and religious significance, likely stemming from the influence of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church, where biblical stories are recited daily (Gabriel, 2001). Haile Gerima's father was a priest in the Orthodox Church, underscoring the film's spiritual and cultural ties (Ukadike, 2002). The title *Harvest: 3000 Years* reflects a traditional song that highlights Ethiopia's long history of struggle. Belachew (2023) translates the lyrics as:

Our bride (Ethiopia), our new bride,
your dress three thousand years old,
how could it not be torn?
Our lady, our mistress,
your dress three thousand years old,
why has it not yet changed?

This song illustrates Ethiopia's enduring history, emphasizing the peasants' endurance while warning against complacency regarding ongoing struggles.

The opening sequences establish a central code reflecting the culture of poverty, depicting a family unit consisting of a grandmother, father, mother, daughter (who dies), and son

(who subsequently leaves). These scenes serve as a reference for all subsequent shots, mirroring oral storytelling where images reappear, evoking memories and associations (Gabriel, 1982). The film is recognized as a national allegory addressing Ethiopia's struggle for sovereignty, solidifying Haile Gerima's reputation in international cinema. Beletech embodies the "myth of the emancipated girl" within African Third Cinema, reflecting resistance to U.S. imperialism and continuing the legacy of earlier Black radical traditions.

As the harvest approaches, locals wonder if they will receive their fair share. Kebebe confronts the landowner again, ultimately chasing him down and beating him to death. The police come for Kebebe, only to discover he has hung himself. The harvest is taken away by officials, leaving the locals uncertain about their share. Beletech's brother impulsively chases after the cart, symbolizing the uncertainty of their fate.

Haile Gerima effectively employs dream sequences to highlight the brutality of feudal exploitation and the necessity for change. One poignant dream features Abebetch and her father as yoked cattle plowing under the oppressive watch of the landlord and his son, who wields a whip. This imagery starkly illustrates their subjugation and culminates in a moment of rebellion as the peasants shatter their yoke, symbolizing their desire for liberation. Haile Gerima's decision to repeat this dream three times throughout the film emphasizes its importance, serving as both a visually striking and emotionally resonant representation of the struggle against oppression and hope for a transformative future.

This multifaceted approach to realism has two significant outcomes. First, each representation is rooted in its own tradition of truth, contributing to a broader cinematic history that connects Haile Gerima's work to his roots. Second, the film's "cinema-effect" transcends traditional cinematic boundaries, reflecting a social form of representation resonating with modern statehood dynamics. Haile Gerima asserts that cinema allows for the control and telling of one's own stories, leading to an interpellative process where the narrative engages both the subject and the viewer.

The film's narrative structure also reflects a broader agenda of historical semantics, as theorized by Sudipta Kaviraj, who posits that narratives initiate audiences into culturally specific

communities. This notion of narrative acts as a contract, reinforcing social bonds and identities within particular groups. Unlike universal discourse, narratives create distinctions between those included in the story and those who are not, emphasizing the localized nature of social organization.

The film unfolds slowly, mimicking the pace of traditional Amhara storytelling, inviting the audience to experience the patience and endurance of rural life. After establishing the peasant family's morning routine, the two antagonists, the landlord and Kebebe, are introduced in separate sequences, each representing opposing worldviews. A brief encounter midway links them, but they share a frame only in the final act, culminating in a violent confrontation where Kebebe kills the landlord. However, this act does not incite a revolution

4.4.5.2. Hybrid Aesthetics and Revolutionary Allegory

Harvest: 3000 Years is a film that uses hybrid aesthetic that fuses documentary realism with allegorical elements. Haile Gerima's film challenges the notion that realism alone can adequately express the complexities of historical and psychic oppression. By interspersing moments of allegory and surrealism within realist depictions of labor and exploitation, Gerima unveils the deeper mechanisms of domination and the latent possibilities for resistance.

One of the most striking features of *Harvest: 3000 Years* is its use of documentary realism to render Ethiopia's social and political contradictions visible on screen. Haile Gerima draws extensively on the aesthetics of Italian Neorealism: non-professional actors, on-location shooting in rural Ethiopia, and the privileging of everyday labor over dramatic action. Like Rossellini's *Rome, Open City* (1945) or De Sica's *Bicycle Thieves* (1948), *Harvest* presents ordinary people caught in structures of exploitation rather than individualized "heroes." Yet Haile Gerima's realism is never mere imitation. As Teshome Gabriel (1982) reminds us, the radical practice of African Third Cinema transforms realist conventions into political pedagogy; refusing Western humanism's universalizing tendencies and instead grounding representation in the material and historical conditions of African societies.

This commitment to realism manifests most vividly in Haile Gerima's attention to repetitive cycles of labor. Scenes of peasants plowing fields, tending cattle, or grinding grain are

filmed in long, unhurried takes, emphasizing monotony rather than spectacle. These sequences resist the Western narrative drive toward progress or resolution; instead, they render exploitation as an endless loop. In one recurring image, peasants hoe the soil under the watchful gaze of the landlord's servant, whose physical presence embodies the violence of class hierarchy. Here Haile Gerima departs from Neorealism's occasional sentimentality. As Manthia Diawara (1992) argues, African filmmakers such as Haile Gerima employ realism not to solicit pity but to expose structural conditions and provoke political critique.

The film's commitment to the everyday also extends to its soundscape. Sparse dialogue, punctuated by silence and environmental sounds wind, animal cries, grinding stone foregrounds the bodily rhythms of labor. The absence of musical underscoring denies emotional manipulation, compelling viewers to confront the raw materiality of exploitation. The effect is both Brechtian and pedagogical: the spectator is not immersed in a seamless fictional world but confronted with the social reality of peasant life as a system of domination.

At the same time, Haile Gerima disrupts pure realism through deliberate formal ruptures. Dreams and nightmares bleed into waking life: Beletech's visions of freedom, Kebebe's hallucinatory denunciations of the landlord, and the grotesque caricature of authority figures fracture the film's otherwise austere style. These interruptions align with Gabriel's (1982) claim that Third Cinema aesthetics are inherently hybrid, combining documentary realism with allegorical excess to awaken political consciousness. A particularly striking example occurs in the climactic freeze-frame ending: as Beletech's brother runs after the cart of confiscated grain, the image halts abruptly, suspending movement and denying narrative closure. This refusal of catharsis exemplifies what Ella Shohat and Robert Stam (1994) describe as a "decolonial aesthetics," which resists Hollywood's reconciliatory endings in order to leave audiences in a state of political unease.

By combining the rigor of documentary realism with moments of allegorical rupture, *Harvest: 3000 Years*, creates a hybrid cinematic form that is at once grounded in Ethiopian historical reality and open to broader revolutionary critique. The result is a cinema of endurance rather than resolution one that teaches audiences to perceive oppression not as isolated misfortune but as systemic repetition demanding collective transformation.

The film's allegorical dimension is vividly illustrated through its characterization. The landlord embodies centuries of feudal exploitation, while his servant represents the caricature of collaborationist authority. Kebebe, the so-called "madman," serves as the silenced voice of rebellion, and Beletech, the young girl, symbolizes the gendered aspects of oppression. Her tragic fate signifies both the loss of potential and the deferred hope for liberation. These characters reflect Fredric Jameson's assertion that "all third-world texts are necessarily national allegories" (1986, 69), yet scholars like Manthia Diawara (1992) and Teshome Gabriel (1982) contend that African cinema transcends this framework, merging allegory with indigenous narrative traditions to portray history as both collective memory and revolutionary prophecy.

Haile Gerima employs various cinematic techniques to disrupt the continuity of realism, allowing nightmarish sequences to bleed into everyday life. Villagers engage in their roles as if trapped in a predetermined drama, underscoring the theatricality of their oppression. Kebebe's surreal critiques of the landlord transform into grotesque gestures, while the film's climactic freeze-frame halts narrative momentum, creating a tableau that symbolizes historical paralysis. As noted by Ella Shohat and Robert Stam (1994), such ruptures exemplify a "decolonial aesthetics" that resists Western cinematic closure, compelling audiences to engage in an ongoing political process. This hybrid aesthetic also reflects Haile Gerima's background within the "L.A. Rebellion" and his commitment to Third Cinema's militant vision. The film's realist long takes and on-location shooting root the narrative in the tangible realities of Ethiopian peasant life, while its allegorical excess opens the text to broader critiques of systemic oppression. This interplay between the mundane and the visionary creates a dialectical tension: realism situates viewers in historical specificity, while allegory disrupts complacency and hints at revolutionary possibilities.

Harvest: 3000 Years serves as a prime example of Gabriel's concept of Third Cinema as a medium of "decolonization," where form and content collaborate to dismantle colonial and feudal narratives while aspiring toward liberation (1982). The film neither idealizes peasant endurance nor romanticizes rebellion; it highlights the coexistence of despair and hope, repetition and rupture. It functions as both a documentation of lived oppression and an allegorical warning about the betrayals inherent in revolutionary movements, prefiguring the failures of the Derg while demanding a future that transcends feudalism and authoritarian

socialism. Emerging from Ethiopia's transition during the downfall of Haile Selassie, *Harvest* exposes the continuity of exploitation across shifting regimes. Rather than endorsing Marxist-Leninist ideology, Haile Gerima prioritizes the agency of the oppressed, showcasing their everyday resistance and the haunting voices of the marginalized.

The film's thematic depth also serves as a profound allegory of the long history of exploitation. The landlord symbolizes three millennia of feudalism; Kebebe channels the suppressed voice of rebellion, and Beletech embodies both gendered and generational vulnerabilities. Her tragic death, while part of the narrative's suffering, highlights gendered dimensions of revolutionary betrayal. From an Africana Womanist perspective, Beletech's marginalization underscores the erasure of women's labor and suffering in nationalist and socialist discourses. Her character anticipates the arguments later articulated by African women filmmakers and theorists: that true national liberation cannot occur without addressing the intertwined oppressions of race, class, and gender.

Thus, *Harvest: 3000 Years* transcends the notion of a mere national allegory, functioning as a cinematic act of historical memory and revolutionary pedagogy. Its embrace of unresolved contradictions reflects Haile Gerima's political vision: liberation is not guaranteed by regime change or ideology but must be continually fought for through the lived experiences of the oppressed. The film's hybrid aesthetic oscillates between realism and allegory, embodying the idea that history remains unfinished and unresolved.

Eventually, Haile Gerima's work invites us to view Ethiopian history as an ongoing struggle that connects feudalism, colonialism, and authoritarian socialism with broader patterns of global domination. By emphasizing the voices of the dispossessed, staging the betrayals of revolution, and envisioning futures yet to be realized, *Harvest: 3000 Years* asserts itself as both a cinematic testimony and a revolutionary prophecy. It exemplifies the militant ethos of Third Cinema while anticipating a gender-conscious critique aligned with Africana Womanism, reminding us that the fight for liberation encompasses historical, aesthetic, and ethical dimensions.

Set against this rich backdrop, *Harvest* presents a three-layered narrative centered on the daily lives of a peasant family: a father, daughter Beletech, and son Berehun. Their lives are dictated by a feudal ruler who issues commands from a distance, while a local "fool" attempts to persuade the peasants that education is their only escape. The family seems resigned to their cyclical existence, clinging to memories of happier times, until a pivotal moment disrupts their acceptance of fate.

The film critiques the class relations that led to Haile Selassie's downfall in 1974, representing the struggles of the Ethiopian peasant class against oppressive landlord elites, while also addressing broader Pan-African concerns (Thomas 2010). Set during what Gerima depicts as a feudal-like era of Selassie's reign, the film captures the intricate details of everyday life through its meditative pace and sharp visual style. In this sense, *Harvest* and other early African films, such as *Kodou* by Senegalese filmmaker Ababacar Samba and *Cahascabo* by Nigerien Oumarou Ganda, contribute to the establishment of a distinctive African cinematic style that seeks to resonate with a global proletariat audience (Gabriel 1979).

The narrative contrasts the lives of a rural peasant family confined and oppressed by a conceited landlord. Berehun, the adolescent son whose name means "to show the way," empathizes with the disenfranchised local madman Kebebe and aspires to escape societal and familial constraints. Through Beletech, Haile Gerima creates a tragic female martyr who dreams of a peasant uprising, drawing poignant analogies between the submissive roles of women and the broader subjugation of the peasant class. Beletech's name, meaning "*she is the best*," carries symbolic weight as she strives to break free from imposed gender roles. Notably, she directly addresses the viewer, declaring, "Even I, a woman, won't submit I am not afraid." This direct communication connects the audience intimately to her struggle, reminiscent of traditional storytelling practices. Tragically, Beletech becomes a martyr of the peasant struggle, drowning while trying to save a cow from a river's torrent, fulfilling the landlord's ominous threat that the peasants will pay with their lives for any loss.

Haile Gerima's commitment to Third Cinema ideology is evident in *Harvest*, as he once remarked that during his time in America in the 1960s, he was profoundly influenced by "Third World films from Africa and Latin America... in which characters expressed themselves in their

African language. This was a Revolution!" (Pfaff, 2004). While *Harvest* stands out among Haile Gerima's more introspective films due to its overt socialist political messages, it also represents more than a tribute to Third Cinema. Haile Gerima creates a unique style of "text in motion," where symbolism, double meanings, and situations are rooted in his native oral narrative traditions in Amharic and embedded in filmic modes (Gabriel, 1982). This distinctive African cinematic style, emerging from Third Cinema ideology and Ethiopian roots, contributes to the film's universal resonance in a Pan-African context (Ukadike, 2002).

At its core, *Harvest: 3000 Years* dramatizes the everyday struggles of a peasant sharecropping family under a predatory landlord in rural Ethiopia. The narrative foregrounds exploitation in its most intimate dimensions: men labor ceaselessly yet remain shackled by debt; women endure the "double burden" of agricultural and domestic toil; children are forced into bonded labor, their futures foreclosed before they can be imagined. The story unfolds through minimal dialogue, privileging gesture, repetition, and silence over conventional plot development. This choice universalizes the experience of oppression, linking the specificities of Ethiopian history to the broader structures of domination in the postcolonial world.

The film's allegorical register emerges most clearly through its central figures. Beletech, a young girl who resists patriarchal constraints and imagines freedom beyond her immediate circumstances, embodies the gendered dimensions of exploitation and the deferred hope of liberation. Her drowning while attempting to save a cow literalizes the tragic costs of sacrifice, exposing how even acts of care and responsibility are subsumed within cycles of violence. Kebebe, the dispossessed "madman," functions as social critic and prophet, his denunciations of the landlord's greed piercing through communal silence. His violent killing of the landlord, followed by his own suicide, crystallizes both the desperate necessity and the futility of individual rebellion within entrenched systems of power. In the closing sequence, Beletech's brother chases after a cart of grain confiscated by officials while villagers recite their roles in a seemingly endless social drama. The freeze-frame ending denies closure, underscoring the persistence of exploitation and the unfinished struggle for justice.

In literary and cinematic theory, Fredric Jameson's well-known claim that "all third-world texts are necessarily... national allegories" (1986) provides one way of reading *Harvest*:

3000 Years. Certainly, Haile Gerima's film operates as a critique of the Ethiopian nation, depicting the feudal landlord as a synecdoche of an oppressive state and the peasant family as a collective representation of the subjugated population. Yet African film scholars have also challenged Jameson's Eurocentric framing. Manthia Diawara (1992) and Teshome Gabriel (1982) argue instead for interpretive models that prioritize African histories, cultural memory, and indigenous storytelling practices. From this perspective, *Harvest: 3000 Years* functions less as a derivative "national allegory" and more as what Gabriel calls a "Third Cinema" intervention, in which cinematic form is mobilized to awaken revolutionary consciousness among oppressed communities.

Within this allegorical framework, the figure of Beletech is especially significant. Her labor, resistance, and eventual death align with what Africana Womanist theory identifies as the "double jeopardy" of African women, who are exploited both as peasants within feudal-capitalist systems and as women within patriarchal structures. Her story anticipates later Pan-African feminist critiques, such as Angela Davis's (1981) insistence that any account of liberation must take into account both class and gender oppression. In this way, Haile Gerima inscribes into the national allegory not only Ethiopia's history of class domination but also the gendered dimensions of that history.

Thus, *Harvest: 3000 Years* occupies a complex position within the discourse of national allegory. While its central figures operate as symbolic types reflecting the condition of the Ethiopian nation, Haile Gerima's refusal of narrative resolution and his focus on gendered labor signal a more radical critique than Jameson's framework alone can contain. The film both affirms and exceeds the category of national allegory, aligning more closely with the radical aesthetics of Third Cinema and the emergent Africana Womanist critique of gendered exploitation.

The title itself *Harvest: 3000 Years* encapsulates the film's historical argument. By invoking three millennia of feudal exploitation, Haile Gerima situates the plight of Ethiopian peasants within a *longue durée* of systemic oppression and deferred revolution. As Majumder (2018) observes, the film anticipates that the Derg's promises of liberation would remain unfulfilled, offering instead an allegory of cyclical exploitation and a warning against

revolutionary betrayal. By refusing to anchor itself to the ideology of the state, the film positions itself as an independent Marxist critique, rooted in both historical memory and a Third Cinema aesthetic cultivated during Haile Gerima's training as part of the "L.A. Rebellion" at UCLA.

Although *Harvest: 3000 Years* is unmistakably a film of the political Left, its ideological stance is complex. As Majumder (2018) argues, the film does not cite or endorse the Marxist-Leninist orthodoxy of the Derg, nor does it validate the centralized command economy of the new party-state. Rather, its narrative foregrounds individual acts of insurgency embodied most vividly in Kebebe's violent rebellion as the privileged mode of resistance. This emphasis on subjective defiance constitutes what Majumder identifies as a "formal-philosophical choice," where human agency, rather than state ideology, becomes the locus of revolutionary potential.

4.4.6. *Bush Mama*

Haile Gerima's *Bush Mama* (1975). Shot on 16mm black-and-white film while Haile Gerima was a student at UCLA, *Bush Mama* shows critique of systemic racism, poverty, and state-sanctioned violence against Black communities in 1970s Los Angeles. As scholars such as Massood (2003) and Wilderson (2010) have argued, the film exemplifies a radical cinematic practice in which formal experimentation mirrors the fractured realities of African American urban existence under conditions of racial capitalism.

Synopsis:- The Film follows Dorothy, an unemployed African American woman living in Watts with her daughter Luann and her partner T.C., a Vietnam veteran. When T.C. is wrongfully arrested en route to a job interview, Dorothy is left to navigate the oppressive welfare system while pregnant with his child. Welfare officials pressure her to undergo an abortion, threatening to revoke her benefits if she refuses. Over time, Dorothy's despair transforms into political awakening, catalyzed by correspondence with T.C. from prison and her interactions with Angi, a young activist who introduces her to radical political imagery- particularly the poster of an Angolan woman holding a child in one hand and a gun in the other, the film's central metaphor of the "bush mama." The film climaxes when Dorothy kills a police officer attempting to rape her daughter, a moment that seals her transformation into a figure of

resistance. The closing sequence shows Dorothy imprisoned, writing to T.C., her natural hair revealed for the first time as she embraces a revolutionary consciousness.

4.4.6.1. Narrative Structure and Critique of Black Operations

The film opens on the streets of Watts, Los Angeles, following Dorothy as she moves between searching for work, visiting the welfare office, and meeting neighbors. Her emotional state is conveyed through the camera's emphasis on extreme close-ups of her face and feet, underscoring her weariness and discontent. Parallel sequences depict police arresting Black residents including Gerima himself and shooting footage that captures the hostile environment of Watts. T.C., Dorothy's husband, is a Vietnam veteran who once dreamed of returning home to stable employment and a joyful family life with Dorothy and their daughter. Two scenes briefly depict this happiness, yet the narrative pivots around his wrongful arrest, which becomes the film's central rupture.

This first section of *Bush Mama* adopts a realist mode. The natural soundscape of the street and overlapping voices from welfare and unemployment offices create an oppressive sonic atmosphere. Gerima's sound design foregrounds bureaucratic speech, questions like "Do you understand? Do you agree?" layered over jazz rhythms and fragments of radio broadcasts, which collectively mirror Dorothy's suffocating entrapment. The film draws on documentary realism: handheld camerawork, improvisation, ambient noise, and even footage of the LAPD harassing Gerima's crew during shooting. This blurring of fiction and reality situates Dorothy's daily struggles within the lived textures of Watts, embedding her passivity in a community subject to systemic poverty, surveillance, and police violence.

The second half of the film shifts toward a more experimental register. T.C.'s imprisonment and Dorothy's isolation introduce a narrative structured around letters exchanged between the two. These letters punctuate the film and function as both political education and narrative voiceover. The first, read haltingly by Dorothy's neighbor Angi, is full of misspellings and unstructured grammar leading Angi to remark "he can't write." Yet Gerima places T.C. directly before the camera, insisting on his authority to narrate his own politicization. In one striking sequence, a pan across a row of Black prisoners freezes on T.C.'s face, before cutting to

Dorothy behind the bars of her bed's headboard. The visual parallel suggests that prison extends beyond the carceral walls, capturing Black life in its entirety, and foreshadows Dorothy's own confinement.

Dorothy's transformation is catalyzed by these letters, which begin as love notes but evolve into lessons in struggle. T.C. articulates how mass incarceration constitutes a form of "neo-slavery," and his words push Dorothy to see her own daily humiliations as part of a structural system. At the same time, her neighbor Angi becomes another teacher, reminding Dorothy of community debates about Malcolm X and the need for collective self-determination. This dialogic interplay between T.C., Angi, and Dorothy embodies what Frank Wilderson (2010) calls the circulation of Black radical subjectivity, where voices interweave to produce consciousness.

Visually and sonically, Haile Gerima emphasizes Dorothy's entrapment: window frames and bedposts mirror prison bars, while overlapping bureaucratic voices trap her aurally. Her pregnancy, and the eventual death of her baby in the womb, becomes a haunting metaphor. On one level, it reflects the coercive regulation of Black women's reproductive lives by welfare and sterilization policies (Roberts, 1997). On another, it symbolizes the suffocated potential of Black futures under racial capitalism. Yet Dorothy transforms this trauma into resolve, embodying the "bush mama" a militant mother figure that defends her family and community at all costs (Massood, 2003).

Her political awakening culminates in an act of violent resistance, when she interrupts a police officer's attempted rape of her daughter. This moment dramatizes what Frantz Fanon (1961) identifies as the birth of consciousness through violence: the realization that liberation cannot be begged for but must be seized. Dorothy's shift from passive endurance to active resistance is not merely personal it represents a Fanonian crossing, where the oppressed subject recognizes themselves as a political agent. In her final prison letter to T.C., Dorothy narrates this awakening, aligning her voice with his struggle and situating their survival within a broader revolutionary tradition.

The closing images merge Dorothy's face with the MPLA poster of an Angolan woman warrior, collapsing boundaries between Watts and global anti-colonial movements. Gerima situates Black Los Angeles within a Pan-African geography of resistance, refusing Hollywood's domesticated portrayals of Black victimhood. Instead, *Bush Mama* insists on the legitimacy of Black self-defense and the necessity of revolutionary consciousness. Through fragmented editing, overlapping soundscapes, and documentary-realist texture, Gerima redefines cinema as a site of struggle, positioning it as both a mirror of oppression and a weapon of resistance.

4.4.7. Ashes and Embers

Ashes and Embers is a 1982 film directed by Haile Gerima, running 120 minutes, and awarded the FIPRESCI Prize in 1983 (Stephenson, 2018).

Synopsis :- *Ashes and Embers* follows the life of Ned Charles, a Black Vietnam War veteran who struggles to reconcile the lingering effects of combat with his identity in America nearly ten years after returning home. Alienated and unable to secure stable work in Washington, D.C., he sets out for Los Angeles in search of better opportunities, only to be confronted by the same hostility and racial profiling that mark his existence, beginning with a tense encounter with the police. The film charts Ned's gradual shift from a disillusioned, angry ex-soldier to someone more rooted and self-aware, a transformation shaped by the guidance and tough love of his grandmother, the activism of his girlfriend, and the support of his friends and mentors. Although Haile Gerima's work has often been overlooked in scholarly discussions, this film's renewed circulation invites fresh reflection on how it explores questions of trauma, identity, and survival against the backdrop of American imperialism, war, and racial oppression.

4.4.7.1.Trauma

The film opens with Ned's haunting stare into the camera, a gesture that immediately situates the viewer within a world marked by displacement and alienation. Scenes of Los Angeles nightlife and Ned's Friend dreams of breaking into Hollywood highlight his search for belonging, which is abruptly interrupted when he and his friend are arrested without cause. This incident becomes a lens into the broader experience of Black men and women subjected to constant surveillance and injustice. Ned's restlessness reflects the central question posed in the

film-“Who are we?”- placing his individual struggles within the wider context of Black identity in America. Gerima makes sound and music central to this exploration: Zulema Cusseaux’s *American Fruit, African Roots*” recurs throughout the film, evoking the enduring legacies of slavery, racial inequality, and the link between American identity and African heritage. Rhythm and blues, rooted in the traditions of spirituals and work songs, mirrors Ned’s turmoil while also affirming a history of survival. In the film music becomes more than background- it anticipates events, illustrates inner states, and generates empathy, showing that trauma is historically shared, not merely personal..

The dreamlike sequence frames Ned within the symbolism of the American flag, visually conveying his psychological entrapment. His silent observation of his girlfriend’s phone conversation set against images of Malcolm X foregrounds the difficulty of resisting systemic oppression and links the personal to global Black liberation movements, including struggles in Mozambique and Guinea-Bissau. Haile Gerima uses these juxtapositions to bridge African American resistance with broader Pan-African revolutionary thought.

Ned emerges as a volatile yet perceptive figure whose anger reflects both personal alienation and the unresolved contradictions of African American identity. His fraught relationship with his politically conscious girlfriend representing Black Power and Pan-African ideologies reveals his ambivalence toward Black Nationalism. As Stephenson (2018) argues, the period was shaped by debates on autonomy and internationalist solidarity, which Ned hears but cannot fully embrace. His hostility stems not only from skepticism toward political rhetoric but also from the guilt of his own involvement in U.S. imperial violence. By placing Ned at this ideological crossroads, Gerima illustrates how Black subjectivity under empire is fractured, and asserts Black internationalism as essential to resisting white imperialism.

When overwhelmed, Ned seeks refuge with his grandmother, assisting her in the garden and hearing her stories. Though weary, she continues working, declaring that her strength lies in her “fighting spirit,” a will to resist until God calls her. As Gerima (1991) explains, his intent was to disrupt conventional cinematic portrayals of African people by anchoring Ned to his human and historical roots. The grandmother becomes the moral pendulum of his life, embodying a legacy of endurance that resurfaces in moments of crisis.

From there, Ned alternates between the wisdom of his grandmother, political debates at his girlfriend's home, and discussions in Black churches on their role in liberation. The sequence culminates with his grandmother's voice "I don't want you to forget it" underscoring the transmission of memory and struggle across generations.

The voices of Ned's grandmother and girlfriend punctuate his disorientation, offering both love and chastisement. His girlfriend embodies the radical energy of Black Power and Pan-Africanism, urging political commitment, while his grandmother grounds him in ancestral endurance and connection to the land. Though he resists both, their influence forms the moral compass of the film. Gerima rejects linear Hollywood storytelling, instead presenting fragmented sequences that collapse time and place. Los Angeles is depicted as a city of illusions where whiteness dominates and Blackness is marginalized, yet traces of resistance- portraits of Malcolm X, discussions of the Black Panthers, and the grandmother's insistence that Ned remain rooted- persist. These juxtapositions link his alienation to a collective diasporic memory that he struggles to deny but cannot fully escape.

The film situates Ned's personal trauma within global struggles against oppression. His girlfriend and her peers invoke liberation movements in Mozambique and Guinea-Bissau, while his grandmother represents the generational transmission of survival and resistance through memory and storytelling. She becomes the moral center of the film, a "pendulum" grounding him in history even as he attempts to hide from it. In one of the most powerful scenes, he admits to her that he "never left Vietnam," finally acknowledging how war continues to live inside him. This climactic confession links his private anguish to larger historical wounds. Haile Gerima structures the film across four intertwined narrative routes family, work, romance, and war- woven together with conversations, dreamlike images, and fragments of history. Through montage, layered sound, and disjointed temporality, Hile Gerima resists Hollywood's cause-and-effect logic, reflecting instead the fractured reality of trauma and dislocation.

The grandmother functions as the film's ethical and emotional center. Her garden, stories, and churchgoing ground the narrative in a lineage of Black resilience, countering Ned's alienation. Her final injunction to "not forget" positions memory as both healing and political resistance. The shifting geographies; Los Angeles, Washington D.C., and rural Virginia operate

as symbolic terrains of dislocation, struggle, and continuity within the broader Black condition. In this regard, Moments like Ned walking to church with his grandmother accompanied by spirituals collapse spirituality and political survival into a single visual gesture.

Ashes and Embers refuse narrative closure. Through fragmented montage, Haile Gerima transforms Ned's personal anguish into a diasporic reflection on collective Black struggle. Dreamlike sequences weave together the Vietnam War, Black liberation voices, the presence of Ned's son, and generational memories, revealing tensions between the grandmother's preservation of ancestral endurance and the girlfriend's critique of inadequate political militancy. The final embrace, as the grandmother soothes Ned, affirms remembrance as a necessary act of survival. Rejecting Hollywood's resolution-based storytelling, Haile Gerima constructs a cinema of resistance that affirms Black humanity and situates African American struggle within a longer history of survival against racism, imperialism, and war.

4.4.8. After winter: Sterling Brown

After winter: Sterling Brown (1985), a 60-minute documentary directed by Haile Gerima, offers a reverent portrait of the Harlem Renaissance poet Sterling Brown at the age of eighty-five.

Harlem Renaissance or a new Negro movement is a pivotal cultural and intellectual movement of the 1920s–1930s that fostered a flourishing of Black artistic and political life. Figures including, W.E.B. Du Bois, Alain Locke, and James Weldon Johnson, alongside younger writers and artists, articulated themes of racial pride, cultural consciousness, and self-determination (Sall, 2024). Harlem itself symbolized both Black cultural vitality and contested economic renewal, drawing African Americans from across the diaspora in pursuit of transformation. Scholarship emphasizes that the movement's literature cannot be confined to a single aesthetic; writers engaged folk, bourgeois, and proletarian forms while interrogating intersections of race, class, gender, and identity, thereby resisting reductive definitions of authenticity (Jones, 2002). The Harlem's Black poet, Brown, in the documentary reflects on his four decades of teaching at Howard University and on the influence of contemporaries such as Jean Toomer, Langston Hughes, and Duke Ellington.

After winter: Sterling Brown is a strikingly intimate documentary gets its title from the next well known poem of brown.

He snuggles his fingers	<i>Turnips fo' de winter</i>
In the blacker loam	<i>An' candied sweets</i>
The lean months are done with,	<i>"Homespun tobacco</i>
The fat to come.	<i>Apples in de bin</i>
His eyes are se	<i>Fo' smokin' an' fo' cider</i>
On a brushwood-fire	<i>When de folks draps in."</i>
But his heart is soaring	He thinks with the winter
Higher and higher.	His troubles are gone;
Though he stands ragged	Ten acres unplanted
An old scarecrow,	To raise dreams on.
This is the way	The lean months are done with,
His swift thoughts go	The fat to come.
<i>"Butter beans fo' Clara</i>	His hopes, winter wanderers,
<i>Sugar corn fo' Grace</i>	Hasten home. <i>"Butterbeans fo' Clara</i>
<i>An' fo' de little feller</i>	<i>Sugar corn fo' Grace</i>
<i>Runnin' space.</i>	<i>An' fo' de little feller</i>
<i>"Radishes and lettuce</i>	<i>Runnin' space..."</i>

Eggplants and beets

Filmed with the collaboration of Haile Gerima's Howard University film students, it captures the wisdom, humor, and humanism of Sterling Brown, one of the most enduring voices of African American poetry. Eschewing embellishment, the film unfolds as a series of conversations with the eighty-five-year-old poet at his home and in familiar surroundings, positioning Brown not only as a venerable artist but also as a "professorial seer" and living

archive of Black intellectual history. Long associated with the English Department at Howard University, Brown reflects on his own trajectory as both poet and educator, while situating himself within the collective ferment of the Harlem Renaissance. What emerges is less a nostalgic portrait than a cultural meditation on the intersections of poetry, pedagogy, and racial consciousness.

Central to Brown's reflections is his acknowledgement of the artists and thinkers who shaped the Renaissance's intellectual landscape. Jean Toomer, for instance, is cited for his modernist experimentalism in *Cane* (1923), a work that fused lyrical prose, poetry, and folk traditions into a fragmented but profoundly innovative meditation on Black life in both rural and urban settings. Critics such as Robert Bone (1975) have argued that Toomer's refusal to be confined within racial categories positioned him as a transitional figure in African American modernism, complicating notions of identity and authenticity. Langston Hughes, another of Brown's contemporaries, is remembered for his democratic poetics his embrace of jazz, blues, and Black vernacular speech as the foundation of a literary aesthetic that rejected elitism. Arnold Rampersad (1986) notes that Hughes's refusal to separate art from the everyday experiences of working-class Black communities made him one of the most influential cultural figures of the era, resonating deeply with Brown's own populist sensibilities.

Brown also highlights the musical genius of Duke Ellington, whose jazz compositions redefined American music and epitomized the Renaissance's insistence on the dignity and modernity of Black cultural forms. As Krin Gabbard (1995) observes, Ellington's work blurred boundaries between "high" and "popular" art, forcing critics to take African American music seriously as both aesthetic innovation and cultural philosophy. Equally significant is Brown's recognition of Alain Locke, often described as the "dean" of the Harlem Renaissance. Locke's anthology *The New Negro* (1925) functioned as both a literary showcase and a political manifesto, articulating the idea that art could serve as an instrument of racial uplift and as a means of redefining African American identity on modern terms (Hutchinson, 1995). Locke's philosophical vision of a "spiritual coming of age" resonates with Brown's lifelong commitment to teaching as a form of cultural transmission. Haile Gerima's documentary carefully layers these references, situating Brown's personal reminiscences within the wider genealogy of Black intellectual thought. Brown himself becomes both narrator and subject, weaving his poetry such

as the autobiographical *After Winter* into a reflection on his life as a poet-educator. In this, his own contribution mirrors that of the Renaissance figures he invokes: like Hughes, he embraced vernacular traditions; like Toomer, he resisted simplistic categorization; like Ellington, he integrated artistry with cultural philosophy; and like Locke, he conceived of art as a vehicle for social transformation. His reflections foreground the pedagogical as much as the poetic, affirming his belief that teaching itself is an art and a moral responsibility.

What finally emerges in *After Winter* is a portrait of Sterling Brown as both witness and participant in the Harlem Renaissance, a thinker who bridged oral traditions, literary experimentation, and social critique. Haile Gerima's unembellished style underscores Brown's eloquence and humanity, making the film not simply a biographical tribute but also a cinematic intervention into the history of Black letters. By grounding Brown in dialogue with Toomer, Hughes, Ellington, and Locke, the documentary affirms his place in an intellectual continuum, situating him as a poet of enduring significance whose work embodies the resilience and creativity of African American culture across the twentieth century.

By foregrounding a Harlem Renaissance figure whose work bridged vernacular traditions, pedagogy, and social critique, Haile Gerima affirms the movement's role as a foundation for modern Black aesthetics. The film rejects nostalgic celebration in favor of a critical continuity, situating Brown as evidence that Harlem's artistic ferment endures as a resource for collective identity and resistance. In this way, the documentary becomes less a portrait of an individual than a statement on the political and pedagogical stakes of Black art across the twentieth century.

4.4.9. Wilmington 10- USA- 1000

4.4.9.1. Structure, History, and Collective Memory

Haile Gerima's documentary *Wilmington 10: USA 10,000* opens with striking juxtapositions of image and history. A close-up of a Black face sculpture is followed by footage of protesters holding the American flag, immediately contextualized alongside images of radical Black leaders including Martin Luther King Jr., Malcolm X, Angela Davis, Anna Murray Douglass, and Frederick Douglass. From its first frames, the film situates the Wilmington 10

case within the continuum of Black struggle in the United States, interweaving abolitionist, civil rights, and Black Power legacies into a single cinematic genealogy of resistance.

The Civil Rights Movement itself, which emerged in the mid-1950s, was profoundly shaped by both nonviolent and militant approaches. W.E.B. Du Bois, co-founder of the NAACP, promoted integration and Black nationalism through *The Crisis* magazine, while also advocating sustained protest against racial segregation (Rummel, 2005,). Martin Luther King Jr. advanced a philosophy of nonviolent protest through speeches, marches, and sit-ins that garnered national and congressional attention (Burns & Siracusa, 2007). In contrast, Malcolm X, initially a leading figure in the Nation of Islam, critiqued integrationist strategies and emphasized Black pride and independence, though he later shifted his stance on white allies following his pilgrimage to Mecca (Takamura, 2012). The Black Power Movement exemplified by Stokely Carmichael of SNCC and the Black Panther Party founded by Huey Newton and Bobby Seale adopted more militant approaches centered on self-defense, armed resistance, and community programs (Lee, 2011 and Palmer, 2006). Other pivotal activists included Julian Bond, who co-founded SNCC while a student at Morehouse, and Angela Davis, who became an international symbol of Black radicalism through her writings and imprisonment. The inclusion of Frederick Douglass and Anna Murray Douglass, further grounds Gerima's film in the deep historical continuity of Black resistance, reaching back to abolitionism (Lesch, 2015).

While the film's central narrative addresses the wrongful imprisonment of the Wilmington Ten Benjamin Chavis (age 24); Connie Tindall (21); Marvin "Chili" Patrick (19); Wayne Moore (19); Reginald Epps (18); Jerry Jacobs (19); James "Bun" McKoy (19); Willie Earl Vereen (18); William "Joe" Wright Jr. (19); and Ann Shepard (35) it situates their case within Wilmington's longer history of racial violence. Following the assassination of Martin Luther King Jr. in 1968, students in Wilmington, North Carolina staged boycotts and protests against racial inequality. Rev. Benjamin Chavis, a young minister affiliated with the United Church of Christ, was dispatched to Wilmington to support the movement. Gregory Congregational Church soon became the headquarters of organizing. But when firebombs were set in February 1971, including at Mike's Grocery, and snipers allegedly fired on firefighters from the church roof, the state arrested the ten activists and accused them of arson and conspiracy (U.S. Department of Justice, 2021). A mixed jury convicted them in 1972, sentencing

the group to terms ranging from 15 to 34 years, though the U.S. Court of Appeals overturned the convictions in 1980.

Haile Gerima frames this episode within the deeper trauma of the Wilmington Massacre of 1898, which he evokes through testimonies, historical photographs, and oral histories. That massacre recognized as the only successful coup d'état in U.S. history saw a white supremacist mob kill over 100 Black residents, burn Black institutions, and overthrow the elected Fusionist government, replacing it with white Democratic control (Thomas, 2019). Wilmington, then North Carolina's largest city, had been a symbol of Black prosperity, with a thriving Black-majority population, businesses, churches, and schools. Yet Alex Manly, editor of *The Daily Record*, North Carolina's only Black-owned daily newspaper, provoked outrage after arguing that many alleged assaults by Black men against white women were consensual relationships and challenging white men to protect their households against all men equally (McLaurin, 2000). His editorial became the pretext for violent white reprisals, orchestrated by Alfred Moore Waddell and the Red Shirts, who burned manly's press and massacred Black residents (Tyson, 2006). Gerima's decision to link the Wilmington Ten to the massacre insists that their 1971 trial cannot be divorced from this entrenched legacy of racial terror.

The film's nonlinear structure underscores this continuity. Oral testimonies from elderly Black women recounting the 1898 massacre are intercut with contemporary interviews with youth who speak of learning this hidden history from their mothers. This multigenerational narration embodies the Sankofa principle, retrieving the past for the sake of the future emphasizing that memory itself is an act of resistance. One elder insists, "The blacks were massacred because they were not armed" (Ibid), transforming history into both warning and call to action.

From there, the documentary transitions to prison testimonies. Chavis declares, "We are political prisoners, prisoners of conscience," situating their incarceration within a global struggle against imperialism and exploitation. His words explicitly link the American judicial system to broader structures of oppression, insisting the fight is "between exploiter and exploited" and "oppressor and oppressed." His speech dedicates their struggle to South African activist Steve Biko, whose Black Consciousness philosophy emphasized that liberation must begin with the

decolonization of the mind (Pityana, 1988; Hadfield, 2017; Hill, 2015). Haile Gerima thus positions *Wilmington* alongside anti-colonial movements in Africa, Chilean resistance to dictatorship, and struggles across the Third World.

The film also foregrounds the voices of women. A female prisoner recounts being falsely accused, shot in the arm, and tortured, while drawing inspiration from Angela Davis and other Black women radicals. Community mothers and grandmothers testify about raising children amid systemic racism, emphasizing their determination to break cycles of illiteracy and marginalization. These testimonies exemplify Haile Gerima's commitment to elevating women's voices as carriers of memory and resistance.

Haile Gerima's documentary style is cumulative and chorus-like, weaving together archival materials, interviews, community voices, and international references to create what might be described as a cinematic palimpsest of Black struggle. Its nonlinear assemblage avoids didactic closure, instead drawing viewers into an intergenerational dialogue on oppression and resistance. As one critic observes, *Wilmington 10: USA 10,000* is "boldly nonlinear in its assemblage and expansive in scope... locating intimate details within a macro understanding and critique of racist systems and structures" (Norman, cited in program notes). By embedding the Wilmington Ten case within the *longue durée* of racial violence from slavery to 1898, from Jim Crow to global anti-colonialism, Haile Gerima insists that their imprisonment cannot be seen in isolation. It is, instead, another chapter in the unbroken struggle against white supremacy and imperial domination.

4.4.10. Sankofa

Sankofa, a 124-minute 35mm color film written, directed, produced, and edited by Haile Gerima in 1993, derives its title from the Akan phrase meaning "to return to the past in order to move forward" (Hedges 1996). The film powerfully embodies this principle by immersing its protagonist in the lived experience of enslavement, effectively collapsing temporal and spatial boundaries to illuminate the continuity of Black historical struggle. Haile Gerima articulates his intention, stating, "Throughout the film I was trying to show the dimension of human rebellion"

(1996). This work not only challenges cinematic representation but also engages with historiography, advocating for the reclamation of Black history from Eurocentric distortions.

Synopsis:- The film follows Mona, an African American fashion model visiting Ghana for a photo shoot at Cape Coast Castle. Initially indifferent and complicit as a tourist, she poses in animal-print attire, reducing the slave fort to an exotic backdrop. Her detachment is disrupted when the Sankofa drummer summons ancestral spirits. Transported through a ritual chant into the past, Mona becomes Shola, an enslaved woman on a North American plantation.

As Shola, she endures repeated sexual assaults by her white master, forms a bond with Nunu, an African-born elder who transmits ancestral wisdom, and encounters Shango, a rebel leader advocating insurrection. Initially resistant to rebellion, Shola gradually moves toward political awakening. The film culminates in an uprising during which she resists her master's final assault. At this point, Mona re-emerges in present-day Ghana, symbolically reborn and committed to living in accordance with her African roots.

4.4.10.1. Temporal Disruption and the Return to Ancestral Memory

Sankofa opens with an image that is at once ritual and rupture: the Divine Drummer, *Sankofa*, rhythmically beating the *Fontomfrom* drums and chanting for the spirits of enslaved Africans to rise from the ocean, “from the wombs of the ships,” and reclaim their story. By saying:

Those stolen Africans step out of the ocean, from the wombs of the ships and
claim your story You raped! Slave bred! Castrated! Burned! Tarred and
feathered! Roasted! Chopped! Lobotomized! Bound and gagged! You
African Spirits! Spirit it of the Dead rise up! Possess your birth of passage

The incantation recalls the bodily violence of slavery rape, forced breeding, castration, and branding, while simultaneously invoking ancestral spirits as witnesses and agents of memory. This ceremonial opening immediately establishes what Haile Gerima himself identifies as the film's core imperative: history as weapon, memory as struggle (Hedges and Gerima, 1996). The *Sankofa* bird an Akan symbol depicted as looking backward with an egg in its beak encapsulates this ethos: to move forward, one must retrieve what has been lost.

The film's narrative pivots around Mona, a contemporary African American model at a photo shoot in Ghana's Cape Coast Castle. Her poses, indifferent to the site's sacredness, embody a troubling detachment from ancestral memory. When the Divine Drummer confronts her, insisting she honor the past, Mona resists, identifying herself simply as "American." Yet this denial of African heritage is precisely what catalyzes her temporal displacement: through Sankofa's drumming, she is transported into the nineteenth-century American South, where she becomes Shola, an enslaved woman on a Louisiana plantation. This transformation literalizes the Akan dictum of *Sankofa*: return to the past to reclaim history.

The plantation narrative exposes Shola to systemic violence, particularly the sexual exploitation that Angela Davis (1981) has theorized as central to the oppression of enslaved Black women. Haile Gerima refuses voyeurism: scenes of rape are filmed in long, steady takes with muted soundscapes, framing sexual violence as systemic and historical rather than individual spectacle. Robert Crossley (1988), writing of Butler's *Kindred*, calls this mode of representation *trauerarbeit* a mourning work in which trauma remains unspeakable, forcing spectators to confront its structural weight. Shola's silence here is less submission than historical symptom, registering violence as foundational to the plantation system.

If Shola initially embodies a passive subject, her transformation is made possible by encounters with figures of resistance. Nunu, the African-born elder, functions as both griot and prophet. In close-up shots that render her face iconic, Nunu teaches that "if you know your past, you know yourself. If you know yourself, you know your future," articulating the Akan principle of Sankofa as lived pedagogy (Christel, 2010). Her oral wisdom anchors the enslaved community, countering the internalized Christianity of her son Joe, whose tragic betrayal killing his mother under the belief she is possessed epitomizes the psychic violence of colonial indoctrination. Shango, the rebellious West Indian field slave, embodies insurgent masculinity. His public whipping, filmed in a long take with a slow pan across the faces of fellow slaves, transforms punishment into communal testimony, what Teshome Habte Gabriel (1989) identifies as Third Cinema's refusal of Western fragmentation of time and space. Shango's cry "Freedom can only come when we fight for it!" is not isolated rhetoric but inscribed into the collective memory of the enslaved.

The plantation becomes a site where ritual and rebellion converge. Circular pans around conspirators planning revolt enact an African temporality that is cyclical, not linear, while drumming underscores the continuity between resistance and ancestral presence. In these scenes, the very grammar of cinema is decolonized: Hollywood's linearity and causality give way to what Allyson Nadia Field (2012) terms the "fracturing of representational regimes." Gerima creates a diasporic cinematic language where history is not reconstructed as past event but experienced as present struggle.

Nunu's martyrdom crystallizes this refusal of colonial temporality. By rejecting baptism and choosing death with dignity, she embodies history as resistance. Haile Gerima films her in long, unbroken shots, stripping away melodrama and insisting on her agency. Her sacrifice catalyzes Shola's own awakening: she accepts the Sankofa bird pendant from Shango, symbolically retrieving the heritage necessary for rebellion. Shola's climactic declaration "I will not let them break me!" is framed in close-up, then followed by a tracking shot that fuses her movement with the rhythms of the drum, visually and sonically embedding her resistance within ancestral continuity.

The conclusion returns Mona to the present, transformed. When the photographer at Cape Coast Castle complains, "You almost made me lose my magic hour," Mona refuses to resume her earlier passivity. As Haile Gerima notes, this break represents a rejection of "the roles that society or the media prescribes for Black people" (Hedges & Gerima, 1996). Instead, she aligns with the Divine Drummer's call: "Reclaim your history." The final image of the bird in flight symbolizes liberation, not as resolution but as consciousness what Saidiya Hartman (1997) describes as slavery's "afterlife," persisting in the present and demanding remembrance.

Thematically, *Sankofa* insists on the centrality of struggle in Black history. Gerima clarifies that the film is "not about slavery" per se but about the unexorcised history that destabilizes the present and requires confrontation (Gerima, 1996). As Du Bois once declared, "the past is the present ... without what was, nothing is," a dictum Haile Gerima visualizes by collapsing Mona and Shola in to one subjectivity. In this sense, the dungeon sequences function as what Homi Bhabha (1994) calls a liminal "in-between" spaces where temporal and spatial boundaries collapse, forcing the viewer to experience slavery as both historical and

contemporary. Christina Sharpe's (2016) notion of the "afterlife of slavery" resonates here: Haile Gerima refuses to contain slavery within the past, staging its structural and psychic legacies as ongoing.

The film also foregrounds the gendered dimensions of resistance. Shola's body is a site of oppression but also of agency, as she transforms trauma into rebellion. Nunu's teachings and Shola's final defiance emphasize the role of women as carriers of memory and catalysts of struggle. Haile Gerima himself has insisted on women's centrality across his oeuvre: "In relation to power they're still outsiders. Even when they participate, they're outsiders" (Gerima, 1996). Like diasporic filmmakers, women remain at the margins yet serve as vital bearers of continuity. This resonates with Davis's (1981) critique of histories that erase enslaved women's roles in resistance, a gap that *Sankofa* explicitly redresses.

Formally, *Sankofa* resists Hollywood and European art cinema conventions. By rejecting linear continuity and instead employing overlapping diegeses, direct address, and ritualistic structures, Haile Gerima enacts what Gladstone Yearwood (2000) calls a decolonizing aesthetics challenging cinematic traditions that fetishize Black suffering while obscuring social change. Cinema, for Gerima, is not neutral; it is, as he states, a "battle zone" where narratives of domination must be overturned (Gerima, 1993).

Ultimately, *Sankofa* is less a film "about slavery" than a counter-history that re-centers the enslaved as historical agents. Through its collapsing of past and present, its ritual aesthetics, and its privileging of women's roles in struggle, the film insists that history itself is the only weapon available to the oppressed. As Haile Gerima (1996) asserts, "They don't have the bomb... but their history is very potent". In its refusal of closure, the film leaves audiences not with consolation but with responsibility: the recognition that liberation requires remembering, and that returning to the past is a necessary step toward any future freedom.

Haile Gerima's *Sankofa* ultimately encapsulates a philosophy of returning to the past for enlightenment, reinforcing the notion that understanding history is essential for moving forward, while also reflecting his commitment to experimental storytelling. Through Shola's trajectory from coerced house slave to conscious resistor the film reclaims suppressed histories of rebellion

and insists that slavery's afterlife remains central to Black liberation. For Haile Gerima, the purpose of cinema is not representation in the Hollywood sense, but struggle: "Without struggle, there is no life. To me, that is all recorded in history" (Gerima, 1996). Rejecting the dominant "plantation school" narrative of Hollywood, which presents emancipation as the result of white benevolence, Haile Gerima insists that enslaved people were the agents of their own liberation (Gerima, 1996). In his own words:

Without struggle, there is no life. To me, that is all recorded in history. The one powerful thing Third World people have that Native Americans, Latin Americans, African Americans have is their history. They don't have the bomb; they don't have the superficial symbol of power. They are apparently powerless, but their history is very potent. When the oppressors realize that the world cannot be ruled by savagery anymore, then history will testify on behalf of those who are powerless now.

This perspective is central to the film's formal and political strategies. Shola evolves from coerced docility to resistance through her connections with Shango and Nunu. Haile Gerima's rejection of realist transparency through ritual scenes, lingering shots, and disjunctive montage avoids what Yearwood (2000) warns against: the fetishization of Black bodies. Instead, as Field (2012) argues, these formal ruptures produce a "fracturing of representational regimes," reclaiming enslaved subjectivity from Eurocentric cinematic grammar.

By fracturing narrative continuity, Haile Gerima aligns *Sankofa* with Black radical aesthetics that reject Eurocentric temporality. Robert Crossley (1988), writing on Octavia Butler's *Kindred*, describes this temporal return as *trauerarbeit*- a mourning work that renders slavery continually present. Similarly, Robinson (1983) argues in *Black Marxism* that racial capitalism depends upon the "forcible interruption of Black historicity," which radical traditions seek to restore. Haile Gerima's overlapping diegeses Ghana, the dungeon, the plantation visualize this restoration, dramatizing what Fanon (1961) described as the "muscular memory" of colonized struggle.

Shola's sexual exploitation by her master embodies the intersection of racialized and gendered domination. The camera lingers on her anguish after repeated assaults, underscoring the embodied cost of slavery. Davis (1981), in *Women, Race, and Class*, insists that enslaved Black women were subjected to systemic sexual violence that commodified both their labor and reproduction. Haile Gerima translates this into visual terms, foregrounding Shola's pain not as voyeuristic spectacle but as testimony. Importantly, her body becomes a terrain of resistance: through her alliance with Shango, whose rebellious energy ignites collective struggle, and her connection to Nunu, who provides spiritual continuity linking African traditions to diasporic survival. In this sense, Haile Gerima reclaims the Black woman's body not only as a site of trauma but also as a locus of rebellion, continuity, and memory.

The Sankofa principle retrieving what has been forgotten grounds the film in Pan-African cultural nationalism. The figure of the drummer, who mediates between the living and the ancestors, symbolizes the necessity of returning to African traditions for survival. Mona's rebirth as a politically conscious subject enacts this imperative. Yet Gerima resists offering a neatly resolved future. Keeling (2007) critiques cultural nationalism for risking essentialist notions of identity, warning that it can confine diasporic futures to a mythical, exclusionary past. This tension is dramatized in *Sankofa's* conclusion: Mona emerges transformed, but revolution remains deferred. Unlike Shango's fiery resistance or Nunu's martyrdom, Mona's return to the present is symbolic rather than material. This unresolved ending echoes Gerima's earlier *Bush Mama* (1975), which likewise privileges political awakening over tangible revolution. In both cases, consciousness is framed as necessary but not sufficient.

Haile Gerima's manipulation of cinematic temporality sutures Mona/Shola's individual experience to the collective struggle of the Black diaspora. Initially distanced from her mutual Black past, Mona's development of racial subjectivity occurs in tandem with the depiction of the Middle Passage. By embedding his protagonist within the *longue durée* of Black historical struggle, Gerima disavows Western cinema's preference for individualist heroes. His departure from Hollywood grammar through fractured time, ritual imagery, and layered diegesis constitutes not simply a stylistic experiment but a political act. As Haile Gerima himself insists, cinema for the oppressed is inseparable from struggle, memory, and survival.

4.4.11. Adwa: An African Victory

Haile Gerima's *Adwa: An African Victory* (1999) is a 96-minute documentary filmed in Amharic and English, narrated by Haile Gerima himself. The documentary recounts the 1896 victory of Adwa, in which Ethiopia, under the leadership of Emperor Menelik II and Empress Taytu, defeated the Italian colonial forces at Adwa. It traces both the causes of the war and its enduring memory, beginning with the Dogali engagement that preceded the decisive battle and situating the conflict within the broader context of the Scramble for Africa. The film then follows the stages of the Adwa campaign, through the Wollo front, the Battle of Amba Alage, the Chelencot Monastery and its spiritual legacy, the siege of Mekele, and the events at Enda Abba Gerima culminating in the climactic battle of Adwa. Beyond the battle itself, the documentary explores the consequences of Ethiopia's victory and its international implications. This collective memory is voiced through the testimonies of intellectuals, Haile Gerima's father, patriot families, clergy, and children of the younger generation, affirming Adwa as a story passed down across generations.

4.4.11.1. Adwa and Pan-Africanism

The documentary opens with Haile Gerima's voice-over, asserting that Italy long dreamed of exploiting Ethiopia as a source of strength and prestige but failed. Two Scholars in the documentary then explain that the war stemmed from the Treaty of *Wuchale*, which was signed in both Italian and Amharic versions. The Amharic and Italian versions of the treaty differed: the Italian text claimed Ethiopia was obliged to conduct all foreign relations through Italy, while the Amharic text only suggested Ethiopia could do so if it wished. Menelik II initially trusted Italy in good faith, but Taytu distrusted them, and her suspicions proved correct.

Cinematically, Haile Gerima emphasizes this betrayal visually by juxtaposing the two versions of the treaty on screen and focusing on a determined image of Emperor Menelik. Photographs of war leaders and the Patriarch who will later bless the emperor before the battle starts underscore the gravity of the coming battle. At this point, Abba Gerima, the filmmaker's father, begins narrating the story of the Adwa campaign. Serving as a living conduit of oral tradition, he recounts the journeys from Addis Ababa to Adwa, tracing the campaign route alongside his son. He recalls that Menelik issued a call to arms, and all sectors of Ethiopian

society, peasants, merchants, nobles, answered willingly. One informant stresses the improbability of victory: an untrained, self-provisioned army on foot and horseback defeating a modern European military. Yet, through unity, Ethiopians prevailed.

War songs, such as *Che Belew* and *Fano Fano*, accompany archival images of Menelik smiling and pictures of Empress Taytu beneath church umbrella, evoking the spiritual and emotional energy of the campaign. The film then presents the impressive scale and diversity of the Ethiopian forces assembled at Adwa. Empress Taytu commanded her own contingent of approximately 5,000 infantry and 5,000 cavalry. Ras Alula Aba Nega contributed around 4,000 troops, while Negus Tekle Haymanot brought between 5,000 and 6,000. Balcha Aba Nefso led 3,000 warriors, and Ras Mikael fielded an estimated 14,000 to 15,000 men. Ras Mengesha supplied about 12,000 soldiers, while Ras Mengesha Atikem commanded between 6,000 and 7,000. Similarly, Ras Wole Bitul led 2,000 troops, Ras Abate Bwa Yalew assembled 6,000 to 8,000, and Ras Wolde Giorgis contributed 4,000 to 5,000. Ras Tesema Nadew commanded between 13,000 and 14,000, Fitawrari Gebeyehu between 10,000 and 11,000, and Wagshum Gwangul about 1,000. Ras Mekonnen led one of the largest contingents, numbering 15,000 to 16,000, alongside Fitawrari Tekele Mekwas. Additional leaders, including Sultan Mohammed, Ras Demese Nesibu, Dejazmach Jote Tulu of Kelem, and Dejazmach Geberemidhin Moreda Lik, also brought forces of unspecified size. Collectively, this vast mobilization reflects the multi-regional and collaborative effort that secured Ethiopia's decisive victory. Jonas (2011) and Zewde (2001) also note that leaders from across Ethiopia united in an unprecedented coalition to defeat the Italian army.

The narrative shifts to oral stories and memories. An elderly Muslim man near Dessie recalls how his father once encountered Menelik, who compassionately granted him money and a cow after learning of his injury. In Dessie, mosque elders proudly recall the patriotism of Ras Mikael of Wollo and Ras Wole, whose bravery became proverbial in local sayings “ሰላሳ ደጃዝማች ደገሰውን፣ ስልሳ ፈታውራሪ ደገሰውን የወሌ ፈረስ ጠጣው ብቻውን” young boyes are also seen praieng in the mosque while the eleders were telling this victories history. The documenteryalso show children singing the Ethiopian national anthem, thas symbolically linking past victories to contemporary identity and sprituality.

Haile Gerima then visits the place called Wuchale, the site of the disputed treaty, lamenting the absence of a memorial rather he saw and show one boy not older than tenyears old went to a farm.

Haile Gerima narrates that the first engagement took place at Amba Alage, where Fitawrari Gebeyehu led Ethiopian forces to victory without waiting for imperial approval. Italian General Toselli was killed, and the victory was celebrated with *zeraf* chants military songs of triumph. The documentary also shows that, at monasteries such as Chelencot and Enda Abba Gerima, priests recount how sacred spaces offered blessings for victory. Menelik donated ceremonial garments to one monastery in gratitude, underscoring the fusion of spirituality and warfare.

The clergies of chelencot monastery and one other participant respectively, from entoto musiuem has recalled Empress Taytu's strategic genius is highlighted when she ordered the capture of Italian water supplies, weakening the enemy and won the war in Mekele. Clergy of the monastery recall her prayers at *Ayrefda*, meaning "she will not be let," signifying the intercession of St. Mary. They also accnolleged remembered women for their contributions: preparing food, tending the wounded, and supporting the warriors, testimonies that highlight their indispensable roles. In addition, one clergyman mentions that Italy had occupied Mekele and the Endasilasie church. On the victory of the battele of mekele, as one participant from the documentary Menelik allowed the Italians to retreat which demonstrated his confidence, but a decision historian's debate but (Jonas, 2011). The clergies have toled this torry under tree infront of the monastery.

Then the narrator then mentioned that after mekele that as the armies converged on Adwa, asymbolizing and showing the row of hilles of Adwa as "statue which its history is transmitted through the oral narratives of eleder". The documentery also shows where the emporer was setteled and the empress was parying through this eledely narraters. Tpatiotic chants intensified. one participant of the documentery mentioned that Italians where not willing to go out of their place and fight than waiting the army finish the food. The turning point came when Basha Awalom, an Ethiopian spy posing as an Italian informant, misled the Italians into believing Ethiopian forces were dispersing. Deceived, the Italians marched out of their

fortifications, enabling Menelik, after receiving blessings at church, to launch the decisive strike and win the battle. The war was visually shown through archival pictures accompanied by war songs and crowd fight sounds. Haile Gerima In his narrative, chant of an elderly man zoomed. “Italy’s colonial power was defeated... the war has ended in Adwa”

The descendants of the war describe the ferocity of the battle and the heroism of leaders such as Fitawrari Gebeyehu, who sacrificed his life. The film honors lesser-known patriots like Freed Gberu, Belata Aregu, and Wase Kabaye, remembered for capturing Italian soldiers. Priests read elegiac poems commemorating fallen heroes such as Ras Alula and Abba Nega, blending oral tradition with sacred ritual. In one poignant account, Empress Taytu placed an earring on Menelik’s ear after the victory, symbolizing triumph.

The aftermath of Adwa is conveyed through song, art, and oral testimony. Painter Tiruneh Eshetu’s images of Ethiopians returning the swords of captured Italian generals symbolize Menelik’s insistence on honoring even fallen foes. The narrator explains that the victory annulled the Treaty of Wuchale and led to a new agreement on Ethiopia’s terms. In the film, Andrias Eshete stresses that “the day of Adwa had tremendous consequences for colonial Africa and the Caribbean,” describing it as a rare, decisive defeat of European imperial power that fueled liberation movements across Africa and the diaspora. Pan-African congresses named Menelik an honorary chair, Ethiopianist churches thrived in South Africa, and civil rights struggles abroad drew strength from the Ethiopian example.

The documentary highlights centennial commemorations of Adwa, where a crowd leader proclaims that although the battle was fought in Ethiopia, it represents freedom for all Black people. Footage shows church services, musical performances, and exhibitions bridging past and present. Andrias further reflects that, while Ethiopians often viewed themselves as culturally distinct from the rest of Africa, Adwa functions as a “bridge” linking Ethiopia with the wider African world. The film also depicts centennial celebrations in Ethiopia, accompanied by artistic expressions that fuse history and contemporary culture. A local singer, draped in the Ethiopian flag, performs verses that weave together the memories of patriots and leaders from different generations who resisted Italy

እምቤ እልሃለሁ ደታህን ሳልለየው	መተማ የሃንስ ሀይማኖታችንን
ይሴድበኛል ጣልያን ወንድነትህን ያየው	ከጎጃም አርበኛ መልከቀና ማነው
እስኪ ላነሳሳሳው ወየሁ ደሜ ደሜ ያገሬልኛን	ያበላይ ዘለቀ ከነጮች ደም አለው
ያፋሽት ረጋጨው ዘራይ ደረሰን	ጥይት እንደቆሎ ያስለቀመውን
መገን ደጋሌ ላይ ራስ አሉላን	ጥይት እንደጥሬ ያስለቀመውን አላውቀውም ይላል ያ ደጃች ባልቻን

This musical poem recalls warlords and their heroic deeds, celebrating their valor not only at the Battle of Adwa but also during the Second Italian Invasion of Ethiopia (1935–1941).

Scenes of children such as a blind boy learning about Adwa through a friend's narration underscore the intergenerational transmission of memory. Haile Gerima recalls how his own father, raised on stories of the Adwa patriots, later fought Italian invaders without hesitation, showing how resistance had become a way of life in Ethiopia. Visual culture also sustains this memory, with Eshetu's paintings reinforcing the dignity of Ethiopia's victory and its moral stance toward defeated adversaries.

Internationally, Adwa's significance reverberated across Africa and the diaspora. Informants stress that the victory not only secured Ethiopia's sovereignty but also ignited Pan-Africanist movements, strengthened Ethiopianist churches in southern Africa, and energized civil rights campaigns in the Caribbean and United States. Scholars (Gebrekidan, 2012; Jonas, 2011) emphasize that Adwa shattered white supremacist myths and provided a foundational narrative for Pan-Africanism. Ethiopianism spread as a theological and political movement, celebrating Ethiopia as a symbol of African dignity and collective struggle.

In *Adwa: An African Victory*, Haile Gerima frames the battle as both a national and Pan-African legacy. Through oral testimony, imagery, and songs of resistance, the film situates Adwa within a broader tradition of African unity and anti-colonial defiance (Muche, 2016). Haile Gerima closes with the assertion that Adwa is not only an Ethiopian triumph but a shared symbol for Black people worldwide. This is borne out historically: the 1900 Pan-African Congress hailed Ethiopia as a moral beacon, Haitian delegate Dr. Benito Sylvain traveled to honor Menelik II, and leaders such as Nelson Mandela later affirmed Ethiopia's independence as an enduring

inspiration. The film thus situates Adwa not merely as a military victory, but as a living heritage of resistance, dignity, and solidarity that continues to unite Africa and its diaspora.

4.4.12. Imperfect Journey

Imperfect Journey (1994) is 1 hour 28 minutes length Documentary, directed by Haile Gerima and produced in both English and Amharic, is a BBC-commissioned documentary that explores Ethiopia's political and psychological recovery after the fall of Emperor Haile Selassie, the brutal repression of the Derg regime, and the uncertainties of the new EPRDF government. Haile Gerima describes his aim as an attempt "to find out from the people how they survived those decades of repression and how they imagined their future after the change of government." He embarks on this journey alongside the Polish journalist Ryszard Kapuscinski, whose own country's colonial subjugation under Russia and Austria allowed him to draw parallels with Africa's experience. Kapuscinski is incorporated into the film both cinematically and symbolically: on screen, he serves as a conversational counterpart to Haile Gerima, helping to convey the narrative to the audience, while symbolically; Kapuscinski's voice and presence draw a parallel between the dilapidated infrastructures and impoverished populations of former Eastern European Soviet-bloc countries and the militarized repression currently imposed by the Ethiopian regime.

Haile Gerima reveals repression through testimonies, grieving mothers, local spokesmen in Gondar, and intellectuals in Addis Ababa. These voices highlight the widening rift between Ethiopia's intelligentsia and its militarized state, a division that undermines democratic possibilities.

4.4.11.1. The Journey

The documentary is structured as a road journey. Opening with the sounds of church chants on a hillside, Haile Gerima and Kapuściński begin their travels from Addis Ababa, capturing roadside scenes and chance encounters. Passing abandoned tanks and weapons, Haile Gerima reflects that these machines once supplied by Russia, the United States, and East Germany- re grim reminders of the wars and violence that shaped Ethiopia's recent history. Their next stop is Abay Gorge (the Nile Gorge), where they speak to young rural boys and girls working in the fields. These

interviews, conducted in natural surroundings as children tend crops and herd livestock, reveal the long shadow of the Derg: many recall peers who were conscripted, disappeared, or killed. Despite the hardships of rural life- long walks to school, poverty, and farm labor- the children voice a determination to continue their education, hoping for better futures. One girl memorably explains, “Fright is not in the body, it is in the heart,” justifying how she is not affried of any animal while watching the farm

In Gonder, where Haile Gerima declares his “umbilical cord is buried,” he reconnects with his cultural roots while documenting the anguish of families who lost children to the Red Terror. Parents recount how their hopes that education would provide a better life for their children were destroyed when soldiers abducted them at night, executed them, and denied them even proper burial rites. Some families lost several children, while Eritrean refugees fleeing war were also killed under suspicion. Survivors accuse the present government of exploiting these tragedies for political purposes while failing to deliver true justice. Rather than glorifying the new regime that came to power in 1991, Haile Gerima documents the persistence of state terrorism and the disillusionment of a war-traumatized society. Unlike the Derg, which openly named its enemies, the new regime thrives on anonymity, midnight raids, and secret denunciations, leaving citizens fearful and voiceless.

The documentary also visits Addis Ababa during a memorial ceremony for the sixty eight ministers and higher officials of Haile Selassie’s government executed by the Derg in a single night. Their remains, once discarded without dignity, were reburied with respect alongside patriots who had fought Italian fascism. Families expressed both relief and sorrow, condemning the Derg for committing atrocities against its own people. Kapuscinski reflects critically on how postcolonial African governments often replicate colonial brutality by turning violence inward. Kapuściński’s perspective links Ethiopia’s repression with the broader collapse of Eastern European states after the Cold War, suggesting parallels between failed socialist experiments and Ethiopia’s stalled democratic transition. His presence situates Ethiopia’s struggle within a wider, global narrative of post-Cold War disillusionment and search for identity.

Throughout the film, Haile Gerima engages with intellectuals and activists who highlight Ethiopia’s systemic failures. Professor Eshetu Chole critiques an educational system that breeds

hopelessness, while other academics stress that successive regimes have consistently suppressed intellectuals branding them imperialists under Haile Selassie, subversives under the Derg, and “arrogant” under the EPRDF. Such hostility, they argue, contributes to Africa’s brain drain not only because of Western opportunities but because local leaders themselves fear visionary thinkers. Haile Gerima himself recalls being interrogated by officials who accused him of focusing too much on Gonder and warned him against interviewing intellectuals. Testimonies from university professors, activists, and dismissed educators reinforce the view that African leaders often stifle rather than nurture intellectual life. Haile Gerima resists blaming individual leaders or intellectuals alone. Instead, he gestures toward the broader structures of global political economy. Institutions like the IMF, World Bank, and WTO are implicated in perpetuating Ethiopia’s cycle of repression by promoting “jobless economic growth” and enabling regimes to brutalize their citizens

Haile Gerima engages this issue by grounding the film in his family’s longstanding ties to Gondar. Through the heartfelt accounts of mourning mothers and the anguished testimonies of veiled community members, the documentary reveals the regime’s deeply flawed understanding of power. He also highlights the role of the intellectual community at Addis Ababa University, emphasizing their capacity to influence public comprehension of Ethiopia’s internal struggles. Nevertheless, the film underscores that the growing divide between the intelligentsia and the military remains a significant obstacle to the achievement of authentic democracy.

The film closes with a message of fragile hope. A group of peace walkers carrying white flags, supported by the Red Cross- trek from Ethiopia across borders into Eritrea, Sudan, and Kenya, preaching reconciliation “with God’s help.” Haile Gerima ends his narration by contrasting his own generation, shaped by nationalism and authoritarian repression, with the youth, who he believes now imagine themselves in Pan-African and global terms: “Unlike Ethiopians of my generation, these young people see themselves in a Pan-African and global perspective. They will march a fire walk into the future to shape a destiny only they know.”

For Haile Gerima, the title *Imperfect Journey* reflects both the film’s form and content. Constrained by Ethiopia’s political climate, the film remains incomplete, fragmentary, and unresolved. Yet this very incompleteness mirrors the larger reality it portrays: the struggle of

Ethiopian youth to build a future out of the ruins of repression, within a dysfunctional national and global order.

4.4.12. Teza

Teza (2008), a 2-hour and 20-minute film written, directed, and edited by Haile Gerima, was shot across Ethiopia in Addis Ababa and Gonder as well as in Germany. The film examines the dislocation and fractured identity of postcolonial intellectuals, tracing both their alienation abroad and their struggles upon returning home. Its protagonist, Anberber, is a young Ethiopian doctor who, after years of medical study in Germany, returns to his native village with hopes of contributing to his country. Instead, he finds that the Ethiopia of his memory has been upended by political turmoil and authoritarian repression. The landscapes of his childhood and the quiet dreams that once sustained him are overshadowed by violence, censorship, and disillusion. Through Anberber's painful confrontation with this reality, *Teza* meditates on exile, memory, and the impossibility of wholeness in a world fractured by dictatorship, displacement, and the betrayal of revolutionary ideals.

Synopsis:- The official synopsis of *Teza* film found on a DVD by Mypheduh Films (2008), a company hold by Haile Gerima is reads as follows

Teza is set in Ethiopia and Germany and examines the displacement of intellectuals, both at home and abroad, through the story of a young and idealistic Ethiopian doctor, Anberber. After studying medicine abroad in Germany for several years, Anberber returns home to Ethiopia only to find his beloved childhood place-and soon the quiet of his dreams- stifled and disarrayed by the country's political turmoil. Anberber must determine if he can bear the strain of his reality and piece together a life from the fragments of a complete existence that lies around him.

4.4.12.1. Alienation, Memory and Intellectual Displacement

As Haile Gerima has mentioned, "The scenes and settings in *Teza*, for instance, are the landscapes of my childhood" (Gerima, 2010). For Haile Gerima, *Teza* is both a deeply personal and politically charged work. As Gerima (2013) has also explained,

It has been screening in Ethiopia for about nine months, and the response has been very strong. At the same time, this is a story that's touching a very sensitive area and period for a lot of Ethiopians. And so, although my film is about childhood memory, the placenta, fire and water, as well as politics, the political angle is the only thing people want to talk about. But there are many metaphors in the movie, and they aren't just playing on politics. And people did the same thing with *Sankofa*.

For Ethiopians, Gerima suggests, the memories evoked by *Teza* are too immediate to be detached into abstraction. “*Teza* cannot be put into perspective in Ethiopia because many Ethiopians have personally experienced the things I'm depicting, which puts a lot of extra weight on the film” (Gerima, 2013).

The central character, Anberber, is an Ethiopian intellectual whose return from Germany initiates a painful process of physical and psychological reconstruction. Alienated from both his homeland and the modern world, Anberber's story unfolds as an allegory of colonial trauma, migration, and disillusionment. When first introduced, he lies wrapped in a Western hospital setting, his mutilation unexplained. Once unbandaged and returned to Ethiopia, he appears as an older man, visibly broken yet welcomed ecstatically by his mother and village. The symbolic layering is immediate: Anberber is not only a Western-educated doctor, but the son of a patriot killed with poison gas by Italian fascists at the Battle of Tekaze River. His childhood memories include “Mussolini Mountain,” a monument to fallen Ethiopian patriots and a site of play that collapses history and memory. Thus, Anberber embodies both Ethiopia's heroic anticolonial past and its fractured postcolonial present. His alienation is not merely Marxian separation from labor, but a deeper existential rupture alienation from his own humanity as a colonized subject struggling to reconcile memory, trauma, and dislocation (Fanon, 1963).

The backdrop is Ethiopia under the Derg regime (1974–1991), a Soviet-aligned military junta that toppled Haile Selassie. The film shows adolescent boys conscripted by force, hiding in caves to escape the state's grip, while Anberber himself is tormented by nightmares and hallucinations. Haile Gerima here situates the intellectual within Fanon's category of the “honest intellectual,” one committed to the people yet abused by authoritarian structures (Fanon, 1963). Under the Derg, Anberber's medical skills are weaponized for state survival rather than

collective uplift. In this sense, *Teza* dramatizes Fanon's "pitfalls of national consciousness": the corruption of revolutionary ideals, the rise of opportunism, and the mystification of leadership (Fanon, 1963). The constant imagery of Mengistu Haile Mariam serves as a cinematic enactment of Fanon's claim that postcolonial bourgeois dictatorships control the masses through the "moral power of the leader" rather than through material transformation (Fanon, 196).

Haile Gerima is equally unsparing of the intellectual elite. In Addis Ababa, Anberber and Tesfaye marvel at the images of Marx, Engels, and Lenin in Meskel Square, ironically remarking, "How did the Holy Trinity make it all the way here?" The joke exposes the imposition of Cold War socialism, a borrowed orthodoxy displacing Ethiopian historical realities. The nightmare of Anberber plugging a leaking granary with torn pages of books vividly illustrates Fanon's warning that postcolonial intellectuals who hoard Western knowledge are powerless to address local crises (Fanon, 1963). Haile Gerima thus critiques both the state's authoritarian appropriation of ideology and the intellectual class's estrangement from the masses.

The film's spiral narrative blending memory, hallucination, and dream echoes Ethiopian oral traditions while enacting what Deleuze (1985) calls the non-chronological multiplicity of time. Anberber's conversation with his childhood self symbolizes a coalescence of temporal layers, where healing becomes possible through a return to memory and tradition. Ricci (2010) emphasizes the turning point of symbolic purification through holy water, enabling Anberber to reimagine his role not as revolutionary ideologue but as a humble village schoolteacher. This narrative of return situates Haile Gerima's work within what Naficy (2001) calls "accented cinema," a diasporic aesthetic that resists dominant cinematic languages through fragmentation, non-linearity, and marginal voices.

Teza also foregrounds the psychological costs of authoritarianism, particularly for women. Cassandra, Azanu, Gabi, and Anberber's mother embody what Fanon (1963) described in *Colonial War and Mental Disorders*: the psychic ruptures inflicted by systemic oppression. Cassandra's abortion, Azanu's infanticide, Gabi's struggle to raise a mixed-race child in racist Germany, and the grief of Ethiopian mothers whose sons are abducted for war all index the intersections of patriarchy, colonial legacies, and national trauma. Even Anberber's own malaise,

symbolized by the dripping faucet, becomes a metaphor for the stagnation of both nation and consciousness (Ross and Stone, 2010).

Haile Gerima further critiques fascism as a global process. Through Mengistu's mimicry of Soviet rhetoric, *Teza* stages what Jackson (1972) identifies as the authoritarian syndrome of global fascism: the perversion of Marxism and Pan-Africanism into mass terror, propaganda, and repression. The fleeting presence of Che Guevara, Amílcar Cabral, and Angela Davis in the film highlights how global Third World revolutionaries are marginalized in Ethiopia's state socialism, contrasted against the constant images of Marx/Engels/Lenin and Mengistu himself. In this way, Haile Gerima situates Ethiopian authoritarianism within broader structures of neocolonial power and global anti-Black violence (Gerima, 2013).

Communication technologies also carry layered meanings. Fanon (1959), in *A Dying Colonialism*, analyzed the colonial radio as both instrument of domination and site of liberation. In *Teza*, radios broadcast regime propaganda, reinforcing authoritarian power while reminding the village of its subjection to globalizing Western culture. The radio, like Mengistu's portraits, illustrates how the state monopolizes media to secure authority while silencing the people's voices.

The climax of *Teza* comes when Anberber, guided by an elder's interpretation of his dreams, realizes that his Western schooling cannot save Ethiopia. He must instead, as Fanon (1963) insists, move from "national consciousness to political and social consciousness". The birth of his child with Azanu, raised in the cave where children once hid from the Derg, symbolizes precisely this future-oriented consciousness: rooted in survival, memory, and community rather than ideology. Tesfaye literally meaning "hope" embodies the possibility of a new political and social awareness forged from Ethiopia's struggles.

Haile Gerima dedicates *Teza* "to all the Black people who have been beaten and killed just for being Black," as well as to his mother, sister, and the countless Ethiopian youth who died resisting dictatorship (Gerima, 2010). The dedication universalizes Ethiopia's story within a global regime of anti-Black violence and resistance, asserting a shared destiny that transcends borders. In this sense, *Teza* becomes not only an Ethiopian story but a meditation on

disillusionment, authoritarian betrayal, and the fragile hope for a new humanity after revolution has failed.

Finally, in this reflection, Haile Gerima (2010) articulates a philosophy of continuous creative evolution, describing his filmmaking as a cumulative process of learning, refinement, and self-interrogation. Each film functions as *a* pedagogical tool *and a* creative archive, building upon the insights, mistakes, and emotional energies of its predecessors. Haile Gerima frames his oeuvre as a “staircase,” where every work advances his craft while retaining the enduring “rage” that animates his political and artistic vision. Films such as *Sankofa* and *Teza* thus represent not departures but inheritances each embodying the struggles, lessons, and aesthetic growth of those before. This iterative process underscores Haile Gerima’s belief in cinema as a dynamic site of self-education, where storytelling remains grounded in passion and political commitment yet matures through reflective practice and communal engagement.

4.5. Black Radical Memory- Praxis Cinema as Haile Gerima’s Cinematic Ideology

Haile Gerima’s cinematic ideology takes shape at the intersection of Black radical thought, Pan-African humanism, Ethiopian cultural consciousness, Third Cinema praxis, and decolonial aesthetics. As Belachew (2025) notes, Gerima’s worldview is multidimensional: his upbringing deeply roots him in Ethiopian cultural identity, his political commitments align with Pan-Africanist and Black radical traditions exemplified by Malcolm X, and his historical vision stretches from the transatlantic past to the present, and from Adwa’s anti-colonial victory to contemporary struggles. Understanding Gerima therefore demands a careful, layered reading of his intellectual and artistic foundations.

Gerima’s oeuvre forms a sustained project of revolutionary cultural and spiritual sovereignty what may be understood as a *Black Radical Memory–Praxis Cinema*. Drawing on thinkers such as Frantz Fanon, Amílcar Cabral, and the Black Radical Congress, he translates the political demands of decolonization into a film practice grounded in ancestral memory, moral responsibility, and collective authorship. Rejecting Hollywood’s colonial grammar of representation, he positions cinema as a weapon of decolonial transformation a site where modernity is reconstructed through Black experience and African-centered liberation.

Haile Gerima's early films *Hour Glass* (1971), *Child of Resistance* (1972), and *Bush Mama* (1976) embody this synthesis of militancy and experimentation. Through allegory, montage, and dissonant sound design, these works dramatize the awakening of Black consciousness and conceptualize film as pedagogy of resistance. Produced within the L.A. Rebellion movement, they express the collective desire to forge a new cinematic language rooted in Black life and community. As Field et al. (2015) observe the dynamic interplay between the "I" and the "we" defined this movement's revolutionary ethos. Critics such as Françoise Pfaff and Greg Thomas situate Haile Gerima's early trilogy within the broader trajectory of Black militant and feminist thought.

With later works such as *Harvest: 3000 Years* (1976), *Ashes and Embers* (1981), and *Sankofa* (1993), Haile Gerima extends his radical aesthetic toward historical reclamation and cultural memory. *Harvest: 3000 Years* depicts peasant resistance under Ethiopian feudalism, while *Sankofa* reclaims the memory of slavery as a living source of spiritual regeneration and political consciousness. His subsequent films *Imperfect Journey* (1994), *Adwa: An African Victory* (1999), and *Teza* (2008) further weave Ethiopian exceptionalism into a diasporic framework, interrogating colonial violence, exile, and fractured identity through nonlinear, memory-driven narratives. Across these works, Gerima evolves from militant nationalism toward a diasporic humanism that integrates political, aesthetic, and spiritual liberation.

Philosophically, Haile Gerima's thought resonates with Cabral's conception of culture as a material force in revolution and Fanon's vision of humanist renewal. Culture, for Haile Gerima, is not static heritage but the dynamic product of struggle. Like Cabral and Fanon, he conceives of liberation as the restoration of creative capacity and historical agency. His films thus function as acts of cultural re-production reclaiming indigenous storytelling, orality, and ritual as revolutionary forms rather than nostalgic symbols.

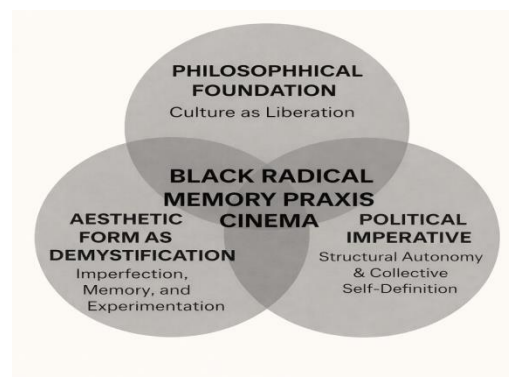
Politically, Haile Gerima inherits and reworks the anti-imperialist spirit of *Third Cinema*. While Solanas and Getino (1969) envisioned cinema as a tool of national liberation, Haile Gerima's version resists didacticism, emphasizing reflexivity, contradiction, and participatory spectatorship. His works transform the screen into a dialogic space of historical inquiry rather

than ideological propaganda, merging Third Cinema's revolutionary ethos with a diasporic critique of nationalism (Willemsen, 1994; Shaka, 2004).

Aesthetically, Haile Gerima develops what he calls an *aesthetic of imperfection*. Through improvisation, nonlinearity, and the use of non-professional actors, he creates a counter-cinema that mirrors the fractured realities of postcolonial existence. Each film, as he describes, becomes a “staircase of rage and learning,” linking artistic growth to moral and political consciousness (Gerima, 2010). His approach dismantles colonial hierarchies of cinematic production, insisting on collective authorship and technical demystification as acts of decolonial empowerment.

Critically, Haile Gerima integrates a Womanist dimension into his praxis. He identifies the exclusion of women from film production as a continuation of colonial silencing and insists that women's participation is essential to reclaiming cinema's wholeness. His pedagogy at UCLA and the Sankofa Center emphasized gender parity in technical and creative roles, while his homage to storytellers like his grandmother situates women as the moral and philosophical foundation of African narrative traditions. By celebrating pioneers such as Safi Faye and Sarah Maldoror, Haile Gerima repositions the African woman filmmaker as a custodian of cultural memory and revolutionary vision.

In due course, Haile Gerima's oeuvre envisions cinema as both political struggle and spiritual renewal a revolutionary humanism rooted in Black experience. His *Black Radical Memory-Praxis Cinema* fuses philosophy, politics, and aesthetics into a triadic praxis:



Philosophical Foundation- Culture as the basis of liberation (after Cabral and Fanon).

Political Imperative- Structural autonomy and collective self-definition (Third Cinema reimagined).

Aesthetic Form- Imperfection, memory, and experimentation as decolonial strategies.

Through this framework, Haile Gerima transforms film into an instrument of historical reconstruction and diasporic solidarity. His cinematic ideology dismantles colonial epistemologies while constructing new visual grammars of Black life a living dialogue among Ethiopia, Africa, and the diaspora. In its totality, Haile Gerima's *Style* (*Yehayle Gerima Silt/ሀይለ ገሪማ ስልጥ*) articulates a radical Black cinema reconstruction through Ethiopian specific tradition, African and diasporic consciousness. Haile Gerima's cinema thus redefines narrative freedom as the power to reconstruct humanity from the vantage of the colonized, uncolonized (but oppressed) and enslaved black people.

4.6. Haile Gerima as an Africana Intellectual

Building upon the methodological framework of Africana Critical Theory (ACT), Haile Gerima can be understood as an Africana intellectual who's cinematic and theoretical contributions exemplify the radical humanism and liberatory praxis central to the Africana intellectual tradition. His body of work comprising films, essays, interviews, and lectures reveals a sustained engagement with questions of historical memory, cultural identity, and ideological resistance. Haile Gerima's cinematic practice is therefore not merely aesthetic but profoundly intellectual: it functions as a medium of critique, pedagogy, and re-Africanization.

In line with Rabaka's (2006, 2009) insistence that ACT expands the field of critical theory by foregrounding Africana voices, Haile Gerima's ideological stance situates film as a site of intellectual struggle and cultural intervention. His commitment to telling stories from an African-centered perspective responds directly to the exclusion of African descent intellectuals from global critical discourse. Like Cabral, who regarded culture as a weapon of liberation, Haile Gerima treats cinema as a revolutionary tool capable of transforming both consciousness and social relations. His films enact what Bassey (2007) describes as the dialectics of domination and liberation constantly interrogating colonial hierarchies while envisioning alternative realities grounded in African agency.

Haile Gerima's theoretical position, articulated in his numerous public talks and essays, underscores the necessity of epistemic re-centering a deliberate effort to reclaim the authority to define African experiences through African eyes. This is evident in his rejection of Hollywood's "visual imperialism," which he critiques for distorting Black realities and reinforcing hegemonic perceptions of Africa. Instead, Haile Gerima advocates for a cinema rooted in African history, oral tradition, and community consciousness a cinema that "returns to the source" in both form and content. This process of narrative reclamation aligns with ACT's call to recentralize Africana epistemologies as legitimate and generative sites of theory-making.

The dialectics of domination and liberation are at the heart of Haile Gerima's cinematic narrative structures. In films such as *Sankofa* (1993), *Bush Mama* (1975), and *Harvest: 3000 Years* (1976), Haile Gerima constructs temporal and spatial continuities between past and present forms of oppression, showing how slavery, colonialism, and neo-imperialism operate within a single historical continuum. Yet these films are not simply chronicles of victimization they are acts of resistance that visualize struggle as an enduring condition of human dignity. This dialectical movement between domination and liberation reflects what ACT identifies as the dynamic relationship between critique and reconstruction, destruction and renewal.

Finally, Haile Gerima's commitment to the praxis of cultural self-determination is evident not only in his film content but also in his production and distribution strategies. By working outside Hollywood and establishing independent means of production, he models a form of artistic sovereignty consistent with the broader aims of Africana thought. His founding of the Mypheduh Film Institute and Sankofa Video and Bookstore in Washington, D.C., demonstrates how intellectual and creative work can emerge from, and return to, the community embodying the ACT principle that theory and praxis must remain dialectically intertwined.

In this regard, Gerima's work exemplifies the "gathering" function of Africana thought described by Outlaw (1992–1993) and Gordon (1997), drawing together cultural memory, political struggle, and spiritual consciousness into a unified vision of liberation. Viewed through Africana Critical Theory, his films operate simultaneously as critique and reconstruction, dismantling colonial representations while re-centering African ways of knowing, being, and relating. By foregrounding epistemic re-centering, the dialectics of domination and liberation,

and the praxis of cultural self-determination, Haile Gerima's cinematic philosophy extend the scope of Africana intellectual traditions and contribute to their ongoing historical project of liberation.

CHAPTER FIVE

5. AFRICANA WOMANIST GAZE ON HAILE GRIMA'S CINEMATIC IDEOLOGY

5.1. Haile Grima's Cinematic Ideology and Africana womanism

Haile Gerima's cinema, while not explicitly identified as Africana Womanist, strongly embodies the ideological and political ethos of that movement. His Pan-African, anti-colonial, and community-centered filmmaking aligns closely with Clenora Hudson-Weems's call for an African-centered theoretical framework grounded in cultural authenticity and collective liberation. His cinematic ideology enacts the foundational tenets of Africana Womanist thought centering community, spirituality, and ancestral continuity as the core of liberation. Like the Womanist emphasis on self-definition and collective survival (Hudson-Weems, 1993; Phillips, 2006), Haile Gerima's rejection of Hollywood's exploitative visual regime becomes an act of cultural self-determination and resistance to epistemic colonization.

Haile Gerima's early exposure to oral storytelling, particularly through the women in his Ethiopian family, shaped his enduring conception of cinema as an extension of African oral tradition. He often recalls his grandmother, sisters, and other elder women as "the first storytellers," whose voices transmitted history, morality, and spiritual wisdom long before colonial modernity disrupted these traditions (Gerima, 1989, 2012, 2021). In *Where Are the African Women Filmmakers?* (Gerima, 2021), he acknowledges that his own cinematic ambition emerged from a lineage of women storytellers: "my sisters, who in truth are far more gifted storytellers than I am." For Haile Gerima, the origins of African cinema are inseparable from the historical displacement of women as narrative custodians. Colonial cinema, he argues, "overthrew women as storytellers and recruited colonial and neocolonial men as their replacements," thus producing a male-dominated institution that perpetuated gendered and epistemic domination. These women, he insists, were Africa's original philosopher's custodians of collective imagination whose silencing under colonial patriarchy epitomizes what Kolawole (1997) calls the "erasure of womanist consciousness."

Africana Womanist scholars similarly identify African women as cultural transmitters, moral stabilizers, and preservers of communal ethos (Hudson-Weems, 1993; Sofola, 1998).

Their narratives rooted in survival, continuity, and collective justice form a counter-archive to colonial and patriarchal storytelling. Haile Gerima's cinematic language consciously revives this epistemic legacy, grounding filmic storytelling in the rhythms, spirituality, and ethical weight of oral narrative traditions. In doing so, he reclaims the authority of African women's voices and aligns his practice with the Womanist goal of restoring ancestral knowledge as a foundation for liberation (Hudson-Weems & Gosa, 2014).

Haile Gerima's critique of women's representation in African cinema reinforces this imperative. He identifies three dominant modes: the commercial portrayal of women as sexualized commodities; the nationalist depiction of women as idealized mothers of the nation; and a so-called progressive cinema that continues to frame women's subjectivity through patriarchal lenses (Gerima, 2021). These modes reproduce what Pellerin (2012) terms "epistemic colonization" the erasure of African women's perspectives even within ostensibly decolonial frameworks. Haile Gerima's response, consistent with Africana Womanist thought, is a call for cultural self-definition and representational sovereignty grounded in community accountability.

In his 1991 address to African filmmakers, Haile Gerima urged artists to "get down on their knees and idolize the different ingredients that comprise the symphony of an African film narrative," emphasizing humility, introspection, and historical continuity. This ethos reflects the Womanist principles of self-recovery and cultural reclamation (Hudson-Weems, 1993). For Haile Gerima, cinema is not merely entertainment but a spiritual and political instrument a cultural tool for resisting Western hegemony and fostering collective liberation.

Demystifying cinema, for Haile Gerima, thus becomes synonymous with decolonizing it both in authorship and form. His praxis reclaims matrilineal storytelling as the moral and aesthetic foundation of an egalitarian cinematic future. He honors pioneering filmmakers like Safi Faye (*Letter from My Village*, 1975) and Sarah Maldoror (*Sambizanga*, 1972) for their interventions against patriarchal cinematic forms, lamenting their scarcity as symptomatic of structural exclusion (Gerima, 2021). African cinema, he warns, "Cannot progress with business as usual" while marginalizing women's creative authority.

From an Africana Womanist perspective, Haile Gerima's project of demystifying cinema parallels the larger struggle for African self-definition and communal survival. As Hudson-Weems (1993) contends, Africana Womanism rejects liberation framed as gender antagonism, centering instead on complementarity, family-centeredness, and collective advancement. Haile Gerima's notion of filmmaking as a communal act mirrors Womanist ethics of cooperation and interdependence (Ogunyemi, 1985). His claim that "no white filmmaker can imagine his mother's story" (Gerima, 2016) captures the Womanist insistence that African women's experiences must be narrated from within their own epistemological and cultural frameworks.

Haile Gerima's rejection of Hollywood's "exploitation cinema" and his advocacy of *triangular cinema* linking filmmaker, audience, and critic embody the Womanist ethic of self-reliance and collective survival (Hudson-Weems, 1993). Drawing inspiration from his grandmother's oral narratives and his father's revolutionary theatre, he constructs cinema as both weapon and spiritual practice an aesthetic of resistance and restoration that aligns with Hudson-Weems's (2021) concept of *ancestral reclamation*. Themes of remembrance, healing, and restoration across generations in Gerima's films reflect the Womanist pursuit of wholeness and ideological self-defense (Phillips, 2006; Collins, 2000). Haile Gerima's *triangular cinema* and Africana Womanism Both reject patriarchal hierarchies and Eurocentric elitism, emphasizing inclusivity and cultural authenticity. His insistence that filmmakers "see, listen, and represent truthfully" (Gerima, 1991a) reinforces the shared Womanist and Pan-African belief that liberation must begin with epistemic sovereignty the right to see and name oneself through one's own lens.

In his 2016 reflections on Black Aesthetics, Gerima exposed how film schools mystified cinematic technology as an exclusive domain of white men, perpetuating radicalized and gendered hierarchies (Gerima, 2016). To *demystify* cinema was thus a pedagogical act of decolonization reclaiming the tools of image-making from the aura of white and male authority. His teaching practice at Howard University embodied this ethic: distributing technical responsibilities equitably, he observed that many women students excelled once freed from internalized limitations (Gerima, 2010). This approach exemplifies the Womanist principle of self-recovery, restoring confidence and agency through communal empowerment (Hudson-Weems, 1993).

Haile Gerima's pedagogy also connects to his idea of "breaking the toys" dismantling the colonial logic embedded within cinematic form. Each image, he argues, must be met with a counter-image: a process of visual decolonization and cultural self-defense (Gerima, 2010; Ogunyemi, 1985). Yet he remains acutely aware of structural obstacles economic dependency, fragile infrastructures, and patriarchal hierarchies that doubly marginalize African women in film (Gerima, 2021). So long as women remain excluded from the dominant storytelling medium of modernity, he insists, representation will remain "half true and lopsided" (Gerima, 2016).

Although many of Haile Gerima's films such as *Bush Mama* (1976), *Ashes and Embers* (1982), and *Sankofa* (1993) are set in diasporic contexts, they remain rooted in African cultural philosophy. His diasporic cinema transforms displacement into a space of reconnection, portraying Africa not merely as geography but as consciousness a living continuum of memory and values. Through this transnational aesthetic, Haile Gerima reclaims Africa as a spiritual and ideological homeland guiding Black existence across borders.

Haile Gerima's analyses of colonialism and neocolonial cinema echo Africana Womanist critiques of racialized patriarchy. He observes that cinema's arrival in Africa coincided with colonial domination, which sidelined women's voices and imposed male-centered narratives that reinforced Eurocentric worldviews (Gerima, 2021). To counter this misrepresentation, he calls for African women's active participation in transforming cinema into a truly inclusive medium. This vision resonates with Ndonibi's (2023) assertion that Africana Womanism must prioritize African women's lived experiences and values, free from imposed Eurocentric identities.

Africana Womanism distinguishes itself from Western feminism by situating gender within the matrix of race, class, and colonial history. As Hudson-Weems (1989, 1993) and Sofola (1993) explain, Africana women face "tripartite oppression" racism, classism, and sexism which necessitate collective struggle rather than gender opposition. Haile Gerima's female characters embody this intersectional resistance: the imprisoned woman in *Child of Resistance* (1972), the awakening mother in *Bush Mama*, the spiritual grandmother in *Teza* (2008), and the women warriors in *Adwa: An African Victory* (1999) all symbolizes resilience, continuity, and ancestral strength. His female figures are not victims but bearers of cultural consciousness, reflecting the Womanist ideal of women as nurturers and preservers of collective identity.

Unlike mainstream feminism, which often emphasizes the experiences and challenges faced by white women, Africana Womanism highlights the importance of race, culture, and class in the lives of women of African descent (Ntiri, 2001). Africana women reject the confrontational stance toward men commonly found in white feminist discourse, seeing Africana men not as oppressors, but as crucial allies in the common fight against systemic injustices such as slavery, marginalization, and poverty (Ahmed, 2017). As articulated by Hudson-Weems (1993), Africana communities do not regard men as adversaries; instead, their collective struggle is against systemic oppression. Unlike white men, Africana men do not hold institutional power over women, shifting the emphasis of activism toward dismantling broader societal systems of racism and classism.

This cooperative and culturally grounded ideology closely aligns with the political and artistic vision of Haile Gerima, a notable filmmaker whose works and writings reflect significant solidarity with Africana women and the wider struggles of African-descended communities. Haile Gerima's dedication to authentic representation and self-definition resonates strongly with the foundational principles of Africana Womanism. He has explicitly acknowledged the systemic racial and economic challenges that hinder the genuine expression of African identity in global cinema, asserting that being an African filmmaker regardless of gender means existing within an oppressive framework.

Haile Gerima's Pan-Africanist outlook mirrors Africana Womanism's focus on unity, cultural integrity, and resistance to misrepresentation. He encourages African filmmakers to connect with the legacy of their ancestors, advocating for cinema steeped in African history, culture, and storytelling traditions. In doing so, he confronts colonial and neocolonial perceptions that pervade the film industry and skew Black identities.

Africana Womanism, as characterized by Hudson-Weems (1993), extends beyond a simple gender-centric ideology; it acts as a culturally specific framework that highlights the lived experiences, challenges, and aspirations of Africana women. Haile Gerima's films consistently focus on African-descended Black women as influential figures in the fight against oppression, highlighting their strong ties to African heritage. Throughout both his fictional narratives and documentary projects, Haile Gerima represents Black women not merely as victims of systemic racism but as proactive participants in resistance and guardians of cultural legacy. In *Child of*

Resistance, the imprisonment of a Black woman symbolizes collective political confinement, while *Bush Mama* depicts a woman's awakening to the realities of poverty and racial violence. *Ashes and Embers* feature female characters such as a grandmother and a girlfriend who act as preservers of memory and initiators of Black consciousness. In *Teza*, a spiritual grandmother emerges as a healer and protector of African traditions, nurturing her returning grandson back to health through ancestral wisdom. Documentaries like *Adwa: An African Victory* showcase the contributions of Ethiopian women in anti-colonial movements and *Imperfect Journey* shows how political ideology impacts even small girls by bringing the case of a shepherd girl, while *Wilmington 10-USA 10,000* includes the voices of female activists confronting institutional racism in America. Through these representations, Haile Gerima uplifts Black women as crucial vessels of resistance and cultural identity, underscoring their vital role in challenging oppression and upholding African diasporic heritage. His artistic ideology underscores symbolic storytelling, where both male and female characters signify broader struggles rather than individual gender conflicts. In a 2023 interview, he clarified that his emphasis is on collective liberation, avoiding gender rivalries. This viewpoint aligns with Africana Womanism's denial of gender antagonism, acknowledging oppression as a systemic problem that demands unified resistance.

Essential to both Gerima's ideology and Africana Womanism is the concept of self-definition and self-naming. Just as Hudson-Weems (1998) highlights the act of naming as a means of empowerment and reclaiming identity, Gerima insists that people of African descent must craft their narratives. In his writings from 1991, Haile Gerima urged filmmakers to dismiss externally imposed interpretations of Africa and to "see, listen," and create images that genuinely represent their historical and cultural realities.

The African idea of *Nommo* the power of words and naming is central to this conversation. Africana Womanism asserts that the acts of naming and defining oneself represent a form of cultural survival and resistance, a sentiment shared by Haile Gerima. As Dahy (2021) notes, these actions are foundational to Africana Womanism, ensuring that women of African descent are defined not by the prevailing culture, but by their communities and traditions.

Haile Gerima also critiques the conventional film industry for depicting Black individuals in subordinate roles, claiming that such misrepresentation reinforces existing power dynamics.

His characters rise above gender stereotypes, embodying systemic resistance. In a similar vein, *Africana Womanism* analyzes racism and sexism as linked forms of oppression that must be tackled through a culturally relevant framework (Sofola, 1993; Hudson-Weems, 1989).

In light of these systemic challenges, Haile Gerima promotes the idea of creating an independent Black cinema rooted in traditional African collective storytelling methods. His notion of triangular cinema, comprising filmmakers, communities, and critics, resonates with *Africana Womanism's* focus on community involvement, participation, and inclusivity. He believes that cinema should be available to everyone; especially marginalized groups and which women should actively participate in sharing their narratives. This cooperative approach undermines patriarchal structures and aligns with *Africana Womanism's* demand for gender harmony and true representation.

As he expressed in 2023, filmmakers need to foster settings where women are fully involved in the production process. This inclusivity not only enhances the art form but also guarantees ethical and responsible storytelling. Haile Gerima's emphasis on cultural authenticity and his respect for strong women especially his mother and grandmother embody the *Africana Womanist* vision of women as nurturers, leaders, and carriers of culture. In the end, both Gerima and *Africana Womanists* argue that the fight for liberation transcends gender and is deeply intertwined with cultural, racial, and historical elements. They call for a shift from Eurocentric narratives to a self-determined perspective on African identity and experiences. For Haile Gerima and *Africana Womanists*, alike sharing one's own story means reclaiming history, restoring dignity, and ensuring the survival of future generations.

In this regard, *Africana Womanist* thought, as defined by Hudson-Weems (1993, 2001), rejects gender antagonism as the basis of liberation. Instead, it views African men and women as co-partners in struggle, both subjected to the historical traumas of racism, enslavement, and colonial domination. For Hudson-Weems (1993), unlike Euro-American feminis which often positions men as oppressors *Africana Womanism* locates oppression in systemic and racialized structures of power. African-descended men, though male, have never possessed the institutional privilege of white patriarchs; hence, *Africana women's* struggle for liberation is not from their men, but with their men, in pursuit of collective freedom and cultural survival. As Dahy (2021)

explains, this Africa-centered model emphasizes the “flexible and compatible male/female relationship” that sustains the African family and resists Western fragmentation. Similarly, Hubbard (2010) situates the principle of complementarity “being in concert with males” and “male-compatible” as the defining feature of Africana Womanist ideology.

This philosophy aligns profoundly with Haile Gerima’s cinematic vision and ideological stance. Throughout his career, Haile Gerima has positioned himself as an ally and advocate for the representation and liberation of African descent women within cinema. His writings and interviews repeatedly critique the historical displacement of African women as storytellers and the patriarchal structures that silenced their voices (Gerima, 1989, 2010, 2021 rejecting the colonial erasure of their cultural authority. In this sense, Haile Gerima can be regarded as a “male Africana Womanist” a man whose art and ideology embody the central tenets of Womanist thought. He speaks for Africana women and uses cinema to restore the space for their self-definition and narrative agency. His critique of patriarchal African cinema demonstrates his commitment to gender complementarity, community advancement, and the holistic liberation of Africana people. Haile Gerima’s vision of cinematic decolonization therefore extends beyond race and class to include the reclamation of womanist epistemologies and matrilineal narrative authority. By situating women at the moral and historical core of African liberation, Haile Gerima fulfills the Africana Womanist principle that the struggle for freedom is both communal and complementary, requiring the active participation of both men and women in the restoration of cultural and spiritual balance.

5.2. Africana Womanist thought in the Films of Haile Gerima

In Haile Gerima’s films, Africana Womanist attributes surface not only through female protagonists but also through the relational and cultural dynamics that sustain them. His women characters embody African cultural memory, carrying it into the hostile terrains of Western modernity and racial oppression. By situating these women within neocolonial and diasporic contexts, Haile Gerima dramatizes the Womanist triad of agency, alliance, and attributes their resistance grounded not in individual rebellion but in ancestral consciousness and communal solidarity. This reflects Hudson-Weems’s (1993) notion of the Africana woman’s inseparable bond with her people and heritage. In Gerima’s diasporic cinema, “Africa” functions less as

geography and more as a living spiritual continuum, embodied through women who bear the continent's memory and dignity across borders. Thus, before examining specific films, it is vital to recognize how Haile Gerima connect and intersect the Africana woman and Africa itself each reflecting the other's struggle and resilience, forming the spiritual and ideological core of his cinematic vision.

5.2.1. The Bond and Intersection of Africana Woman and Africa in Haile Gerima's Films

The cinematic representation of Women residing outside of Africa and their bond to Africa can be seen in relation to different historical and social facts that will go with diverse experiences and different filmic narrative techniques. The themes of Haile Gerima's *Sankofa* (1993), *Child of Resistance* (1972), *Bush Mama* (1976), and *Ashes and Embers* (1982) are connected to the legacy of slavery and systemic racism, anti-colonial struggle significantly contributes to the narratives surrounding Africana women. According to Belachew (2021) the filmmaker Haile Gerima is a Pan - Africanist visionary who is known for creating cinematic narratives connecting African stories to the diaspora and uses cinema as a weapon to voice story from the owner's perspective and to reclaim identity and dignity. His cinematic narratives are rooted in the African historical reality of the past and the social reality of the present. These films, directly and indirectly, relate the forced displacement of Africans throughout the transatlantic slave trade and the lasting effects of colonialism coupled with the ongoing battles against racial and gender oppression. Engaging in a comprehensive analysis of the narratives presented in these films within Africana womanist framework, Ahemed (2017) claims that are "first supporters of the functionality" of art will further facilitate understandings of the intricate relationships among race, class, and gender, thereby offering a profound investigation into these intersecting social dynamics.

Among Gerima's films, *Sankofa* is the one which is grounded on Trans - Atlantic slave trade which forcibly transported millions of Africans from various regions of Africa to the Americas. This slave trades "embarked about 12.5 million slaves from Africa changed the demographics, economics, society, and politics of the eastern coast of the New World" (Black, 2015). The film mainly digs into the brutal experiences of Africana women character, as contemporary model Mona who is taken back in time by ancestral spirit to embody the identity

of Shola, an enslaved woman of this time. Through Shola's perspective, Mona witnesses the shocks of slavery, including sexual abuse and torture while exploring themes of African identity and resistance.

The cinematic narrative begins with an aged divine drummer also named *Sankofa*, performing the traditional music using drums as a medium to establish communication with the ancestral spirits of Ghana. In Ghana, an Akan word, “Sankofa” denotes the relevance of the past and the need to return to investigate the past (Adu-Boahen and Akansor, 2019). Sankofa is the mythical bird whose head is faced in the opposite direction to its body collecting eggs or seeds of wisdom and implies a need to delve African History and culture (Belachew, 2021). Mona, the protagonist Character of the film, is a modern individual of African descent and an American fashion model makes an encounter with Sankofa during a photographic session along the Ghanaian coastline. Back to the fifteenth century this cost was used by the Portuguese, Swedes, Dutch, English, Danish, French, and Brandenburg-Prussians along the Gold Coast, these fortifications were used to incarcerate captive Africans prior to their transport across the Atlantic (Engmann, 2023). After this occurrence, Mona dubbed as Shola and returns through a contracted corridor as if she came from another world into the light naked as a newborn. She is then hugged by African woman who covers her in a cloth. After this occurrence, Mona, now referred to as Shola, traverses a narrow corridor as if she has emerged from another realm into the light, as innocent as a newborn. She is then embraced by an African woman who wraps her in a cloth. Kande and Karaganis (1998) describe this filmic portrayal of her as a "reborn African," distancing her from the West and the locations of the diaspora where she is redeemed and finds her rightful place among those who, fully aware of their African history, are now at peace with themselves and with Africa. Africa here is represented as “the past and Ghana”. She experiences slavery, sexual abuse and torture. At Lafayette plantation in the Southern United States, she faces maltreatment and sexual violence. Though she is perceived as racially and sexually inferior by the white slaveholders she endures physical violence, sexual assault and economic marginalization. Martin (2009) analyzes this film reenactment as it underscores the sorrow of a common racial legacy tied to slavery. This is especially apparent in Mona. Haile Gerima juxtaposes the pre-colonial African identity with its traces in the postcolonial era by showcasing her transformation from a black model Mona to an African slave Shola.

Mona's transformation and experience of slavery as shola, shows the psychological impact on the identity of their African descendants and shows how the history of slavery relates to race. Haile Gerima initially sought to connect contemporary Africana women in the United States with their ancestral roots in Ghana, Africa. He then informed her about the history of slavery that brought her forebears to her current home. Lastly, he placed the character in scenarios that encourage her to reevaluate and redefine her identity. Kande and Karaganis, (1998) claim this way of the filmmaker's representation as three- step plan that will help black community to identify their historical past. Mona's (also Shola) dual role intersecting in a single body not only shows the historical bond of Africana women with Africa but also portrays the intergenerational history and trauma experienced by descendants of enslaved Africans its legacy. The non-linear narrative framework and panning cinematographic techniques highlight the transformative journey of Africana women, transitioning from modernity to slavery, underscoring the interconnectedness of individual and collective experiences. The story investigates the complexities of slavery and its relation to race, class, and gender dynamics.

On the Lafayette plantation, Mona/Shola meets Nunu, Noble Ali, and Shango, who each resist the daily realities of slavery in unique manners. Despite the ongoing oppression, Nunu, Shango, and Ali significantly motivate Mona to restore her African identity and stand up against her oppressors while finding ways to uphold their cultural heritage and safeguard their identities. According to Martin (2009) Nunu is the personification of African motherhood who participates with Shango in an underground society. It convenes secretly at night, comprising enslaved individuals from the plantation and other nearby estates community decides to devise a strategy aimed at liberating themselves. Ultimately, Mona returns to the present being enlightened and reconnects with her African roots. This symbolizes the importance of understanding one's past to understand the future. The film ends with a message of liberation and empowerment for those who African men and women have embraced the meaning of Sankofa and reconnecting with their heritage through Mona. According to Martin (2009) Gerima makes oblique references to a transatlantic African diaspora at the start and end of the film. Through Mona, the filmmaker shows Mona navigating the intersection of her African lineage confronts the root of racial discrimination and gender-based injustices against Africana people thus encumbering them with a dual layer of inequity. Mona's bond with her African roots facilitates a deeper understanding of her ancestors and their endurance against the atrocities of

slavery, including sexual and economic abuse. While the film intentionally stresses the unsympathetic treatment of white slave owners, simultaneously portrays the humanity, respect, strong bond and self-respect that existed among the enslaved African men and women between each other.

Bush Mama is Haile Gerima's another film made in the binging of his filmmaking carrier. This film also centrally presents the experiences of an African descent characters. The central character is unemployed Dorothy who is a pregnant Africana women living in Los Angeles mainly giving care for daughter Luann and her boyfriend, T. C., who is Vietnam War veteran that wrongfully imprisoned. The film captures Dorothy's journey as she deals with tough decisions to care for her daughter, support her incarcerated boyfriend give birth and lose the support that she gets from the government or Abort the baby and have the money to support the remaining family. She could not decide though she refuses to abort as her caseworker, pressures her to consider an abortion, threatening to cut off her benefits from the system. By following this Dorothy's internal conflict with her surroundings and self, the film depicts Dorothy's struggle with poverty, racism, and the legal system, symbolizing the resilience of Africana women. The film shows the emotions and dialogues/ voice over dialogues of Dorothy while she goes to different spots; the street, the care worker's office, home or with her neighbors or interacting with her boyfriend T.C in prison through letters he wrote to her.

Her initial appearance occurs on the street, where a boy forcibly snatches her pocketbook after a brief struggle and flees around a corner. This moment follows a scene depicting the police's harassment and interrogation of two Black men, presented in slow motion. The accompanying soundtrack features a complex blend of helicopter sounds, police walkie-talkies, and the pressing inquiries of welfare caseworkers, illustrating not only the overt and visual nature of the film's action but also the intense stress of the environment she is departing from. Subsequently, she finds herself in a welfare office, awaiting her turn while listening to other women grapple with their paperwork. Suddenly, a man known for harassing the staff appears outside wielding an axe; the police are summoned, and to the shock of everyone in the office, officers fatally shoot the man. Her days are consumed by visits to the welfare office and half-hearted battles with bureaucrats, leaving her completely drained. Everyone in Dorothy's life appears to possess more strength and conviction than she does early in the film. The palpable

sense of imprisonment and frustration among these characters transformed Dorothy into conscious and decisive Africana women. From that on she undergoes a transformation from a sleep-walking state to embody the spirit of the African militant heroine depicted on her wall poster, a picture of an Angolan woman carrying a child and a gun during the anti - colonial struggle.

Angi is a character that Dorothy did not give attention and played a major role to give meaning for her fragmented imagination and transformation. She is teenage girl involved in protests, one day returning with two posters for Dorothy's wall. She likes to put up angry posters in Dorothy's apartment because her mother disapproves of such things one poster depicts a black man who was shot twenty-five times by law enforcement, while the other features a woman holding a child and a machine gun, symbolizing the struggle for Angola's liberation. In the booklet titled *Liberation in Southern Africa: the Organization of Angolan women (1976)*, it is emphasized that Angolan women took on vital responsibilities, from directly engaging in the anti-colonial guerrilla fight to challenging colonial oppression and gender norms. Though the headline is bold, Haile Gerima deliberately refrains from showing the photograph until Dorothy herself is prepared to gaze at it in indignation and almost disbelief.

Empowered by the resilience of these Angolan women, Dorothy finds herself mirrored in their struggle, igniting within her a newfound determination to combat the racial injustices plaguing her Africana family, neighbors, and community. She takes a stand against the oppressive racial system that perpetrates abuse within her community and perpetrates the heinous act of raping black girls. As Asante (2003) stated, “to be black is to be against all forms of oppression, racism, patriarchy, child and white racial domination” her transition and resistance is marked by her actions of killing a white policeman who raped a teenage black girl and discarding her wig.

Thus, *Bush Mama* stands out as a remarkable piece of cinema, showcasing the development of Dorothy's political consciousness come to understand her African roots through a single image and it as a result brings a profound impact has on her identity. Haile Gerima specifically reconnects Africana women with Africa visually through a single picture hanging on Dorothy's wall. In this film the viewer can comprehend that self-consciousness is not something to be raised by others but something to be found within oneself. It shows this through

Dorothy's journey of self-discovery, highlighted by the movie's ending, which is both subtle and significantly transformative. Thus the film portrays the development of Dorothy's racial awareness and the transformative effect it has on her African rooted identity and gender injustice.

The third film which relate to Africana women and her African root is *Child of resistance*. It is a film that centers on an unnamed woman's imprisonment resulting from her advocacy for social justice. The film is a parabolic representation of Angela Davis who is a US author, poet, and activist is living proof that it is possible to survive, withstand, and overcome the full force of group power and the state fixed on the destruction of her because she inspires collective solidarity (Barat, 2016). Davis's scholarship on women, workers, and black people helped keep alive a radical vision, analysis and praxis (West, 2016). Based its story on the imprisonment of Davis, The narrative primarily is sated in a prison cell following a story of this unnamed black woman who expresses her refusal of subjugation. It depicts the Africana woman who is revealed as a fighter against the system that identified it as "the white man's system". This cinematic piece goes between her current circumstances in prison room to energetic dreams, voice over dialogues against extravagant depictions African descent people against harsh realities that she thinks hidden from them.

In her voice over dialogue, she stresses the need for African descent women and men understand their origin by identifying her black community as descendants of Africa. Since the time they leave their "mother land"/Africa their ancestors have been confronting oppressive systems. Within her self-examination, she draws strength from her ancestry and acknowledges the necessity of solidarity between Black men and women. She also conveys her frustration at being reduced to labels like "thief" and "criminal," which misrepresent the distinctive identity of Africana people who come out of such struggle and resilience. The character examines her identity and the challenges faced by Africana men, reflecting on their historical and social roles. She expresses frustration with the objectification and manipulation of Africana identities by white society, portraying it as a systemic war against African descent people. The film contrasts her confinement with montages of oppression, including images of young Black children in chains and a white performer entertaining a segregated audience, highlighting the harsh realities of racial inequality. To Africana womanists also stress importance of social

context to comprehend reality of the Africana communities' experiences and struggles as oppressed people (Ahmed, 2017).

Her voice-over highlights her strength and commitment to avoid being victimized, stressing her unwillingness to yield to racial and sexual oppression. She urges Africana men to acknowledge their common fight, appealing for them to respect women and come together for freedom. In her voice-over message, she invites Africana men to stand by her side as:

Black man... just start treating her (woman) right she is you men she is you.
No! No! ... Don't give me that same story. Got revenge your master. Change
your master. It is your life I know! know! You are the way you are. it is about
to change that one how long you are playing a game? Stop acting like your
master ... you can get it together. You and me! ya! Just got your shape up!
And clean your ... let us move am your queen and you are my king. we walk
tall and proud without any

Her speech emphasizes a deep relationship between her racial and gender identities, highlighting the significance of collective support in addressing systemic injustices. Ultimately, the film advocates for empowerment, self-awareness, and the significance of community in the pursuit of true freedom. The subversive visual storytelling is amplified by a raw monologue that offers a window into the protagonist's innermost thoughts and fears. Through voice-over narration, her emotions, thoughts, and raw feelings are conveyed to the external world, embodying the archetype of the Freedom Fighter or Liberator. Referencing her ancestors, she learns resilience from African slaves, claiming them as her lineage from Africa. This film portrays the strength of the Africana women character, who, despite facing racial and sexual oppression, demonstrates resilience similar to her forebears who she claims as Africans.

She identifies herself as a Black woman of African descent, living under the oppressive system of Whiteness and battling against both mental and institutional slavery, just as her ancestors during the trans- Atlantic slave trade. She embraces her African heritage and refers to her community as "my people." In her narration, she expresses a desire for unity with Black men, asserting her identity as a Black woman of African heritage and emphasizing their shared struggles. She firmly connects her identity to Africa and identifies those African individuals

who arrived in the Americas for sugar plantations as her forebears. She acknowledges that her challenges are intertwined with those of her brothers and sisters, highlighting that many are still trapped in a colonial mindset. However, she is determined not to succumb to this mentality, viewing her mind as a refuge against manipulation.

The Other film of Gerima, *Ashes and Embers* depicts the story of Ned Charles who is a veteran lost with an unfamiliar system that rewards him with nothing but racism. His girlfriend rather is an activist in the civil rights movement and his grandmother, forced to sell her hard-won land to schemer both was around him. Within this context, the film presents his inner fight challenged by his African-descent grandmother and girlfriend, Liza Jane. The film presents Ned, with hunting memories of the Vietnam War, he is forced to change his perception of his and the life of his surroundings by juxtaposing the ideology of his grandmother who is a spiritual and resilient Africana woman, and his girlfriend who is an advocate of Black Nationalism. According to Stephenson (2018) the film is a kind of cinematic resistance that might help to revisit the multiplicity of trauma and identity by building complex characters, narrative of psychological trauma and dislocation by presenting Ned's difficulty to connect with his grandmother, girlfriend and close friends. Following his return from the Vietnam War, the protagonist grapples with a sense of alienation from both middle-class Africana people who have assimilated into the system and radicals striving for societal change. Supporting this interpretation Kai (2016) also understands, emphasizing personal and historic memory using non-conventional and semiotic technique, it reconnoiters Ned's psychological dislocation and trauma as he wanders from Los Angeles to Washington, D.C., to the countryside trying to understand his tormented past.

Through Ned's grandmother and girlfriend brings us to realization that his alienation is rooted in the deeply ingrained racism against black people, a potent yet often invisible force. He has witnessed his girlfriend expressing emotionally how African descent people face racial and economic segregation for being black and African descendent and calling upon all Africana men and women to unite in challenging the domineering structures. She, who is a member of a discussion group with a Black Nationalist ideology, plays a key role in shaking his beliefs. As specified by Gerima (1991) Liza Jane is portrayed as an informed and articulate activist involved in a study group focused on systemic transformation. She has a complex emotional and physical

relationship with Ned which highlights their contrasting approaches to struggle. While Liza Jane engages in intellectual debates about class and racial exploitation, Ned remains detached, symbolizing his emotional turmoil. Their conflict is essential for their personal growth, with Jane embodying intellectualism and him representing emotional struggle. The film emphasizes the effects of racism and the fight for liberation through the group's discussions which this Africana woman is a member, presented in a cinematic montage.

Although the film's protagonist is Ned, the profound impact of his girlfriend on his ideological evolution is undeniable. His girlfriend has given a major place in the film's story to illuminate the persuasive impact of racism and the struggles for liberation, portrayed through this group's discussions. As Dahy (2021) race and class biases are prioritized over gender issues for African descent women and she was more concerned about her race than her gender. But dynamic underscores the active participation of Africana women in combating racism alongside Africana men, despite facing strains in their relationships. It underscores how the burden of racism goes beyond gender issues, stressing the united fight against systemic oppression.

Ned's grandmother embodies the strength of a generation, reminding her grandson of the challenges and beliefs of their forebears. She represents the “amber, the fire, and the struggle... personifying History, time, and space.” Gerima (1991) highlighting the ongoing fight for conviction and survival in rural Africa. During Ned's visit, she urges him to maintain belief, drawing inspiration from their ancestors who once possessed vast resources and land in their origin. Ned, however, does not fit with her life in rural Virginia. He is in ongoing journey and Gerima explained him as “a ticking time bomb that will either be self-destructive or be detonated toward self-preservation” (Gerima, 1991). But Liza Jane also understands the significance of the grandmother and takes her as her own, ensuring the past is reassured and guaranteed. Gerima aims to make the viewer meet the grandmother as a caretaker and bearer of culture. Through both Ned's girlfriend and his grandmother Haile Gerima emblem racial issues often pose greater challenges than questions of gender for Africana women in the United States.

Through the Weight of historical injustice related to Africa are fallen Africana women characters, Haile Gerima's cinematic narratives crafted not to overshadow Africana women's roles as fighters, activists, and thinkers, care givers and decision making skill. By centering Africana women's stories, Haile Gerima not only acknowledges their historical challenges but

also calls for a deeper exploration of their triumphs and resilience by connecting it with African History and Heritage. The essentiality of the dual focus for understanding the deep spectrum of their experiences and their historical and cultural realities directly related to their African Origin. Through an analysis of the historical contexts the cinematic works portray the connections between Africana women and their African heritage, emphasizing the complex interactions of race, class, and gender. Situated within broader historical and cultural paradigms, these films highlight the significance of Africana women's experiences in relation to the African continent.

5.2.2. Agency, Alliance, and Attributes in the Films of Haile Gerima

In examining Haile Gerima's cinematic vision, Africana Womanism provides a culturally grounded framework for interpreting how his films articulate African-centered notions of resistance, identity, and collective survival. Alexander-Floyd and Simien (2006) refine Clenora Hudson-Weems's foundational model of Africana Womanism by organizing its eighteen defining characteristics into three overarching analytical categories: agency, alliances, and attributes. This tripartite structure offers conceptual clarity, enabling a deeper understanding of how Africana women's lived experiences, cultural ethics, and political struggles are represented within creative works.

By grouping Hudson-Weems's eighteen tenets into these three interconnected domains, Alexander-Floyd and Simien establish a holistic interpretive method that emphasizes both the self-defining power of the Africana woman (agency) and her commitment to communal struggle and interdependence (alliances), as well as the spiritual, moral, and nurturing qualities (attributes) that sustain African communities across generations. This synthesis not only illuminates the theoretical breadth of Africana Womanism but also provides a culturally specific lens for analyzing artistic representations that engage the complexities of race, gender, and liberation.

Applying this framework to Gerima's body of work particularly films such as *Bush Mama* (1976), *Ashes and Embers* (1982), and *Sankofa* (1993)- reveals how his female protagonists embody the Womanist triad of agency, alliance, and attributes. Although many of these narratives unfold outside Africa, they remain deeply anchored in African worldviews, ancestral memory, and communal ethics. Through Africana Womanist analysis, Haile Gerima's

women characters emerge not simply as individuals navigating oppression, but as cultural carriers whose resilience, solidarity, and moral strength affirm Africa's enduring spiritual and ideological presence within the diaspora.

5.2.2.1. **Agency /Nommo**

The first theme emphasizes self-naming and self-definition as vital elements of African culture. Hudson-Weems (1997) argues that self-naming is crucial for reclaiming identity and countering prevailing stereotypes. This focus on agency empowers Black women to articulate their experiences and positions Africana Womanism as a genuine response to patriarchy. By reclaiming their narratives, women of African descent can express their unique realities, reinforcing their identities and fostering collective action which is denoted by a notion known as Nommo.

Africana Womanism is a theoretical framework rooted in African traditions and Afrocentrism, focusing specifically on the lived experiences, challenges, needs, and aspirations of women of African descent. This framework distinguishes itself from mainstream feminism and traditional womanism by offering a perspective tailored to the unique realities those women of African heritage encounter (Dove, 1998). The concept was formally introduced by Hudson-Weems in 1987, following her extensive engagement in public discussions that highlighted the critical significance of self-identification among women of African descent, who often face distinct challenges. Hudson-Weems (1989, 2007) asserts that it is as a model aimed at addressing the obstacles confronted by Africana women, drawing inspiration from the strength and resilience displayed by African women warriors throughout history, while also recognizing the extensive legacy of activism among women of African descent.

Hudson-Weems (2024) further elaborates on Africana Womanism, defining it as an inclusive framework that encompasses women of African descent from various backgrounds, including those from the Continental African region as well as the African Diaspora, which includes the Caribbean, the Americas, Europe, and Canada. The term "Africana woman" signifies this inclusivity, acknowledging the shared heritage and connection that emerges from African ancestry, irrespective of geographical location. Asante (2020) supports the framework, emphasizing its efficacy in comprehending the experiences of Africana women dispersed across

the globe. Dove (1998) further elaborated that Africana Womanism is essential for the progression of Afrocentric thought, as it prioritizes the female perspective and acknowledges the significant roles women play in the narratives of Africa and the African diaspora. She also highlighted that the framework is anchored in Afrocentric principles which enhance the concept of Afrocentricity by clarifying the interplay among race, gender, and class-specific factors that influence the lives of marginalized Africana women.

Among eighteen characteristics of Africana womanism, Africana womanists place significant emphasis on the principles of self-naming and self-definition. As noted by Hudson-Weems (1998), the act of naming inherently bestows meaning upon a subject. Historically, Africana individuals have faced systemic denial of their ability to define themselves, making the reclamation of this agency crucial in countering ongoing degradation, isolation, and existential threats. Hudson-Weems further posits that she engaged actively in the processes of naming and defining by developing an African-centered paradigm specifically tailored to women of African descent. This paradigm is shaped through careful observation of the traditional roles, attributes, and activities of this collective group sharing African ancestry. In support of this perspective, Dahy (2021) underscores that self-naming and self-definition are critical to Africana womanism and serve as fundamental elements in the pursuit of self-identity. This interconnection implies that the process of assigning a name to an entity is inherently linked to the infusion of meaning, thus illustrating the significance of these concepts within the broader discourse on identity among Africana women.

Hudson-Weems (2020) emphasizes that establishing self-naming and self-definition is crucial for Africana woman. Once these foundational elements are recognized, the other sixteen traits of Africana womanism align seamlessly, reflecting both the physical and spiritual essence of Africana women and celebrating their rich traditions. Africana womanists take on the responsibility to define themselves proactively, ensuring they shape their own realities. The concept of *Nommo* is particularly significant in this regard, as it underscores the importance of self-naming and self-identification. Harrison (1972) highlights it denotes language and spoken word as a powerful tool that shapes our reality, influences social interactions, and creates shared understandings. Karenga (2003) builds on this, explaining how language unveils deeper meanings of experiences and encourages self-representation. This concept illustrates spoken words creative and transformative capacity, extending to collective communication and the

creation of cultural narratives. It emphasizes the significance of self-expression and the assertion of one's voice amidst oppression. Through Nommo, individuals and communities engage in dialogue, storytelling, and cultural practices that shape their identities, emphasizing the importance of Africana individuals in defining themselves.

In African culture, self-naming, known as Nommo, holds great significance under the belief that true existence comes from accurate naming. Ntiri (1993), referencing Lerone Bennett Jr., emphasizes that naming should not be left solely to the dominant group, as Black individuals increasingly seek to define themselves. Research by Alexander-Floyd and Simien (2006) highlights how Africana Womenists advocate for the importance of Nommo and the empowerment of women of African descent in shaping their life circumstances.

Africana womanists emphasize that societal stereotypes are rooted in historical labeling and categorization. Hudson-Weems (2020) argues for a paradigm shift where those previously labeled take on the role of 'namers,' rather than allowing the dominant group to define them. Additionally, Mbiti (1969) suggests that names serve as lasting reminders of the African community's shared knowledge. This collective aspect of naming resonates with Africana womanism's focus on the interconnectedness of individuals and their communities.

In this regard, Africana Womanism underscores the significance of expression in cultivating social consciousness and solidarity, particularly emphasizing the necessity of self-definition among individuals of African descent. Through the lens of Nommo, Africana women are inspired to develop their personal narratives and fortify their communities via collective cultural practices, including storytelling and music. This framework positions Africana Womanist theory as an essential analytical tool for exploring the representation and experiences of Africana women in diverse creative mediums, such as film.

a. Child of Resistance

Child of resistance primarily unfolds mainly within the confines of a plain solitary jail cell, centering on this unnamed woman who contemplates the perceived degradation and mental colonization of Black race, particularly in a Eurocentric context. She contends that her imprisonment is a result of her rejection of this colonization, positioning herself in contrast to

other Black individuals who are metaphorically 'blindfolded' by systemic oppression. She articulates that her presence in this facility serves as a platform for voicing her dissent against a society marked by racial and sexual oppression.

The narrative structure of the film employs an ana-chronic approach, oscillating between the protagonist's current state of isolation in her jail cell and vivid daydreams or nightmarish visions. These sequences feature Black men and women adorned in opulent attire, accompanied by vibrant jazz, cruising in luxurious cars, and socializing with white party-goers on one side, while a group of white individuals gazes upon her from the other. In a dreamlike scene around the beginning, the prisoner enters a bar busy with both Black and white customers led by her guard. A significant moment occurs when the camera descends to reveal that every Black person depicted is physically shackled to one another, binding them by their feet and hands. Despite their captivity, they appear oblivious to their situation, focusing solely on their perceived "social status," as noted by the Black women prisoner's identification (Thomas, 2013). The initial casual interaction between Black and white individuals quickly transforms into a disturbing tableau, wherein white individuals objectify Black bodies, engaging in lewd behavior while the white males maintain a façade of nonchalance, seemingly reveling in the intrigue.

Following this impactful introductory scene, the film gives see close-up of the protagonist's face, transitioning to a point-of-view shot as she surveys her cell, noting a discarded shoe, a toilet, a derelict sink, and the white guard passing by. Then the viewer will be introduced to a dark, assertive voice-over, emanating from the imprisoned African woman, whose identity remains undisclosed throughout the film. She articulates her frustration at being merely labeled a "convict," lamenting that even her own society fails to recognize her true self. Expressing fatigue with the burden of self-explanation, she conveys a sense of hopelessness regarding the likelihood of others understanding her and her community's authentic identities. This is exemplified when she questions, "Who will understand me? Not even my own people. Even my own skin they call me convict. How would they know? ... How can they know? ... They are blindfolded ... It is readymade definitions created for them". Through this assertion, the character underscores the pressing need for self-recognition and understanding.

In alignment with Hudson-Weems' (1993) perspective, which posits that women of African descent must utilize *nommo* to reclaim their identities by rejecting negative labels, the protagonist ultimately empowers herself by naming herself, asserting her autonomy in defining

her identity. This act stands in stark contrast to the impositions of an oppressive system. Hudson-Weems' interpretations of Lerone Bennett further emphasize the importance of authenticity in self-identification, asserting that historical classifications and nomenclatures have significantly influenced the narratives surrounding Black identities. Thus, Bennett advocates for individuals of African descent to embrace self-definition as a means to foster empowerment and cultural authenticity.

In his film, Haile Gerima intentionally refrains from providing a name for the character, instead allowing her to inherently define herself and narrate her own story, as well as the broader narrative of her community. Gerima (2021) articulates in a noncreative writing piece that African women possess the unique ability to articulate their own stories and those of their ancestors. This concept is reflected in his work, *Child of Resistance*, where the woman protagonist asserts her identity and self-naming through a combination of voice-over dialogue and symbolic action.

The character identifies herself as a Black woman of African descent, enduring the oppressive structures imposed by a Eurocentric system. She emerges as a figure of resistance, akin to her ancestors who fought against the historical injustices of slavery. Within her community, there is a pervasive skepticism towards the narratives presented by white social scientists, which often perpetuate stereotypes that do not reflect the community's lived experiences. The protagonist emphasizes this disconnect, stating, "They believe everything you (white social scientists) tell about them". reflecting on the community's struggle against long-standing stereotypes that have been propagated for centuries.

The character articulates a profound sense of interconnectedness with her community, revealing that "my life is intertwined with those of my brothers and sisters," who are similarly ensnared by systemic oppression. Despite acknowledging the fear that comes with such confinement, she expresses a strong defiance against this colonial mentality, stating, "I am right here because I refused to be a colony" This declaration underscores her belief in the sanctity of her mind, which she determines to keep free from manipulation, thereby asserting her agency.

The film illustrates the protagonist's desire for people of African descent to reclaim their identity, rather than passively accepting the definitions imposed by external entities. She actively advocates for the necessity of self-definition among Black individuals, challenging her community's adherence to the narratives constructed by white social scientists. Through her

struggle, she highlights the historical inaccuracies and biases that have mischaracterized her community by saying:

They (her community) believe everything you (white social scientists) telling about them stereotyping they don't know everything social scientists written for centuries we believe ... and fighting its coming. History is unraveling the white man's wadding veils. My life is in this (person) walls brothers and sisters out their running with their chains too. We all are inside outside it makes no difference.

Haile Gerima's portrayal of the protagonist's monologue reveals her anguish in the pursuit of authentic self-expression and identity. Citing Eze (2018), the importance of Africana intellectual and cultural traditions in addressing systemic domination becomes evident, as the term "Africana" signifies a confluence of knowledge and experiences between Africa and the African Diaspora. In the film, Haile Gerima seeks to cultivate this bond, illustrating the protagonist's unwavering connection to her heritage. Although she does not explicitly refer to herself as an "Africana woman," her declaration, "We (Black men and women) are prisoners of war since I have been snatched and abducted from the motherland (Africa)," clarifies her identity as a Black woman of African descent.

Furthermore, her reference to "my people" solidifies her connection to the collective identity of Black individuals who share a common lineage. In reflective voice-over dialogue, she seeks solidarity with Black men, expressing, "hi my people, I hope they defend me. I am their woman. I am them, and they are me". Through these sentiments, the protagonist embodies the identity of an "African-descendent Black woman," solidifying her agency and connection to her heritage.

The character in the film discards the identity labels ascribed to individuals of African descent by others, particularly white individuals. She articulates her dismay regarding the terms 'Thief,' 'property,' and 'criminal,' which are imposed upon Black individuals, stating, "These are readymade definitions created for them (blacks, men and women)... Thief, property, and criminal- they are born into their definitions." Her frustration with these reductive labels is powerfully conveyed through a harsh voice-over monologue.

As this internal dialogue progresses, the filmmaker employs a dream sequence in which the protagonist, a Black woman of African descent, confronts a white man attempting to assault her. Concurrently, a montage reveals Black police officers sitting in a state of subjugation, their hands restrained. These visual representations resonate with the discourse posited by African womanists, who advocate for the critical examination of race within the context of Black women's experiences (Nitiri, 2001). According to Houston (1993), understanding the complexities faced by women of African descent requires acknowledging the intertwined dimensions of gender, race, and class, while also recognizing the intersecting forms of oppression they endure, including sexism, racism, and classism.

Throughout the film, the protagonist primarily identifies herself through the lens of her racial identity as a Black woman, emphasizing the myriad challenges she faces as a result of her race. However, it is not until the film's conclusion that she addresses the issue of her gender and the complexities associated with it. In this moment of self-reflection, she recognizes the significance of forming alliances with Black men who genuinely comprehend her lived experiences. Ultimately, in a poignant moment of self-dialogue, she implores all Black men to remain steadfast and acknowledge the harsh realities that confront them.

In alignment with this theme, the filmmaker presents a scene in which the protagonist daydreams about being shackled and dragged by a white man in a bar, a circumstance that elicits indifference from both Black and white patrons. Notably, the camera captures her gaze fixing on a young Black boy in the bar, who is also shackled, with the word 'Black' emblazoned on his jacket. Following her departure, the audience observes the boy expressing his frustration by shaking his restrained hands, signifying his yearning for liberation. The scene gradually reveals a group of Black men and women who appear to indulge in the nightlife, yet they are metaphorically linked by a chain. Among the crowd, a Black individual in a wheelchair dons a The United States Army uniform, further illustrating common issues faced by individuals of African descent. The film highlights these struggles through a scene in which the protagonist navigates the jail floor, deliberately stepping only on the black-painted spaces, underscoring the prominent themes of racial identity and shared oppression among Black individuals.

The character in the film also connects her identity deeply with blues music, expressing it vividly as a part of her essence "Like a long steady river... Modern dungeon... Prison in

between funky walls” Her words reflect a haunting commentary on the legacy of slavery, highlighting her plight and the collective suffering of her people in a “plantation dungeon.” She questions the ignorance of others regarding their struggles and underscores her empathy by attempting to help a young black boy trying to escape his own torment through drugs. As D. Diallo (2013) elucidates, American Black music including the blues has its origins in the work-songs of enslaved individuals. The availability of drums and other instruments was restricted by slave owners, who perceived them as instruments of rebellion. Consequently, the blues emerged as a powerful symbol of freedom and resistance. He further argues that women's blues have explicitly challenged the dominant cultural narratives propagated by the Christian church, providing a platform for the expression of Black cultural identity.

Following the aforementioned voiceover, the character also proclaims, “More blacks are behind these bars (jail bars). No! No! The European man never examines himself, never throughout history. He never examines himself. Instead, it is always the black man's fault ... What does he know? He doesn't question himself. He is just a man from the moon. Going in for surgery into the black man's brain...” This underscores the shared plight of the imprisoned Black woman and the young boy. While attempting to prevent the young black prisoner from taking his own life, she attributes the systemic issues they face to the legacy of colonialism. This representation in the film exemplifies the struggle of women to protect subsequent generations while navigating the same racial injustices. And the character's self-expressive monologues and the accompanying montage sequences compel the audience to engage with the narrative through the protagonist's perspective, ultimately highlighting the complexities of identity, resistance, and the impact of historical oppression.

The character's exploration of black men identity and historical context reveals the complexities of racial and gender dynamics within her narrative. She articulates her questioning of the black male experience by stating, “All his time is after my man's bone tricking, measuring, cutting, studding, lying, mystifying, gossiping, Pepping my man's ... now he is after his mind. Man's brain is what he is after now. What is wrong with the black man?” Accompanying this introspection is a montage scene that establishes her physical and metaphorical confinement a prominent symbol of societal oppression. The protagonist is depicted sitting in a swaying chair adorned with a cross, surrounded by a group of white men and

women who gaze upon her, while a blindfolded black figure is situated between them. The imagery is starkly contrasted by the white man pushing her chair, whose smile conveys complicity in her subjugation. This visual juxtaposition is complemented by her voiceover, which critiques the surrounding figures as “clowns” and “performers,” suggesting a façade intended to distract from the harrowing realities of racial oppression.

Subsequent scenes unfold within the confines of her prison cell, revealing a significant moment of juxtaposition between her and a black male character. The black male figure, similarly isolated and pushed by a white man, is obscured by a cloud of white individuals, illustrating the intentional segregation between black men and women. The protagonist perceives this division not as a mere coincidence but as a deliberate construct of a white-powered society, framing it as a war waged against both herself and her male counterpart in an ongoing struggle to which she resolutely refuses to succumb.

Within the prison walls, the character embraces her identity as a fighter, deriving strength from her ancestral lineage. She acknowledges the resilience exhibited by women of African descent throughout history, who have cultivated coping mechanisms rooted in their cultural heritage. This acknowledgment leads her to recognize the indomitable spirit inherited across generations, which informs her values and virtues. She poignantly articulates her understanding of struggle by stating, “

Parting between walls this is war really war. White man is declaring war on me and on black people... Constant historical war... I was born in wartime and it is still happening ... it is ... The only choice I have is to keep carrying a struggle on. It is my responsibility to carry on and on and on.

The accompanying montage featuring young black children chained to chairs visually represents their oppression, while a white performer entertains against the American flag, underscoring racial inequalities. The protagonist, weary and confined, embodies the weight of her struggles, and a moment of distress arises as she symbolically covers her eyes, revealing her anguish. An unsettling scene follows with a white police officer's attack thwarted at the last moment, portraying her resilience. The imagery of black men breaking free from chains alongside a sewing chair being repaired illustrates the complexity of her fight and emphasizes the crucial solidarity needed between black men and women in their struggle against oppression.

Overall, these cinematic representations and symbolic elements serve as compelling articulations of the multifaceted nature of the black female protagonist's struggle, while underscoring the significance of unity and mutual support among individuals of African descent. Her identity, intertwined with that of black men, is encapsulated in her declaration: "Hi my people, I hope they defend me. I am their woman. I am them and they are me" This interconnectedness aligns with Myers (2004), who posits that self-knowledge forms the foundation of understanding within the Africana community, emphasizing that personal growth and development rest upon deeply valued human relationships.

While the protagonist views black men as integral to her identity, she challenges them to resist the delusions perpetuated by a dominating white system by asserting, "White men, tired of their emptiness, are now trying to make you empty too. They keep you away from the reality of these walls historical walls he has surrounded you with. Concentration camp" .This sentiment resonates with bell hooks (2015), who articulates that discussions on domination inherently address the dominators, illuminating the power dynamics that dictate the direction and impact of discourse. Similarly, Nitri (1998) emphasizes the complexities of language as a battleground for struggle, further contextualizing the protagonist's narrative.

The visual narrative presented also include with a depiction of her rotating barefoot on a black-and-white floor, an image that evokes a sense of disorientation. This is followed by a blurred portrayal of women running freely through a corridor, with a sunset visible at the end, symbolizing transition and hope. The scene shifts back to the protagonist, who returns through a corridor illuminated by electric light. Accompanying these visuals is a voiceover from a pivotal character, who addresses the male audience directly with a powerful message about self-awareness and accountability by saying;

Black man black man you hear me but start getting your shit together. For instants it is not right the way you treat your women you know it. No don't give me that shit. Ah ... just start treating her right she is you men she is you. No! no!... don't give me that same story. Got revenge your master. Change your master. It is your life I know I know you are the way you are. It is about to change that one how long you are playing a game? Stop acting like your master ... You can get it together. You and me! ya! Just

got your shape up and clean your ... Let us move am your queen and you are my king. We walk tall and proud without any talking.

The protagonist urges a "black man" to reflect on his treatment of women and to change harmful habits shaped by oppressive legacies, emphasizing autonomy with the call to stop imitating his master. She highlights their partnership, declaring, "I am your queen, and you are my king," which promotes mutual respect and dignity. And her message advocates for authenticity and the potential for positive self-image over negative stereotypes. This dialogue not only encourages the male character to overcome his racial and gender identity limitations but also stresses the importance of solidarity among black individuals for achieving freedom and self-determination. Ultimately, the visual and vocal elements portray the intricacies of racial and gender identities while championing empowerment and positive representation, asserting that true liberation requires both individual and collective efforts.

Thus, the film *Child of Resistance* centers on an African descent black woman who embarks on a journey of self-identification and resistance against community injustices. This narrative resonates with the Africana womanist framework of self-naming and self-definition, as discussed by Hudson Weems (1998), who highlights the empowering aspect of nommo in reclaiming identity. Asante (1987) further elaborates on nommo as the transformative power of language that articulates deeply personal experiences. Through her poignant expressions and limited physical movements, the protagonist symbolizes the systemic barriers that impede black individuals from self-identification while asserting her strength as an African descent black woman. Self-naming and self-definition are central themes as the protagonist confronts societal challenges while remaining connected to her heritage, exemplifying agency and resistance to externally imposed labels. Cinematically, voice-over dialogue reveals her identity, history, and emotions, alongside symbolic imagery and montages that reflect the complexities of her experiences. This representation aligns with Yancy's (2004) interpretation of nommo which describes it as a symbolic action that defines the black self and actualizes life through "creative word magic."

The film concludes with a dramatic prison escape scene, where previously confined Black men break free, shattering their restraints. As described by Thomas (2013) the film finishes with sound over the mages. Her voice over comes flows over a marvelous use of "closing credits" directly to the "Black man," encouraging him to "get his shit together" and

embrace "revolutionary love," while also addressing the issue of anti-Black sexism. He has also stated that as she moves from sharp critique to a hopeful vision for the future of Black men and women, the scene changes. The credits begin to roll, listing the title, cast, music, cinematography, lighting, assistant director, props, and crew, along with general and special acknowledgments. These credits look like they are etched on the walls of a prison cell, resembling graffiti in hieroglyphic style. The portrayal of the guard underscores the film's critique of neoslavery and the ongoing struggle for liberation illustrating true liberation requires both individual agency and mutual support among Africana women and men.

Moreover, the film counters stereotypes by allowing Africana women to reclaim narratives and challenge societal misrepresentations, emphasizing the significance of voice and perspective. Through storytelling, the protagonist asserts her identity and empowers others. The depiction of Nommo underscores the importance of words in articulating both individual and collective identities among African descent people. By intertwining the concepts of Nommo, self-naming, and self-definition the film, provides a nuanced examination of personal and cultural identity, while highlighting the importance of resistance and self-expression in the face of oppression.

b. *Harvest: 3000* (ፖርት ቫ ሽህ አመት)

Clenora Hudson-Weems (1993) positions agency as the defining feature of Africana Womanism, conceptualizing it as the capacity of African women to self-define and self-name, to exercise self-determination, and to anchor strategies of collective survival within African cultural traditions. Unlike Western feminist paradigms that often privilege individual autonomy or frame women's struggles in isolation from race and class, Africana Womanism insists on a holistic understanding of women's roles within family, community, and historical continuity. In this light, Haile Gerima's *Harvest: 3000 Years* provides a cinematic articulation of Africana Womanist agency through the figure of Beletech, the peasant girl whose prophetic imagination, quotidian labor, and ultimate sacrifice foreground the Africana Womanist principles of Nommo, resistance within patriarchy, and communal survival.

Central to Africana Womanist thought is the power of self-naming, what Hudson-Weems describes as Nommo the generative force of the spoken word that enables African women to resist externally imposed identities and assert their own realities. Beletech embodies this

principle through her rejection of gendered subordination and her insistence on envisioning alternative possibilities for herself and her family. Her prophetic dream sequences, in which her family breaks free from feudal bondage, exemplify the Womanist praxis of naming liberation even in the face of oppression. In theoretical terms, her dreams constitute an epistemological intervention: they reclaim the narrative of peasant struggle from the landlord's hegemonic gaze and re-situate it within the liberatory discourse of African historical memory. Here, Beletech performs the Africana Womanist function of oral testimony, where language, vision, and imagination are mobilized to create counter-hegemonic knowledge.

Equally significant is Beletech's resistance within patriarchy, which Hudson-Weems identifies as inseparable from class exploitation, colonial history, and racial subjugation. Africana Womanism refuses to isolate gender oppression from these intersecting forces, and Beletech's position demonstrates this intersectionality. Her labor situates her firmly within the class struggle of Ethiopia's peasantry under feudalism, yet her rejection of gendered inferiority within her own household asserts her determination to resist patriarchal containment. Even in play, she contests the authority of boys, embodying what Hudson-Weems calls the "self-assertive spirit" of Africana Womanist agency. Her drowning while saving a cow illustrates both the exploitative weight of her responsibilities and the centrality of women's labor to cultural survival. Within the Africana Womanist framework, this moment is not reducible to tragedy; it signifies the woman as the backbone of survival, whose sacrifices secure the continuity of the collective even as her personal aspirations remain unfulfilled.

The communal dimension of Beletech's agency is particularly aligned with Hudson-Weems's emphasis on collective survival as the bedrock of Africana Womanism. Unlike liberal feminist models that valorize individual achievement, Africana Womanism locates agency in the shared endurance and cultural reproduction of family and community. Beletech's daily labor, tending livestock, producing charcoal, and contributing to the subsistence economy, enacts this ethos of communal survival. Though denied access to formal education and broader freedoms, she embodies what Hudson-Weems calls the "preserver of culture and nurturer of community." Her prophetic visions reinforce this role by embedding her family's immediate struggles within the *longue durée* of Ethiopian historical endurance, the "three thousand years" that Haile

Gerima's title invokes. Thus, Beletech's individual resistance becomes legible as part of a continuum of collective struggle against systemic domination.

Finally, Haile Gerima's cinematic technique itself reflects Africana Womanist principles by deploying Nommo as a liberatory narrative device. His privileging of orality, song, and dream sequences aligns with Hudson-Weems's assertion that African women's truths are often articulated through oral and symbolic forms rather than linear, written discourse. The thrice-repeated dream of Beletech exemplifies the oral tradition's reliance on rhythmic repetition to affirm meaning, marking her as both seer and truth-teller. In so doing, Haile Gerima positions her voice as central to the articulation of peasant resistance, displacing silence and victimhood with testimony and agency.

Read through the theoretical lens of Africana Womanism, *Harvest: 3000 Years* reframes Beletech not merely as a tragic casualty of feudal exploitation but as a cultural and political figure who embodies the Womanist principles of self-definition, resistance, and communal survival. Her dreams operate as symbolic enactments of Nommo, reclaiming narrative authority and envisioning liberation amidst subjugation. While her death and that of Kebebe mark the film's tragic conclusion, her imaginative insistence on freedom affirms Haile Gerima's alignment with Africana Womanist thought: the recognition of women's agency as the foundation of cultural continuity and the seedbed of revolutionary possibility.

C. Bush Mama

Clenora Hudson-Weems (1993) identifies Africana Womanism as a paradigm that privileges self-definition, maternal responsibility, and communal survival as central to Black women's agency, distinguishing it from Western feminist discourses that often isolate gender oppression from race and class. Haile Gerima's *Bush Mama* dramatizes these Africana Womanist principles through Dorothy, a Black mother in Watts whose transformation from silenced passivity to militant self-definition exemplifies what Nah Dove (1998) calls the "African Woman as culture-bearer" the one who nurtures continuity while simultaneously resisting systemic domination. Dorothy's trajectory illustrates how self-naming through Nommo,

maternal agency, resistance to interlocking oppressions, and collective revolutionary voice operate together to define Africana Womanist praxis in lived experience.

Dorothy's journey begins in silence, overwhelmed by the bureaucratic discourse of the welfare system and the surveillance of the state. Officials determine her eligibility, police decide her partner T.C.'s fate, and neighbors trivialize her struggles. Here, Dorothy exemplifies what Patricia Hill Collins (2000) terms the "controlling images" of Black women under racial capitalism the welfare mother, the silenced dependent. Yet, through exposure to T.C.'s prison letters and Angi's political consciousness, she gradually asserts what Hudson-Weems (1993) describes as *Nommo*, the power of naming one's reality against externally imposed identities. The letters, though halting and grammatically imperfect, operate as revolutionary speech acts, affirming Collins's (2000) argument that subaltern knowledge vernacular speech, othermother wisdom constitutes valid epistemology. By the final prison scene, Dorothy claims authorship of her own narrative, writing to T.C. with natural hair revealed, an act of literal and symbolic self-naming.

This process of self-definition is inseparable from Dorothy's role as a mother. Africana Womanism stresses family-centeredness and the Africana woman as cornerstone of survival, a theme reinforced by Layli Maparyan's (2006) emphasis on "spiritualized activism" in Womanist praxis, where care, protection, and struggle are inseparably linked. Dorothy's relationship with her daughter Luann anchors her existence, and the loss of her unborn child becomes a tragic metaphor for the suffocation of Black futures under systemic oppression. Yet, as Dove (1998) reminds us, the Africana woman is both nurturer and warrior; Dorothy transforms this loss into militancy. When she kills the police officer to protect her daughter from sexual violence, she enacts the ultimate form of maternal agency, prioritizing the survival of the family and community over submission to state authority. In this moment, she becomes the "bush mama" a mother-warrior whose actions crystallize the Womanist principle of ensuring continuity through struggle.

Haile Gerima situates Dorothy's transformation within a broader system of interlocking oppressions. As Collins (2000) theorizes, Black women's oppression must be understood through a "matrix of domination" encompassing race, class, gender, and state violence.

Dorothy's coercion into reproductive control by welfare officials echoes Dorothy's (1997) critique of state regulation of Black motherhood, while her dependency on welfare dramatizes the classed dimensions of racial capitalism. Yet her solidarity with T.C., rather than opposition to him, affirms Hudson-Weems's (1993) critique of Western feminism: Africana women's agency is not predicated on rejecting men but on collective struggle. Dorothy embodies this principle, asserting her subjectivity in partnership with T.C. and her community rather than in isolated individualism.

Cinematically, Haile Gerima foregrounds Nommo as a structuring principle. By privileging voices T.C.'s letters, Angi's teachings, Dorothy's narration the film enacts what Maparyan (2006) calls Womanist "harmonizing," weaving multiple perspectives into a collective discourse. The merging of Dorothy's face with the Angolan "bush mama" poster at the film's conclusion literalizes this principle: her voice becomes inseparable from a global, Pan-African geography of anti-colonial resistance. In Africana Womanist terms, this moment epitomizes the transformation of silence into speech, victimhood into agency, and individual struggle into communal liberation.

Thus, *Bush Mama* reframes Dorothy not merely as a victim of welfare dependency but as an archetype of Africana Womanist agency. Her transformation exemplifies Hudson-Weems's principle of self-naming, Dove's assertion of the woman as cultural backbone, Collins's framework of resistance to the matrix of domination, and Maparyan's vision of spiritualized, community-centered activism. Haile Gerima situates her trajectory from victimhood to militancy as emblematic of Black women's role in sustaining cultural survival and revolutionary struggle. In doing so, the film affirms Africana Womanism as not only a theoretical framework but a lived praxis, where the voice, labor, and sacrifice of Black women become the foundation of collective liberation.

d. *Ashes and Embers*

Haile Gerima's *Ashes and Embers* (1982) can be productively reinterpreted through an Africana Womanist framework, which foregrounds Black women as agents of survival, cultural memory, and community continuity. Though the narrative centers on Ned Charles, a

disillusioned Black Vietnam War veteran struggling to reconcile his war trauma with his place in America, the women in his life particularly his grandmother and girlfriend are the moral and cultural anchors of the film. Their voices and actions embody what Clenora Hudson-Weems (1993) defines as the Africana Womanist imperatives of family-centeredness, self-definition, and the preservation of community, positioning Black women not as peripheral supporters but as central agents in the collective struggle for liberation.

Ned's grandmother epitomizes Africana Womanist agency as a bearer of memory and survival. She is not simply an emblem of ancestral wisdom but, as Nah Dove (1998) argues, a culture-bearer who embodies both nurturance and warrior-like resilience. Her work in the garden, her oral insistence that Ned "not forget," and her embodied persistence against hardship mark her as the film's moral compass. This aligns with Hudson-Weems's (1993, 41) conception of the Africana matriarch, who safeguards continuity through action as much as through memory. Rather than a relic of the past, she enacts what Patricia Hill Collins (2000) terms an alternative epistemology: knowledge rooted in survival, storytelling, and everyday labor as modes of resistance. In guiding Ned back toward historical consciousness, the grandmother affirms the Africana Womanist principle that liberation depends on intergenerational memory and the refusal of cultural erasure.

If the grandmother embodies survival through ancestral grounding, Ned's girlfriend exemplifies Africana Womanist agency as political voice and intellectual self-definition. Her engagement in Pan-African debates linking Black struggles in the United States to liberation movements in Mozambique and Guinea-Bissau reflects what Maparyan (2006) identifies as "spiritualized activism," in which personal struggle is always bound to global visions of justice and healing. By articulating a transnational critique of imperialism, she resists patriarchal marginalization and imperial silencing, embodying Collins's (2000) framework of resisting the "matrix of domination" where race, gender, and class converge. Importantly, her agency does not operate in the shadow of Ned's trauma; rather, she asserts visions of collective liberation that exceed his personal disillusionment. In this sense, Haile Gerima affirms the Africana Womanist principle that women's agency is not derivative of men's struggles but central to the redefinition of communal futures.

Taken together, the grandmother and girlfriend dramatize the intergenerational continuum that Africana Womanism locates at the core of Black women's agency. Their influence reveals the dialectic between memory and militancy: the grandmother insists on the ancestral memory of survival, while the girlfriend urges radical political action in the present. Gerima layers these voices not as competing but as complementary, echoing Dove's (1998) insistence that Africana women serve as both nurturers and warriors in different registers of the same struggle. By situating Ned within this continuum, *Ashes and Embers* underscores Hudson-Weems's (1993) claim that Africana women are not only mothers and partners but also historical and political agents who ensure the survival of the collective.

Formally, Haile Gerima's counter-cinematic style reinforces Africana Womanist values of agency. The film's non-linear narrative moving between ancestral memory, everyday labor, political debate, and fragmented dreams esists Hollywood's individualist closure. Instead, it embodies what Maparyan (2006, 118) describes as Womanist harmonizing, weaving multiple temporalities and perspectives into a collective vision of survival and transformation. Within this structure, women's voices and labor are not decorative to Ned's development but constitutive of it, guiding his tentative movement from alienation toward consciousness.

Thus, *Ashes and Embers* re-centers Africana Womanist agency as the foundation of diasporic survival. The grandmother and girlfriend are not secondary to Ned's story but are instead the bearers of cultural memory and political vision that frame his potential transformation. In resisting both imperial erasure and cinematic marginalization, Haile Gerima positions Black women as what Collins (2000) calls "agents of knowledge and survival," whose voices anchor the collective struggle for liberation. The film therefore affirms Africana Womanism not only as a theoretical paradigm but also as a cinematic praxis, foregrounding Black women's agency as the indispensable ground of diasporic continuity and resistance.

e. *Wilmington 10: USA 10,000*

Haile Gerima's *Wilmington 10: USA 10,000* (1979) exemplifies Africana Womanist principles by foregrounding the voices of Black women as central agents of memory, survival, and political struggle. While the documentary addresses the imprisonment of the Wilmington

Ten, its power lies in how it situates this event within a broader continuum of African American resistance. Women's testimonies whether from mothers, grandmothers, or female prisoners serve not merely as supplementary narratives but as constitutive acts of agency. Through speech, memory, and testimony, they embody what Clenora Hudson-Weems (1993) identifies as the Africana Womanist principle of self-definition, reclaiming the authority to name their own realities against a system designed to erase or distort them. This act of vocal reclamation reflects *Nommo*, the generative power of the spoken word, which in Africana cosmology creates, sustains, and transforms both individual and communal existence (Dove 1998).

The oral testimonies of elderly women recalling the 1898 Wilmington Massacre reveal this dynamic most clearly. Their voices do not simply recall history; they reclaim it, resisting the silencing of official archives. When one woman insists that "the blacks were massacred because they were not armed," her words function as both historical documentation and political instruction. This exemplifies *Nommo* as theorized by Nah Dove (1998), where speech becomes a performative act of cultural and political survival. The act of remembering, therefore, is not nostalgic but strategic an intergenerational weapon of resistance. In Africana Womanist terms, women emerge as custodians of collective memory, ensuring the continuity of historical truth for the survival of future generations (Hudson-Weems, 1993).

Equally significant are the testimonies of community mothers and grandmothers who articulate the struggles of raising children within systems of poverty and racial repression. Their narratives emphasize persistence in breaking cycles of illiteracy and dispossession, embodying what Patricia Hill Collins (2000) terms "motherwork": a political labor that transcends domesticity and functions as resistance within the matrix of domination. By insisting on nurturing children for futures beyond systemic oppression, these women redefine maternal responsibility as agency, demonstrating Hudson-Weems's (1993) claim that Africana women are the backbone of family-centered survival. Their words affirm that maternal care itself is a political practice of self-naming and self-determination, situating Black women as architects of continuity rather than passive sufferers of history.

The testimonies of female prisoners further underscore the principle of *Nommo* as self-definition. One woman recounts being falsely accused, shot, and tortured yet frames her survival

through solidarity with figures like Angela Davis. In voicing her own narrative against state repression, she reclaims the authority to define herself, embodying what Layli Maparyan (2006) describes as Womanist “harmonizing” the act of speaking and acting in ways that integrate personal suffering with collective liberation. Her testimony resists the judicial system’s attempt to silence her, transforming her experience into an assertion of agency and solidarity within a lineage of radical Black women activists.

Haile Gerima’s cinematic structure reinforces this Africana Womanist framework. By layering women’s voices across generations’ grandmothers recalling 1898, mothers narrating survival, prisoners naming their resistance he creates a chorus that mirrors the Womanist ethic of interdependence. The film embodies the principle of Sankofa, retrieving the past in order to shape the future, with women’s speech acting as the bridge between history and ongoing struggle. In this sense, *Nommo* is not only represented in the film but enacted by the film itself: the documentary becomes a living archive of women’s voices that generate political consciousness and communal survival.

Ultimately, *Wilmington 10: USA 10,000* exemplifies how Africana Womanist agency is articulated through self-naming and the transformative power of speech. Women in the film do not occupy the margins of political struggle; rather, their voices are the very ground on which resistance is built. By centering testimony, memory, and maternal responsibility as forms of agency, Haile Gerima affirms Hudson-Weems’s (1993) insistence that Africana women are indispensable to the continuity of Black life. In giving cinematic space to women’s *Nommo*, Gerima enacts a counter-hegemonic praxis where voice becomes agency, and agency ensures survival.

f. Sankofa

Haile Gerima’s *Sankofa* (1993) offers a powerful cinematic articulation of Africana Womanist agency by centering the transformative journeys of Black women as agents of survival, memory, and resistance. Africana Womanism, as defined by Clenora Hudson-Weems (1993), emphasizes self-definition, family-centeredness, spiritual grounding, and communal responsibility as the cornerstones of Black women’s agency. Through the intertwined figures of

Mona/Shola and Nunu, *Sankofa* dramatizes how agency is enacted not as individual empowerment detached from history, but as a collective and ancestral practice rooted in cultural continuity, self-determination, and the reclamation of voice.

Mona's transformation into Shola embodies the Africana Womanist emphasis on self-definition. At the film's opening, Mona identifies herself exclusively as "American," disavowing her African heritage in line with Eurocentric paradigms of assimilation. Hudson-Weems (1993) warns that such misidentification reflects the imposed categories of a dominant culture that strips Africana women of their historical roots. Once transported into the enslaved past, however, Mona becomes Shola, undergoing a process of historical retrieval that exemplifies the principle of Sankofa returning to the past to reclaim the future. Her declaration, "I will not let them break me!" marks a pivotal moment of Nommo, the power of speech to generate new realities (Dove, 1998). Here, Shola asserts agency through naming herself anew, rejecting domination, and reclaiming her ancestral identity.

Nunu, the elder enslaved woman, functions as the spiritual and cultural anchor of the community, embodying the Africana Womanist principle of family- and community-centeredness. She insists on remembering Africa, affirming that "if you know your past, you know yourself," thus linking survival to cultural continuity. By refusing baptism and embracing death rather than submission, Nunu enacts what Layli Maparyan (2006) describes as Africana Womanist spiritual grounding resistance that derives strength from ancestral memory and African-centered traditions. Her sacrifice is not portrayed as defeat but as self-determined agency, equipping Shola and the community with the consciousness necessary to continue resisting.

Shola's sexual exploitation under slavery also illuminates Africana Womanist readings of agency through the body. Angela Davis (1981) underscores how enslaved Black women were commodified as breeders and subjected to systemic sexual violence. Haile Gerima represents this trauma not as spectacle but as structural, situating Shola's body within the continuum of racialized gender oppression. Yet, Africana Womanism insists that agency persists even within such violation: Shola refuses to let exploitation define her, aligning instead with Shango's rebellion and Nunu's wisdom. Her body, initially marked as a site of domination, becomes re-

signified as a vessel for resistance, embodying what Collins (2000) calls “resilient agency within the matrix of domination.”

Haile Gerima resists Hollywood conventions of individual heroism by situating Shola’s awakening within a collective framework. Her transformation is inseparable from the teachings of Nunu, the courage of Shango, and the resilience of the enslaved community. *Africana Womanism* rejects individualistic notions of empowerment, emphasizing instead that women’s agency is inseparable from the survival and liberation of the community (Hudson-Weems, 1993). The film affirms this principle by portraying women not as isolated heroines but as custodians of memory and continuity, whose strength sustains the collective through oppression.

When Mona returns to the present, her transformation is marked not by revolutionary triumph but by a redefined consciousness. Her refusal to resume passive complicity during the photo shoot signals a rejection of commodification and Eurocentric objectification. This act of self-naming and refusal demonstrates what Maparyan (2006) describes as Womanist harmonizing: aligning personal transformation with collective struggle. Mona’s shift illustrates the *Africana Womanist* understanding of agency as survival, resistance, and historical consciousness, even within systems that remain oppressive.

In sum, *Sankofa* embodies *Africana Womanist* principles by portraying women’s agency through self-definition, spiritual and cultural continuity, resistance within and through the body, and commitment to communal survival. Mona/Shola’s transformation and Nunu’s defiance affirm Hudson-Weems’s (1993) central claim that *Africana* women’s agency lies not in abstract notions of empowerment but in their ability to self-define, preserve cultural integrity, and nurture collective resistance. By centering women’s voices and sacrifices, Haile Gerima constructs a counter-hegemonic cinematic vision in which *Africana Womanist* agency becomes the driving force of both historical memory and future liberation.

g. Adwa: An African Victory

In *Adwa: An African Victory* (1999), Haile Gerima foregrounds women as central historical agents whose leadership, labor, and cultural memory shape the meaning of liberation. Through an *Africana Womanist* lens, the film rejects Eurocentric feminist frameworks that equate

empowerment with individual autonomy; instead illustrating what Hudson-Weems (1993) and Dove (1998) define as collective, family-centered self-definition and community survival. Empress Taytu Betul stands as a major exemplar: her strategic command at Mekele and refusal of the Treaty of Wuchale affirm her as an autonomous leader rather than a subordinate figure to Menelik. This reclaims women's centrality in African history, countering patriarchal historiographies that diminish female political agency. Haile Gerima also draws attention to the everyday contributions of women caring for the wounded, sustaining food networks, maintaining morale practices framed by Africana Womanism not as domestic servitude but as acts of cultural and communal resistance (Dove, 1998). Spirituality, functions as active empowerment, as seen in Taytu's prayers at Ayrefda, aligning with Dove's (1998) concept of spiritual praxis as a force sustaining liberation. Intergenerational transmission through oral tradition and patriotic songs affirms Collins' (2000) and Maparyan's (2012) emphasis on cultural continuity, situating Adwa not simply as historical memory but as a living resource in ongoing Pan-African struggles.

h. Imperfect Journey

Imperfect Journey (1994) shifts from anti-colonial battlefield memory to post-revolutionary trauma, yet it sustains the Africana Womanist emphasis on women as custodians of cultural continuity, survival, and spiritual grounding. The testimonies of grieving mothers who recount the abductions and killings of their children during the Red Terror transform personal suffering into collective witness, enacting what Maparyan (2012) describes as activism through memory and voice. Their refusal of silence counters state-imposed historical erasure and affirms community-based self-definition consistent with Hudson-Weems (1993) and Collins (2000). Gerima emphasizes the ongoing transmission of agency to younger generations, particularly rural girls who articulate determination to pursue education embodying a forward-looking, survival-centered agency aligned with Africana Womanist thought. Spirituality again operates as active empowerment: the film's final sequence of peace walkers carrying white flags and invoking divine guidance echoes Dove's (1998) understanding of spiritual praxis as a sustaining force for liberation rather than passive faith. The film's resonance extends beyond Ethiopia, illuminating how struggles against authoritarian oppression speak to global Black and Pan-African movements, reinforcing Africana Womanism's insistence on diasporic solidarity rather than narrow nationalism.

i. *Teza*

Haile Gerima's *Teza* (2008) is a profound meditation on displacement, dictatorship, and cultural survival that foregrounds the agency of Ethiopian women and communities through the lens of Africana Womanism. Clenora Hudson-Weems (1993, 2004) defines Africana Womanism as a philosophy distinct from mainstream feminism, rooted in African cultural values, family, community, and collective survival. Central to this framework are the notions of self-naming/defining one's identity on one's own cultural and historical terms and self-definition the articulation of lived experience free from external distortions. *Teza* dramatizes these womanist strategies through its characters, its narrative form, and its dedication to Ethiopian mothers and youth, reclaiming voice and identity from both authoritarian repression and Western misrepresentation.

At the heart of this framework is the figure of Anberber's mother, whose response to her son's return demonstrates the Africana Womanist prerogative of self-naming. She does not receive him as the traumatized exile shaped by European intellectual life and the Derg dictatorship, but as her child within a lineage of ancestors and community memory. Her invocation of cultural survival against colonial fascism and authoritarian betrayal positions her as an anchor of resistant identity, sustaining Ethiopian survival through maternal agency (Hudson-Weems, 2004). Through her, Haile Gerima situates cultural memory and motherhood as forms of naming identity against erasure.

The women surrounding Anberber—Cassandra, Gabi, and Azanu—each embody Africana Womanist agency through self-definition in the face of systemic violence. Cassandra's decision to abort her pregnancy, though tragic, asserts bodily autonomy in a context where both patriarchy and the state sought to weaponize reproduction. Gabi, raising a mixed-race child in Germany despite racist ostracism, refuses erasure by affirming community and legacy in a hostile diaspora. Azanu's trajectory is the most complex: her initial act of infanticide reveals despair and disempowerment under unbearable conditions, yet her later motherhood with Anberber becomes an act of renewal and redefinition, shifting from trauma toward healing and community continuity. In all three cases, these women resist the labels of "victim" or "discarded," instead defining their survival strategies on their own terms (Hudson-Weems, 1993; Keeling, 2007).

Agency in *Teza* also emerges at the collective level. The women left behind in the village, grieving the sons taken to war, enact a collective self-definition by transforming mourning into testimony. Their songs and rituals constitute an alternative narrative that refuses Mengistu's propaganda and Cold War caricatures of Ethiopia, preserving memory through cultural performance (Gabriel, 1982). The holy water ritual that renews Anberber is similarly led by community elders and women, affirming that cultural practices and spiritual traditions remain instruments of survival and continuity. Such collective naming echoes Hudson-Weems's (1993) emphasis on the Africana Womanist ethic of family-centered healing.

Even Anberber's personal transformation parallels Africana Womanist notions of agency. Having been molded by Europe as an alienated intellectual and by the Derg as a weaponized doctor, he ultimately redefines himself as a village schoolteacher. His decision reflects a conscious act of self-naming: rejecting fractured elitism to embrace humility, service, and community-centered survival. His journey underscores that liberation is not individualistic but rooted in family, land, and cultural continuity (Hudson-Weems, 2004; Cham, 1992).

Haile Gerima's cinematic practice itself functions as Africana Womanist agency. His refusal of Hollywood's linear narrative structure in favor of a spiral, memory-infused form reflects an Africana aesthetic grounded in oral tradition and cultural rhythm (Diawara, 1992). The film's dedication to Ethiopian mothers and youth explicitly names them as historical agents rather than passive victims, foregrounding their role in cultural survival. By asserting these narrative and formal choices, Haile Gerima enacts self-naming at the level of cinema, resisting the dominance of Western representational codes.

Finally, *Teza* embodies Africana Womanism in both content and form. Through characters such as Anberber's mother, Cassandra, Gabi, and Azanu, the film foregrounds strategies of self-naming and self-definition that resist authoritarian, colonial, and patriarchal erasures. The collective rituals of the community extend this agency into a shared process of survival, while Anberber's own journey parallels Africana Womanist principles of humility, service, and cultural continuity. In its narrative structure, its dedication to women, and its aesthetic resistance, Haile Gerima's film reclaims Ethiopian memory as Africana Womanist agency an insistence on naming, identity, and survival rooted in community and history.

5.2.2.2. Alliances in Haile Gerima Films

The second major theme within Africana Womanism alliances encompasses values such as *family-centeredness, wholeness, authenticity, flexible role-playing, adaptability, political alignment with Black men*, and *genuine sisterhood* among Black women. These interconnected principles reflect the Africana womanist's commitment to communal survival and collective progress rather than individual advancement.

According to Hudson-Weems, Africana womanists differ fundamentally from mainstream feminists, who often prioritize self-realization and individual gratification. Instead, Africana womanists are family- and community-centered, viewing personal fulfillment as inseparable from the well-being of the collective. While sexism remains a concern, it does not eclipse the broader struggle against racism. Historically, the material and social realities of slavery and its aftermath denied Black women the privilege of domestic confinement, yet they maintained a deep spiritual and cultural attachment to the home.

The ideals of wholeness and authenticity further root Africana womanism in African cultural values emphasizing the balance between family and career, and the grounding of identity in African heritage. Likewise, flexible role-playing and adaptability highlight the historical necessity for Black women and men to transcend rigid gender expectations. Because systemic racism forced both to assume nontraditional roles, the mainstream feminist project of dismantling domestic roles is largely irrelevant to their lived experiences.

Moreover, the Africana womanist's adaptability is expressed through resilience and creativity within constrained circumstances. Unlike the White feminist notion of needing a "separate space" for self-expression as articulated by Virginia Woolf Black women have historically cultivated creativity *within* shared and often oppressive spaces, reaffirming their resourcefulness and agency.

Finally, the theme of alliances extends to political solidarity with Black men and genuine sisterhood among Black women. Africana womanists reject the antagonistic gender politics of mainstream feminism, instead envisioning liberation as a collective struggle waged "in concert with men" against racial oppression. Their "genuine sisterhood" reflects a deep empathetic bond

rooted in shared historical experiences of subjugation, distinguishing it from the often superficial notions of sisterhood found in mainstream feminist discourse.

As Hudson-Weems (2004) emphasizes, adaptability ensures survival under systemic oppression by allowing Africana women and their families to withstand changing circumstances without losing cultural grounding.

Thus, alliances within Africana Womanism extend beyond sisterhood among women to encompass collaboration with Black men in the collective struggle against oppression. Authentic partnership, grounded in family-centeredness and cultural wholeness, resists the divisive tendencies of Eurocentric gender paradigms. By cultivating such alliances, Africana Womanism establishes a holistic survival strategy that uplifts women and men, ensuring continuity, dignity, and liberation for the entire community (Hudson-Weems, 1993; Ogunyemi, 1985).

a. Child of Resistance

Haile Gerima's *Child of Resistance* (1972), a 47-minute black-and-white 16mm film, stands as one of the most powerful works of the "L.A. Rebellion," the collective of Black filmmakers at UCLA who sought to reject Hollywood's conventions and create cinema rooted in Black liberation. Inspired by the televised arrest of Angela Y. Davis in 1970, Gerima's film does not function as biography but as allegory, transforming Davis's incarceration and political philosophy into a meditation on racial oppression, imprisonment, and resistance (Field, Horak, and Stewart, 2015).

At the center of the film is an unnamed Africana woman confined to a stark solitary jail cell, a setting that becomes a metaphor for the psychic and material colonization of Black communities. Her voice-over articulates the logic of her imprisonment: "I am here because I refused to be a colony... the brain is chain". This cinematic moment recalls Davis's argument in *If They Come in the Morning* (1971), where she warns that prisons are designed not to rehabilitate but to break human beings, converting them into "specimens in a zoo" (Davis 1971, 28). By rendering the protagonist's consciousness as the site of struggle, "At least I have my brain. I can't fuck up my brain". Gerima visualizes Davis's critique of incarceration as both a material and psychological weapon of racial capitalism.

The film's dreamlike structure oscillates between three surreal spaces: the barren cell, a decadent barroom, and an endless corridor. In the bar sequence, Black patrons appear to enjoy themselves alongside white partygoers until the camera tilts down to reveal shackles binding their wrists and ankles. This striking allegory dramatizes Davis's caution against "the false comfort of participation in a decaying consumer society" (1971), exposing how systemic captivity persists beneath illusions of social mobility. Similarly, the corridor sequence in which the protagonist runs endlessly without escape visually translates Davis's critique that prisons are "a system whose intent is to repress and contain rather than rehabilitate" (1971).

Haile Gerima's film also channels the radical language of Malcolm X, whose framing of Black existence as a condition of captivity reverberates in the protagonist's repeated claim: "We are all prisoners of war". Malcolm declared in *Message to the Grassroots* (1963), "If you're born in America with a black skin, you're born in prison," and in *The Ballot or the Bullet* (1964), he insisted that Black people "have experienced only the American nightmare." Haile Gerima translates this rhetoric into cinematic form: the solitary cell, surreal dreamscapes, and endless corridor all function as metaphors for systemic entrapment. As Thomas (2013) observes, sequences of Black men attempting suicide with syringes and plastic bags expose the psychic toll of what she terms "neo-slavery." Here, the film resonates with Cornel West's (2016) observation that Davis's critiques of neoliberal policies and mass incarceration remain central to contemporary justice struggles.

Viewed through the lens of Africana womanism, *Child of Resistance* also dramatizes the necessity of collective struggle and interdependent survival. Africana Womanist thought, as theorized by Hudson-Weems (1993), emphasizes family-centeredness, wholeness, adaptability, and authentic collaboration between Black women and men in resisting systemic oppression. The protagonist embodies these principles when she asserts, "Inside, outside makes no difference... we all are in the same boat. Her insistence that liberation cannot be achieved individually reflects the Africana womanist rejection of mainstream feminism's individualism, instead prioritizing community survival and authentic alliances (Hudson-Weems 2001; Phillips 2006).

The barroom sequence underscores this womanist call for alliance. The protagonist does not reject Black men but rather critiques their symbolic blindness, calling for shared awareness

and mutual recognition of oppression. By portraying Black women and men as shackled together, the film visualizes the Africana womanist notion of authentic sisterhood and brotherhoodcollaborative bonds necessary to dismantle racial and gender oppression (Hudson-Weems 1993). In this sense, *Child of Resistance* advances a vision of liberation that depends on alliances rather than fragmentation, on communal wholeness rather than individual escape.

Ultimately, Haile Gerima transforms Davis’s prison critiques, Malcolm X’s radical oratory, and Africana Womanist principles into a cinematic language of resistance. The stark jail cell, the surreal bar, and the endless corridor collapse the boundary between dream and reality, biography and allegory, to articulate the shared captivity and collective resistance of Black people. The protagonist’s final reflection “The only choice I have is to keep carrying the struggle on” encapsulates the film’s central insight: liberation is both historical and ongoing, both gendered and communal, both psychological and political. By rejecting Hollywood realism, *Child of Resistance* reimagines cinema itself as a weapon of struggle, one that insists on the necessity of Africana womanist alliances in the pursuit of freedom (Field, Horak, and Stewart 2015; Hudson-Weems 1993; Davis 1971; Malcolm X 1963, 1964).

b. *Harvest: 3000 Years*(ምርት ፷ ሺህ አመት)

Haile Gerima’s *Harvest: 3000 Years* (1976) dramatizes the plight of Ethiopian peasants under feudal exploitation, yet its deeper significance emerges when read through the Africana Womanist lens of alliance a principle emphasizing family-centeredness, male compatibility, respect for elders, nurturing, ambition, and spirituality as foundations for liberation (Hudson-Weems, 1993; 2001). Far from depicting isolated individuals, the film foregrounds communal struggle, revealing how women, men, children, and elders function as interdependent agents of resistance.

Beletech, the peasant daughter, embodies the Africana Womanist notion that women’s struggles are inseparable from the survival of the community. Burdened with agricultural and domestic labor, she also dreams of education and freedom, symbolizing both the “double burden” of African women (Davis, 1981) and the deferred hope of collective liberation. Her

tragic drowning while saving a cow literalizes the sacrifices women make to sustain family and community, highlighting nurturing as both a strength and vulnerability.

Kebebe, the village “madman,” demonstrates the principle of male compatibility. Though marginalized, he persistently denounces the landlord’s greed and urges rebellion, aligning his militancy with the people’s survival. His violent act of resistance, followed by his suicide, symbolizes both the potential and limits of individual male action without broader community support. Yet his role reflects Hudson-Weems’s view that men and women must form alliances, not hierarchies, in the fight against systemic oppression.

The grandmother in the family reinforces the Womanist value of respecting elders as the bearers of wisdom and cultural memory. Her presence connects the peasant family to Ethiopia’s long history of struggle, ensuring intergenerational continuity. Berehun, the son, inherits this legacy when he chases the cart of stolen harvest in the film’s freeze-frame ending an open symbol of ambition oriented toward community survival rather than individual gain.

Spirituality also permeates the narrative. Gerima’s use of his father’s lamenting song and Beletech’s visionary dreams situates the peasants’ suffering within a sacred framework of resilience. For Africana Womanism, spirituality is not an escape but a source of strength, binding cultural identity to the pursuit of liberation (Hudson-Weems, 2001).

Eventually, *Harvest: 3000 Years* resists closure and refuses to romanticize either endurance or rebellion. Instead, it dramatizes the Africana Womanist principle of alliance: women nurturing and sacrificing, men resisting and protecting, elders transmitting memory, and children inheriting unfinished struggles. The freeze-frame ending denies resolution, underscoring that liberation is not guaranteed by ideology or regime change but must be continually fought for through family and communal solidarity. In this way, Haile Gerima’s film transcends Eurocentric notions of national allegory (Jameson, 1986) by embodying Africana Womanist ethics, presenting alliance as the bedrock of survival and the pathway to liberation.

c. Bush Mama

Read through the Africana Womanist framework of alliances characterized by family-centeredness, collective survival, flexible role roles, authenticity, and political solidarity with Black men *Bush Mama* reveals Dorothy's transformation not as an individual feminist awakening, but as a relational and communal one. As Hudson-Weems (1993, 2004) argues, Africana womanism rejects individualistic models of empowerment in favor of cultural wholeness and family survival; Gerima's film embodies this principle by grounding Dorothy's political development within her relationships with T.C., Angi, and her community in Watts.

At the beginning of the film, Dorothy's struggles are shaped by structural poverty, police surveillance, and the bureaucratic state. However, her transformation is catalyzed not by separation from men or withdrawal into selfhood as mainstream feminism often prescribes but through a deepening alliance with T.C., whose letters articulate the systemic nature of racial oppression. Though imprisoned, T.C. remains a partner in liberation, aligning with Hudson-Weems' (1993) insistence that Africana women and men must struggle together against racism. Dorothy's evolution into the "bush mama" is thus not a rejection of Black men, but a political alignment with them, affirming collective survival rather than antagonism.

Similarly, Dorothy's relationship with Angi models what Africana Womanism terms genuine sisterhood, rather than the abstract or symbolic "sisterhood" often assumed in mainstream feminism. Angi does not simply empathize she teaches, encourages, and interprets T.C.'s letters, helping Dorothy recognize her oppression as systemic rather than personal. This shared process of consciousness-building reflects what Ogunyemi (1985) describes as womanist communal nurturing and what Collins (2000) calls epistemologies grounded in lived experience. Their alliance is practical, emotionally sustaining, and politically formative.

Dorothy's role as a mother further embodies Africana Womanism's emphasis on family-centeredness and wholeness. Her protection of her daughter culminating in the moment of violent resistance exemplifies flexible role-playing and adaptability (Hudson-Weems, 2004). She becomes nurturer and warrior simultaneously, rejecting rigid Eurocentric gender expectations. Her pregnancy and the stillbirth of her baby function as metaphors for the suffocation of Black futures under racial capitalism (Roberts, 1997), yet the film refuses to reduce Black motherhood

to tragedy; instead, Dorothy reclaims motherhood as a site of political agency and intergenerational protection.

The film's closing montage, merging Dorothy's image with the MPLA woman freedom fighter from Angola, expands this alliance from the domestic to the Pan-African sphere. Dorothy's struggle in Watts is situated alongside global anti-colonial movements, affirming Africana Womanism's commitment to diasporic solidarity rather than isolated nationalism.

Through Dorothy's evolving relationships with T.C., Angi, her daughter, and her community, *Bush Mama* illustrates the Africana Womanist principle that liberation emerges through collective alliances. Gerima therefore constructs a cinematic vision of resistance grounded in family-centeredness, shared struggle, adaptability, and global Black solidarity, affirming that the survival and liberation of Africana women and men are inseparable.

d. Ashes and Embers

Haile Gerima's *Ashes and Embers* (1982) explore the fractured identity of Ned Charles, a Black Vietnam veteran navigating trauma, displacement, and racial oppression in postwar America. Through an Africana Womanist lens, the film's emphasis on family, community, and interdependence embodies what Clenora Hudson-Weems (1993) identifies as the principle of alliance a commitment to collective survival rooted in family-centeredness, authenticity, adaptability, and cooperative struggle between men and women. This theme of alliance functions not only as a narrative structure within the film but also as a philosophical and cultural framework through which Gerima affirms the interconnectedness of individual healing and communal liberation.

Africana Womanism distinguishes itself from mainstream feminism by emphasizing collective wholeness over individual autonomy, centering the family and community as the foundation of Black resistance (Hudson-Weems, 1993). For Hudson-Weems, the Africana woman is not defined by her opposition to men but by her role in sustaining and protecting her people through nurturing, cooperation, and moral strength. Similarly, Patricia Hill Collins (2000) situates Black women's agency within a matrix of community-centered values, emphasizing that empowerment emerges from relational ties rather than solitary pursuit. Haile Gerima's film

visually and thematically enacts this ethos: Ned's journey toward self-understanding is made possible only through his reconnection with the women in his life his grandmother and his politically conscious girlfriend whose guidance embodies the sustaining power of Africana womanist alliance.

Ned's trauma, stemming from war and systemic racism, isolates him from family and society. His wandering through Washington, D.C., and Los Angeles mirrors his psychological dislocation and alienation from his communal roots. Yet, as Africana Womanism posits, healing is not an individual act but a collective process grounded in family and historical consciousness (Hudson-Weems, 2004). Haile Gerima situates Ned's eventual moral awakening within the orbit of two pivotal women who serve as his moral and political mirrors. His grandmother, who tends her garden and insists he "not forget," represents the spiritual and historical continuity of the Black community. Her resilience and storytelling embody the Africana womanist ideal of the elder as the moral compass a keeper of ancestral memory and transmitter of cultural strength. Through her, Ned reconnects to a lineage of endurance that transforms his trauma into testimony.

In contrast, Ned's girlfriend represents the activist dimension of Africana womanist alliance. Rooted in the Black Power and Pan-African movements, she challenges Ned to confront structural injustice and see his suffering as linked to global struggles from Mozambique to Guinea-Bissau. This relational dynamic reflects Hudson-Weems's (1993) notion of authentic partnership, wherein Black women and men collaborate as equals to dismantle systems of oppression. Their debates are not mere romantic quarrels but pedagogical exchanges that illuminate gendered differences in approach while affirming shared commitment to liberation. Haile Gerima thus dramatizes the friction inherent in alliance, suggesting that transformation requires both emotional grounding (the grandmother's love) and political awakening (the girlfriend's activism).

Through these two women, Haile Gerima constructs a layered portrait of Africana womanist community. The grandmother anchors Ned in ancestral strength, while the girlfriend expands his consciousness toward collective struggle. Together, they form the dual pillars of spiritual and political alliance necessary for renewal. Ned's ultimate confrontation with his past his admission that he "never left Vietnam" occurs within this network of relational care,

suggesting that individual redemption is possible only when reabsorbed into the communal body. The grandmother's insistence on remembering, coupled with the girlfriend's insistence on action, bridges generational divides and redefines healing as a process of reconnection rather than escape.

Haile Gerima's cinematic form reinforces this Africana womanist ethic. The film's fragmented structure, nonlinear editing, and layered sound design reflect what Collins (2000) describes as a "collective epistemology" a way of knowing grounded in oral tradition, rhythm, and shared memory. Songs like "American Fruit, African Roots" evoke diasporic continuity, transforming music into a medium of alliance that links individual emotion to historical resistance. Haile Gerima's rejection of Hollywood linearity mirrors Africana womanism's rejection of Western individualism; both propose a cyclical, relational view of life where time, struggle, and love are intertwined.

Finally, *Ashes and Embers* assert that survival for the Africana subject depends on restoring alliances across gender, generation, and geography. The grandmother and girlfriend's roles demonstrate the Africana woman's centrality as nurturer, activist, and moral guide figures through which communal healing becomes possible. In Africana womanist terms, Haile Gerima's film is a call to rebuild wholeness through reciprocal care, cooperative struggle, and memory. Ned's return to his grandmother's home, framed by her storytelling and the rhythm of her labor, signifies not an end but a beginning a reaffirmation of collective endurance. As the creaking swing and her final words, "Do not ever forget it," fade into the soundscape, Gerima reminds us that alliance is both a moral duty and a political act, the bridge between personal redemption and communal liberation.

e. Wilmington 10 – U.S.A. 10,000

Haile Gerima's *Wilmington 10: U.S.A. 10,000* (1979) exemplifies a cinema of resistance rooted in collective memory, historical reclamation, and community-centered struggle. Through an Africana Womanist lens, the film's structure and historical consciousness reveal how the survival of the Black community depends upon alliances between men and women, elders and youth, past and present, and local and global movements. As Clenora Hudson-Weems (1993)

articulates, the Africana Womanist concept of alliance emphasizes family-centeredness, communal interdependence, and partnership between Black men and women in their shared struggle against systemic oppression. This notion contrasts sharply with Western feminist individualism, foregrounding instead a collective ethos of survival, responsibility, and wholeness. In *Wilmington 10: U.S.A. 10,000*, Gerima translates these Africana Womanist principles into cinematic form, demonstrating that liberation requires both historical awareness and cross-gender, intergenerational solidarity.

The film opens with a montage that places the Wilmington Ten's struggle within the continuum of Black resistance from the abolitionist movement of Frederick and Anna Murray Douglass to the radical activism of Malcolm X and Angela Davis. This visual genealogy establishes what Hudson-Weems (1993) calls a "familial matrix of struggle", where freedom is not an isolated act but a generational inheritance. By aligning contemporary activists with historical figures, Gerima invokes a transhistorical alliance of Black resistance that includes both male and female agents of liberation. This inclusivity mirrors Africana Womanism's insistence on complementarity, rather than competition, between Black men and women. Each generation, and each gender, carries a specific but interdependent responsibility within the larger project of survival and emancipation.

The film's return to the 1898 Wilmington Massacre recounted through the oral testimonies of elderly Black women exemplifies the Africana Womanist valorization of ancestral memory and matriarchal authority. These women serve as the moral historians of the community, ensuring that the atrocities of the past are neither forgotten nor repeated. Their voices embody what Patricia Hill Collins (2000) terms the "*ethic of caring*" and "*ethic of personal accountability*" within Black women's epistemology: knowledge rooted in lived experience, emotion, and intergenerational transmission. By foregrounding these oral histories, Haile Gerima not only reclaims suppressed narratives but situates women as the custodians of cultural continuity the living bridges between historical trauma and contemporary resistance. Their assertion that "the blacks were massacred because they were not armed" reframes remembrance as resistance, turning mourning into mobilization.

Haile Gerima's portrayal of women extends beyond the domestic and historical sphere into the political. The testimonies of female prisoners, community mothers, and grandmothers affirm their active role in resistance movements. One woman's story of false accusation and torture juxtaposed with her invocation of Angela Davis exemplifies Africana Womanism's ideal of the strong, adaptable, and community-centered woman who transforms pain into political energy (Hudson-Weems, 2004). These women's accounts function as counter-narratives to the masculinist framing of political struggle. Their presence reclaims the narrative of liberation from patriarchal exclusivity and redefines it as a shared, communal process. This inclusivity aligns with Hudson-Weems's (1993) view that true liberation must "uplift the entire race," not one gender at the expense of the other.

The partnership between Rev. Benjamin Chavis and the Wilmington community illustrates the male counterpart to this alliance. Chavis's leadership and public articulation of the group's political imprisonment are complemented by the moral, emotional, and logistical support of women within the movement. The film's structure intercutting Chavis's speeches with the testimonies of mothers, grandmothers, and community workers constructs what can be termed a collective voice of conscience. This synthesis reflects Africana Womanism's rejection of gendered hierarchy and its call for cooperation based on mutual respect and shared destiny (Hudson-Weems, 2004). Chavis's invocation of South African activist Steve Biko and his recognition of global anti-imperialist alliances further expand this concept of partnership beyond gender and geography, aligning with the Pan-African and diasporic commitments central to Africana Womanist thought.

Haile Gerima's cinematic method reinforces these ideological commitments through form. His use of nonlinear montage weaving together interviews, archival footage, historical documents, and songs creates what Collins (2000) describes as a "*collective epistemology*" grounded in dialogue and relationality. Knowledge in this structure is not owned by any single narrator; it is produced communally through conversation, testimony, and shared remembrance. The intercutting of past and present voices blurs temporal boundaries, enacting the Africana Womanist principle of Sankofa retrieving the wisdom of the past to guide the present and future. This structural interdependence mirrors the ethical interdependence that Africana Womanism envisions between individuals, families, and communities.

At the same time, Haile Gerima avoids romanticizing alliance. The film acknowledges internal divisions between militants and moderates, youth and elders, men and women yet frames these tensions as essential to collective growth. Alliance, in Africana Womanist terms, is not an absence of conflict but a commitment to struggle together despite differences. It demands adaptability and flexible role-playing (Hudson-Weems, 1993), qualities visible in the shifting roles of men and women throughout the film. Women act as historians, nurturers, and activists; men serve as leaders, listeners, and witnesses. This dynamic flexibility ensures communal resilience, demonstrating that liberation is sustained through cooperation rather than hierarchy.

Wilmington 10: U.S.A. 10,000 embodies what Hudson-Weems (2004) calls a “communal ideology of resistance.” By interweaving the voices of the Wilmington Ten, the memories of 1898 survivors, and the global echoes of anti-colonial movements, Haile Gerima constructs a cinematic testament to collective endurance. The film asserts that Black survival like Africana Womanism itself depends on unity across generations, genders, and geographies. Women’s voices ground the narrative in moral continuity; men’s activism anchors it in political action; together they form an alliance that refuses erasure and reclaims history as a living, communal weapon against oppression.

Haile Gerima’s insistence on linking local injustice to global liberation transforms *Wilmington 10: U.S.A. 10,000* into more than a documentary it becomes a cinematic ritual of remembrance and alliance. In Africana Womanist terms, the film exemplifies wholeness, authenticity, and the adaptability necessary for survival. It transforms pain into pedagogy and memory into mobilization. Through the interwoven voices of mothers, martyrs, and militants, Haile Gerima crafts an enduring message: liberation is not an individual victory but a collective covenant, sustained by the alliances that bind Black humanity together across time and space.

f. Sankofa

Haile Gerima’s *Sankofa* stages a ritualized return to the past that insists memory is the principal technology of survival and liberation. Reading the film through an Africana womanist concept of alliance one that centers family- and community-based survival strategies and calls for cooperative, accountable partnerships between Black women and men illuminates how

Sankofa both models and interrogates the social practices necessary for collective renewal (Hudson-Weems, 1993). In this reading, alliance is not merely interpersonal harmony; it is a politically disciplined practice of intergenerational transmission, gendered labor, and mutual responsibility that produces the conditions for resistance and reparation.

Haile Gerima foregrounds the matriarchal axis of memory that Africana womanism valorizes. Nunu's role as griot, healer, and moral anchor perfectly embodies the Africana womanist figure that preserves communal knowledge and shapes identity through embodied storytelling and labor (Hudson-Weems, 1993; Collins, 2000). Nunu's teachings "if you know your past, you know yourself" are not folkloric ornamentation but the practical core of alliance: memory as pedagogy that orients present action. By privileging Nunu's voice and her sacrificial choice, the film inscribes women as the repositories of cultural continuity and as political actors whose domestic and spiritual labor constitute indispensable infrastructure for collective survival (Collins, 2000; Davis, 1981).

Sankofa stages alliance as intergenerational pedagogy. The Sankofa ritual literally fuses Mona (the contemporary subject) with Shola (the enslaved woman), making the passing of memory a bodily, traumatic, and pedagogical encounter. Africana womanism's emphasis on family-centeredness and flexible role-playing finds cinematic form here: elder and youth perform complementary roles (wisdom-bearer, learner), and this intergenerational exchange is the epistemic foundation for political becoming (Hudson-Weems, 2004). Rather than treating history as archival backdrop, Gerima enacts history as active instruction an alliance that binds generations into a single political subjectivity capable of resisting amnesia and co-optation (Sharpe, 2016).

The film stages gendered modalities of alliance both its possibilities and strains. Shola's transformation from victim to insurgent depends on relationships with both women (Nunu) and men (Shango). Africana womanism calls for cooperative partnerships between Black women and men where roles are complementary and oriented toward communal uplift; *Sankofa* dramatizes this by showing how spiritual continuity (Nunu) and militant praxis (Shango) together enable Shola's agency (Hudson-Weems, 1993). Yet Haile Gerima is also attentive to the ways gendered power plays out under domination: the sexual violence Shola endures shows how patriarchal

logics intersect with racialized exploitation. An Africana womanist critique thus reads the film as both affirmation of cross-gender alliance and as a caution that men's participation must be accountable, not merely instrumental (Davis, 1981; Collins, 2000).

The film's formal strategies ritual drumming, cyclical temporality, long takes perform alliance aesthetically by privileging collective rhythm over individual perspective. This collective epistemology aligns with Africana womanism's focus on communal knowledge-production: memory is communal, knowledge is oral and ritualized, and the cinematic form itself becomes a site of pedagogical alliance (Gabriel; Field). By refusing Hollywood linearity, Haile Gerima makes the film a communal ceremony in which spectators are implicated into a responsibility rather than offered a voyeuristic closure (Bhabha, 1994; Fanon, 1961).

Sankofa models transnational and diasporic alliance linking African rootedness (the Cape Coast ritual) with American plantation struggle. Africana womanism's Pan-African commitments insist alliances must extend beyond local and gender boundaries to encompass diasporic solidarity; the film literalizes this by making African ritual the necessary condition for African-American political memory (Hudson-Weems, 1993). Yet Haile Gerima also problematizes an easy recuperation of "authentic" Africa: Mona's initial tourist gaze and the film's unresolved ending caution against romanticized cultural nationalism that substitutes symbolic return for material transformation (Keeling, critique). An Africana womanist reading therefore insists that diasporic alliance must be material and political rooted in reparative practices, not only symbolic reclamation.

The film invites a critical recalibration of alliance by exposing its limits. While Africana womanism rightly centers women's everyday leadership, critics warn that a singular valorization of matriarchy can obscure intra-community gendered violences and the need for male accountability (Alexander-Floyd 2006; Collins, 2000). *Sankofa* anticipates this critique: Joe's betrayal under Christianized ideology and the plantation's gendered coercions show that alliances formed without critique can replicate domination. Thus an Africana womanist praxis gleaned from *Sankofa* must demand reciprocal accountability men's militant roles must be tied to reparative responsibilities and to dismantling patriarchal harm within the community.

Finally, the film reframes memory as militant resource an idea central to Africana womanism's project of race-centered survival. Haile Gerima's insistence that "history is very potent" positions collective memory as the material basis of alliance: it supplies identity, strategy, and moral claim-making that undergird long-term resistance (Gerima, 1998). An Africana womanist interpretation reads *Sankofa* as a manifesto: alliances built on transmitted history, gendered labor, intergenerational pedagogy, and accountable cross-gender partnership constitute the durable groundwork for freedom.

Read through Africana womanism, *Sankofa* is both exemplar and provocation: it exemplifies how women's custodial labor, intergenerational transmission, and cross-gender cooperation form the bedrock of collective survival, and it provokes us to demand that alliances be both strategic and just. Haile Gerima's ritualized return demands not only remembrance but ethical reconfiguration alliances that repair what slavery and its afterlives have fractured, while refusing to naturalize gender hierarchies in the process. In short, *Sankofa* insists that to move forward we must form alliances that are rooted, accountable, and materially oriented toward collective uplift (Hudson-Weems, 1993; Collins, 2000; Davis, 1981).

g. Adwa: An African Victory

Adwa: An African Victory (1999) not only documents Ethiopia's 1896 triumph over Italian colonial forces but also highlights the Africana Womanist principles of alliances, which emphasize family- and community-centeredness, spiritual grounding, flexible roles, political solidarity with Black men, and genuine sisterhood among Black women (Hudson-Weems, 1993; Ogunyemi, 1985; Hudson-Weems, 2004). Through this lens, the documentary foregrounds the collaborative and interdependent actions of men, women, and spiritual leaders in securing victory at Adwa.

Empress Taytu Betul exemplifies Africana Womanist alliances. Her decisive strategies such as ordering the capture of Italian water supplies at Mekele and her prayers at Ayrefda reflect not only self-definition and spiritual praxis but also her commitment to communal survival. Taytu's leadership demonstrates the flexible role-playing and adaptability central to Africana Womanism, as she operates as warrior, strategist, and spiritual anchor simultaneously, collaborating closely with Emperor Menelik II and other military leaders like Ras Alula Aba

Nega, Ras Mikael, Ras Mengesha, Fitawrari Gebeyehu, and Ras Mekonnen. These alliances underscore the Africana Womanist ideal of men and women working in tandem toward collective liberation rather than prioritizing individual heroism.

The documentary also honors women's everyday contributions, such as preparing food, tending to the wounded and sustaining morale, which are often overlooked in nationalist historiographies. These acts embody genuine sisterhood and communal nurturing, aligning with Africana Womanist notions that survival and resistance are achieved through interdependent networks of care and labor. Spiritual leaders, including priests at Chelencot Monastery and Enda Abba Gerima, further anchor these alliances, providing blessings and ceremonial guidance that fuse ethical, religious, and political dimensions into a shared struggle.

Haile Gerima's inclusion of oral histories and testimonies from elders, children, and his own father, Abba Gerima, highlights intergenerational alliances, ensuring that the memory and lessons of Adwa are transmitted across time. The children's participation singing the national anthem, learning war stories, and engaging with local traditions reinforces the Africana Womanist emphasis on educating and sustaining the community collectively.

Finally, the documentary situates Adwa within a Pan-African framework, linking Ethiopian resistance to broader struggles across Africa and the diaspora. Informants like Andrias Eshete and scholars such as Gebrekidan (2012) and Jonas (2011) emphasize that the victory inspired liberation movements, strengthened Ethiopianist churches, and energized civil rights campaigns abroad. These transnational alliances reflect the Africana Womanist principle of collaboration with men and communities beyond local or national boundaries, reinforcing solidarity as a strategy for collective empowerment.

Through Empress Taytu, Emperor Menelik, the clergy, and community participants, *Adwa: An African Victory* demonstrates that liberation is achieved through interconnected alliances, not isolated heroism. Haile Gerima's documentary aligns with Africana Womanist thought by portraying women and men collaborating across familial, communal, and spiritual networks, transmitting knowledge intergenerationally, and extending solidarity globally. Victory

at Adwa, therefore, is both a historical event and a living model of collective survival, strategic collaboration, and ethical leadership for the African continent and its diaspora

h. Imperfect Journey

Haile Gerima's *Imperfect Journey* (1994), a BBC-commissioned 88-minute documentary filmed in English and Amharic, is both a political chronicle and a cinematic meditation on recovery. The film investigates Ethiopia's psychological and social reconstruction following decades of violence under Emperor Haile Selassie, the Derg military junta, and the uncertain dawn of the EPRDF government. Framed through an Africana Womanist lens, *Imperfect Journey* embodies the principle of alliance a relational ethic that privileges collective healing, gender complementarity, intergenerational continuity, and Pan-African solidarity (Hudson-Weems, 1993; Collins, 2000). In Haile Gerima's vision, recovery is not an individual or national act but a communal journey that demands accountability, remembrance, and unity across fractured social boundaries.

At the moral and emotional core of *Imperfect Journey* are Ethiopia's grieving mothers, whose testimonies provide both a historical record and a spiritual reckoning. Their memories of sons and daughters executed or "disappeared" during the Derg's Red Terror transform private mourning into public testimony. Within an Africana Womanist framework, these women represent what Hudson-Weems (1993) calls the custodians of cultural memory those whose moral authority arises from nurturing and sustaining the community through crisis. Their grief is a political act, a form of truth-telling that challenges both patriarchal silence and state repression (Davis, 1981). By foregrounding their voices, Gerima constructs an alliance of remembrance a communal ethic in which women's suffering and endurance become the foundation of national self-reflection.

The film's road-journey structure traversing Addis Ababa, the Abay Gorge, and Gondar embodies the Africana Womanist principle of intergenerational transmission of knowledge (Hudson-Weems, 2004). Along this journey, Haile Gerima and Polish journalist Ryszard Kapuściński encounter rural children whose stories of loss and perseverance articulate a future-oriented form of resilience. When a young girl declares, "Fright is not in the body, it is in the

heart,” her words crystallize what Collins (2000) terms *resilient knowledge*: wisdom born from survival that transforms fear into purpose. These children, like the mothers before them, represent the continuity of collective strength across generations. Their desire for education despite poverty and displacement embodies the womanist belief that knowledge, not vengeance, is the vehicle of liberation (Hudson-Weems, 1993; Collins, 2000).

The inclusion of Kapuscinski whose own country Poland, experienced colonial domination under Russian and Austrian powers, extends this pedagogy beyond national borders. His presence dramatizes a transnational dialogue of empathy and solidarity an alliance between Africa and Eastern Europe rooted in shared experiences of subjugation. This cross-cultural alliance reflects Africana Womanism’s Pan-African ethos: the insistence that liberation must be global, interconnected, and human-centered (Gilroy, 1993; Hudson-Weems, 2004).

Haile Gerima’s critique of successive Ethiopian regimes reveals the film’s deeper concern with ethical leadership, a key tenet of Africana Womanism. Through interviews with scholars such as Professor Eshetu Chole, the documentary exposes how authoritarian systems have historically marginalized intellectuals branding them “imperialists” under Selassie, “subversives” under the Derg, and “arrogant” under the EPRDF. This cyclical repression of critical thought, as Collins (2000) explains, represents a failure of patriarchal governance that prioritizes power over responsibility.

Within a womanist framework, *alliance* requires accountability: men and women, leaders and citizens must engage in cooperative partnerships that serve communal welfare rather than personal ambition (Hudson-Weems, 1993). By juxtaposing the testimonies of intellectuals with those of mourning mothers, Gerima critiques a gendered imbalance in national healing an imbalance where women carry the moral burden while men often reproduce the very hierarchies that destroyed the community. In this way, *Imperfect Journey* becomes a call for ethical realignment: leadership must emerge from service, empathy, and remembrance, not coercion.

Formally, *Imperfect Journey* enacts its womanist politics through its fragmented, nonlinear structure. Its incompleteness, what Gerima himself calls “imperfection,” reflects the unfinished nature of Ethiopia’s recovery. The road narrative, marked by pauses, chants, and

silences, transforms the documentary into a communal ritual of remembrance. This participatory form aligns with Gabriel's (1982) notion of "Third Cinema," where film becomes a site of collective engagement rather than consumption. The cinematic rhythm slow pans, uncut testimonies, and open-ended dialogues mirror an Africana Womanist of wholeness: knowledge that emerges not through closure but through shared listening and emotional participation (Hudson-Weems, 2004; Collins, 2000).

Kapuscinski's reflections on the collapse of Eastern European socialism function as a mirror to Ethiopia's own struggle with postcolonial disillusionment. His comparative insights highlight the repetition of colonial structures in postcolonial governance a theme Haile Gerima situates within the global political economy of exploitation. This dialogue models what Hudson-Weems (2004) calls transnational alliance: solidarity across oppressed peoples that resists both racial and ideological isolation. Yet, Haile Gerima maintains the centrality of the Ethiopian voice, ensuring that empathy does not erase difference. As Keeling (2007) argues, this relational ethics what she terms a "politics of listening" is essential to building authentic solidarity without reproducing colonial hierarchies.

Haile Gerima's engagement with Addis Ababa's intellectual community reopens a central question in Africana Womanist discourse: how should intellectuals serve the community? For Collins (2000), the womanist intellectual functions as a bridge figure grounded in academic inquiry but accountable to the lived realities of ordinary people. *Imperfect Journey* dramatizes this tension by depicting both the alienation of scholars and the suspicion of the state. Haile Gerima refuses to romanticize intellectualism; instead, he advocates for a form of knowledge rooted in community experience. This aligns with Hudson-Weems's (1993) insistence that genuine liberation must arise from internal cultural frameworks, not from externally imposed ideologies.

The film concludes with scenes of peace walkers carrying white flags across Ethiopia's borders into Eritrea, Sudan, and Kenya an image that visually embodies the Africana Womanist concept of reconstructive alliance (Hudson-Weems, 2004). These walkers, supported by the Red Cross, symbolize both fragility and endurance: a generation seeking reconciliation beyond ethnic and national divides. Haile Gerima's closing narration "these young people see themselves in a

Pan-African and global perspective”, positions them as heirs to an unfinished struggle. Their journey, like the film itself, remains *imperfect*, an ongoing process of repair and renewal. Within an Africana Womanist framework, imperfection is not a flaw but a condition of becoming: a collective movement toward balance, accountability, and harmony (Hudson-Weems, 1993; Collins, 2000).

Read through the Africana Womanist notion of alliance, *Imperfect Journey* becomes a cinematic embodiment of communal healing. Haile Gerima transforms the road film into a ritual of reconstruction linking the grief of mothers, the vision of intellectuals, and the resilience of youth into a unified call for ethical renewal. The film’s title encapsulates both the nation’s condition and its method: imperfect, ongoing, and collective. In centering women’s testimonies and framing recovery as relational labor, Haile Gerima enacts the core tenet of Africana Womanism that liberation must be built through ethical alliance, gender complementarity, and intergenerational solidarity (Hudson-Weems, 1993; Davis, 1981; Collins, 2000). *Imperfect Journey* thus extends beyond documentary realism; it is a womanist manifesto for national and spiritual rebirth through the power of memory and cooperative struggle.

i. Teza

Haile Gerima’s *Teza* (2008), a 2-hour and 20-minute film written, directed, and edited by the filmmaker, traverses landscapes from Gondar and Addis Ababa to Germany, exploring the psychic and social displacement of postcolonial intellectuals. At its center is Anberber, a Western-educated Ethiopian doctor whose return home after years of study in Germany forces him to confront national trauma, authoritarian betrayal, and the search for spiritual renewal. Under an Africana Womanist lens, *Teza* transcends its political narrative to become a meditation on alliance the communal process of healing, family restoration, and intergenerational continuity that defines Africana Womanist philosophy (Hudson-Weems, 1993).

In Africana Womanism, alliance is not a theoretical abstraction but a lived ethic rooted in family and community wholeness. It insists on collaboration between men and women, elders and youth, the living and the ancestral, in the shared labor of survival and renewal (Hudson-Weems, 2004). Within *Teza*, Haile Gerima dramatizes this alliance through Anberber’s cyclical

journey from isolation to reintegration a process symbolically paralleled by Ethiopia's struggle to recover from colonial trauma and state terror. The film's fractured temporal structure, moving between Germany and Ethiopia, mirrors the protagonist's divided consciousness. His eventual re-rooting in his home village signals what Collins (2000) calls a "communal epistemology," where knowledge is reclaimed not through Western ideology but through collective memory and relational care.

The character of Anberber's mother functions as the moral axis of this process. Her unwavering love and acceptance embody the Africana Womanist ideal of family-centeredness a nurturing force that refuses to abandon even the broken or disillusioned (Hudson-Weems, 1993). Through her, Haile Gerima situates the mother as the symbolic keeper of continuity, the one who anchors the intellectual son's wandering soul back to the land and community. This re-mothering process aligns with the Womanist belief that liberation and healing begin at home, within the embrace of family and tradition (Collins, 2000).

Teza also critiques the failures of masculine revolutionary leadership and intellectual elitism, revealing how patriarchal structures fractured both political and familial alliances. Under the Derg regime, Anberber's medical expertise is weaponized by the state, turning his education into an instrument of oppression rather than empowerment. Yet, the film refuses to isolate this failure within male authoritarianism alone; instead, it proposes a relational ethic of *partnership* between genders in the struggle against systemic injustice.

In Africana Womanist thought, genuine liberation requires cooperation between Black men and women, grounded in mutual respect and shared struggle rather than gender antagonism (Hudson-Weems, 1993). The relationships between Anberber and the women he encounters Cassandra, Azanu, Gabi, and his mother reflect different dimensions of this alliance. Cassandra's abortion, Gabi's experience with racism in Germany, and Azanu's infanticide all embody the violent ruptures inflicted by patriarchal domination and colonial legacies. Yet, each woman's presence in the film also reasserts agency, demonstrating what Davis (1981) describes as the "politics of endurance" the capacity of Black women to transform suffering into testimony and continuity.

Through these portrayals, Haile Gerima articulates a cinematic sisterhood of resistance, where women's pain and resilience sustain the moral foundation of community. Anberber's redemption depends on his ability to listen to, learn from, and rejoin this feminine wisdom. His final act returning to his village to become a teacher signifies a rebirth through alliance: a surrender of patriarchal ego and a re-entry into collective purpose (Hudson-Weems, 2004).

Africana Womanism emphasizes adaptability and intergenerational healing the transmission of survival wisdom from elders to youth and vice versa (Hudson-Weems, 1993). Gerima visualizes this continuity in *Teza* through recurring images of children: those hiding from forced conscription, those playing near "Mussolini Mountain," and finally, Anberber's own son, Tesfaye (meaning "hope"). Each represents the possibility of renewal amidst historical devastation.

Anberber's dream dialogues with his younger self enact what Collins (2000) terms an "ancestral pedagogy," where healing emerges through temporal alliance between the past that remembers and the present that acts. The scene of purification by holy water, interpreted by an elder, symbolizes this return to wholeness through cultural rootedness. It is in this spiritual alliance between memory, ancestry, and rebirth that Anberber reclaims his humanity. The Africana Womanist principle of flexible role-playing also surfaces here: the intellectual becomes a student, the healer becomes healed, and the man learns to mother his nation through care, not control.

While *Teza* critiques the Derg regime's violence, it also situates authoritarianism within broader systems of global oppression. Mengistu Haile Mariam's mimicry of Soviet socialism and his deification through propaganda echo what Fanon (1963) termed the "pitfalls of national consciousness." However, through an Africana Womanist lens, Haile Gerima's critique expands from political betrayal to the rupture of communal bonds. Dictatorship destroys alliance turning neighbor against neighbor, child against parent, and intellectual against the people.

In contrast, Gerima's invocation of global revolutionaries such as Angela Davis, Amílcar Cabral, and Che Guevara signals a transnational alliance of resistance. These fleeting images remind viewers of a Pan-African solidarity grounded in shared suffering and mutual

empowerment (Gilroy, 1993). By including Davis a Black woman intellectual and activist, Haile Gerima embeds within *Teza* an affirmation of womanist leadership that bridges local and global struggles.

The Africana Womanist notion of authenticity also guides Haile Gerima's aesthetic choices. The nonlinear narrative, rich in oral and dreamlike textures, resists Western cinematic logic, privileging indigenous storytelling and collective memory (Hudson-Weems, 2004). This authenticity asserts cultural self-definition as a form of resistance a cinematic alliance between form and philosophy.

The birth of Anberber's child with Azanu inside a cave a place of refuge from state violence serves as the film's final articulation of womanist rebirth. This act fuses the maternal and the revolutionary, symbolizing the creation of a future grounded in love, memory, and collective survival. Within Africana Womanism, such rebirth is the culmination of *alliance*: the restoration of community through the balance of masculine and feminine forces, spiritual renewal, and family-centered continuity (Hudson-Weems, 1993; Collins, 2000).

Haile Gerima dedicates *Teza* to "all the Black people who have been beaten and killed just for being Black," extending the film's Ethiopian narrative into a global Black struggle. This dedication reaffirms the Africana Womanist ideal of wholeness the belief that the liberation of one is bound to the liberation of all. Through this inclusive gesture, Haile Gerima situates Ethiopia's trauma within the global history of anti-Black violence, calling for solidarity rooted in compassion, accountability, and shared humanity.

Viewed through the Africana Womanist notion of alliance, *Teza* becomes far more than a political lament; it is a cinematic theology of reconstruction. Haile Gerima envisions wholeness not as the erasure of pain but as its transformation through familial, communal, and transnational bonds. Anberber's journey from disillusionment to spiritual renewal mirrors the collective struggle of African peoples to heal from colonialism, patriarchy, and ideological fragmentation.

By foregrounding mothers, children, and women as the emotional and ethical anchors of the narrative, Haile Gerima enacts the Africana Womanist conviction that true liberation is a collaborative process: the restoration of right relationships between men and women, individuals

and community, and humanity and the earth (Hudson-Weems, 2004). *Teza* thus affirms that alliance flexible, compassionate, and inclusive is the path toward healing both the self and the nation.

5.2.2.3 Attributes in Haile Gerima Films

Another key dimension of Africana Womanism emphasizes strength, male compatibility, respect, ambition, nurturing, and spirituality qualities that define the holistic nature of Africana womanhood.

Strength both psychological and physical has historically characterized Black women's existence, particularly during slavery, when they endured extreme hardship and family separation. This resilience remains central to Africana womanist thought, symbolizing women's endurance and capacity for survival within oppressive conditions.

Male compatibility represents another foundational element. Hudson-Weems underscores the Africana womanist's pursuit of positive male companionship, viewing it as vital to the mutual survival and progress of the Black family. Contrary to the mainstream feminist rejection of male partnership, Africana womanism affirms interdependence between Black men and women as essential for the perpetuation of community and culture. This relational bond, built on love and respect, underscores the Africana woman's belief in complementary gender roles rather than adversarial ones.

Respect, self-recognition, and self-love are equally indispensable. Africana womanists seek recognition of their humanity, intelligence, and contributions. A lack of self-respect often exacerbated by internalized Eurocentric beauty ideals can lead to alienation and diminished self-worth. Thus, cultivating self-love and mutual respect becomes both a psychological necessity and a political act of resistance.

Hudson-Weems emphasizes that while gender oppression affects Black women, it does not supersede the systemic forces of racism and poverty, which remain the most urgent threats to the Africana community. This prioritization reveals the intersectional yet hierarchically structured understanding of oppression in Africana womanist theory.

Furthermore, Africana womanism honors respect for elders, recognizing their wisdom and guidance as vital components of cultural continuity. This reverence reflects the African ethos of intergenerational connectedness and communal learning.

The Africana womanist also embodies ambition and creativity, continually carving out “space” however limited for self-expression and intellectual or artistic growth. Her ingenuity enables her to thrive despite material and social constraints.

Mothering and nurturing extend beyond biological motherhood; they encompass care for the entire Africana family and community. Unlike strands of Western feminism that devalue maternal roles, Africana womanism celebrates motherhood as a site of strength, creativity, and cultural preservation.

Finally, spirituality anchors Africana womanism. Rooted in African cosmology, spirituality affirms the interconnectedness of the natural and supernatural realms. The Africana womanist’s belief in a higher power sustains her resilience and grounds her moral and cultural identity, reinforcing the unity of the physical, communal, and spiritual dimensions of life.

Equally significant is the attribute of ambition, which in Africana Womanism is understood as a drive not for personal gain alone but for the advancement of family and community. Ambition encourages Africana women’s active participation in economic, educational, and political spheres, ensuring collective success and empowerment (Hudson-Weems, 2004).

Taken together, these attributes male compatibility, respect for elders, ambition, mothering, nurturing, and spirituality articulate the unique resilience of Africana women. They reaffirm that survival and liberation are rooted not in isolated individualism but in cultural values, interdependence, and a holistic vision of community well-being (Hudson-Weems, 1993, 2001; Phillips, 2006).

a. Child of Resistance

Haile Gerima's *Child of Resistance* (1972) stands as a landmark film within the L.A. Rebellion movement, using surrealist aesthetics to explore the psychological and spiritual dimensions of Black resistance through the experience of an unnamed African woman imprisoned for her commitment to liberation. While often read as a political allegory inspired by Angela Davis's incarceration and radical thought, the film also lends itself to an African Womanist interpretation that centers the woman's agency, spiritual resilience, and moral vision within a patriarchal and racist world. Using Clenora Hudson-Weems's framework of African Womanist attributes including *strength*, *compatibility with men*, *respect for elders*, *ambition*, *nurturing*, and *spirituality* Haile Gerima's film can be understood as a cinematic testament to the enduring power of the Black woman as the spiritual and ideological backbone of resistance.

The unnamed protagonist of *Child of Resistance* embodies what Hudson-Weems (1993) calls the "unparalleled strength" of the African woman, forged through generations of struggle and survival. Confined within a stark, oppressive cell, she refuses to succumb to psychological defeat, declaring, "At least I have my brain. I can't fuck up my brain no, I can't do that". This insistence on mental sovereignty resonates with Hudson-Weems's (1993) assertion that the African woman's strength lies not only in her endurance but also in her conscious resistance to mental colonization. In the protagonist's defiance, Haile Gerima translates the philosophical strength of African womanhood into cinematic form: even in isolation, she asserts intellectual autonomy and self-definition against systems that seek to silence her.

Angela Davis's reflections in *If They Come in the Morning* (1971) illuminate this dynamic, as she describes prisons as institutions designed to "break human beings" and render them docile. Haile Gerima's film transforms this violence into a site of moral resistance, where the protagonist's confinement becomes a crucible for self-realization. Her isolation does not diminish her power; rather, it reveals the depth of her fortitude. In this sense, Haile Gerima's imprisoned woman mirrors the historic resilience of Black women from Harriet Tubman to Davis herself who transform suffering into resistance, captivity into consciousness.

African Womanism, unlike Western feminism, rejects antagonism between men and women, emphasizing instead a cooperative relationship in the shared struggle for liberation (Hudson-Weems, 1993). In *Child of Resistance*, this notion surfaces in the protagonist's

reflections on collective struggle: “We all are inside, outside makes no difference. Malcolm is right; we all are in the same boat”. Her words echo Malcolm X’s framing of Black existence in America as a collective imprisonment a “prisoner of war” condition shared by both men and women (Malcolm X, 1964).

By invoking Malcolm X’s name, Haile Gerima positions the woman not as rival to male revolutionaries but as their ideological equal and moral complement. Her voice continues the struggle he articulated, translating his militant consciousness into a deeply introspective, spiritual mode of resistance. In doing so, the film embodies the Africana Womanist value of mutual respect and compatibility, portraying Black women not as secondary participants but as equal partners in the liberation movement. As Hudson-Weems (2004) stresses, the Africana woman’s role is not to dominate men but to sustain the balance of community and ensure that the pursuit of freedom remains holistic, inclusive, and interdependent.

While *Child of Resistance* centers on a young woman’s struggle, the film is permeated by an ancestral consciousness that reflects the Africana Womanist reverence for elders and historical lineage. The prisoner’s voice evokes collective memory “My people and me Black men and Black women prisoners of a long fight. Look at the history: constant war” invoking generations of resistance from slavery through the civil rights and Black Power eras.

Hudson-Weems (1993) underscores respect for elders as vital to Africana Womanism because elders embody the wisdom, faith, and survival strategies that sustain the community. Haile Gerima mirrors this respect through the film’s tone of ancestral remembrance, where the woman’s resistance is not only her own but an extension of the struggles of those who came before her. In this way, *Child of Resistance* affirms that Africana womanhood is defined not merely by individual defiance but by intergenerational continuity a reverence for the spiritual and historical lineage that shapes present struggle.

The protagonist’s imprisonment is not a marker of defeat but a consequence of her revolutionary ambition a determination to dismantle systems of racial and sexual oppression. Her reflections reveal a visionary drive that transcends her immediate suffering: “The only choice I have is to keep carrying the struggle on. It is my responsibility carried on and on and on”. This

sense of purpose aligns with Hudson-Weems's (1993) depiction of the Africana woman as ambitious not in pursuit of individual gain but in service to collective uplift.

Haile Gerima visually encodes this ambition in the recurring imagery of the long corridor a space the protagonist runs through toward an unknown light. The corridor, observe, represents both entrapment and aspiration, symbolizing the ongoing pursuit of liberation. Her relentless motion embodies the Africana woman's refusal to remain confined by either physical or ideological barriers, expressing the spiritual determination to seek freedom beyond visible constraints.

Even within her isolation, the protagonist exhibits the nurturing qualities central to Africana Womanism. Her compassion emerges as she attempts to console and protect others such as the moment when she intervenes in another prisoner's attempted suicide. This act, while tragic, reveals her moral orientation toward care and solidarity, even under conditions of despair. Hudson-Weems (2004) identifies nurturing as both emotional and political: it is the capacity to sustain life, love, and community in the face of dehumanization.

Haile Gerima's camera amplifies this nurturing impulse through close-ups of the woman's face, which oscillates between pain and serenity. Her voice, though weary, becomes a maternal voice of the oppressed, guiding the audience through the spiritual landscape of resistance. In doing so, Gerima transforms her individual suffering into a collective lament, aligning her with the archetypal Black mother figure who bears and redeems the pain of her people.

Perhaps the most defining attribute of Africana Womanism is spirituality, the sense that liberation is both a political and sacred pursuit (Hudson-Weems, 1993). *Child of Resistance* resonates with this attribute throughout. The protagonist's meditations transcend material confinement, invoking a spiritual struggle between colonization and consciousness. "The mind is a colony," she insists, foregrounding liberation as an inner awakening as much as an external revolution.

This emphasis on spiritual consciousness parallels Davis's (1971) reflections on freedom as both material and metaphysical. In Haile Gerima's film, the protagonist's resistance is prayer-

like, her monologue functioning as a litany of survival. The stark lighting and minimalist soundscape evoke a ritualistic atmosphere, transforming the cell into a sacred space of reflection and renewal. Spirituality here is not institutional but ancestral a connection to a divine and cultural source that empowers her to endure.

Through *Child of Resistance*, Haile Gerima constructs a cinematic embodiment of the Africana Womanist ideal one grounded in strength, compatibility, nurturing, ambition, respect, and spirituality. The film's imprisoned woman stands as both a tribute to Angela Davis's real-world defiance and a broader symbol of Africana womanhood's moral and spiritual authority. Her resistance is not an act of isolation but of connection to men, to ancestors, to community, and to the divine. In rejecting Hollywood realism, Gerima creates a visual poetics of survival, one that asserts, in the spirit of Africana Womanism, that liberation is a collective, spiritual, and enduring journey.

b. *Harvest 3000 Years*

Haile Gerima's *Harvest: 3000 Years*, though often read as a Marxist or Third Cinema text, also embodies deep Africana Womanist dimensions through its portrayal of women's labor, spirituality, communal interdependence, and gender complementarity. Applying Clenora Hudson-Weems' (1993, 2004) Africana Womanist framework, the film's narrative and characters particularly Beletech, the young peasant girl reveal the interconnected attributes of strength, ambition, nurturing, spirituality, respect for elders, and compatibility with men, which collectively sustain the moral and social fabric of the peasant community amid systemic oppression.

Hudson-Weems emphasizes that strength is a defining characteristic of Africana women, born not of aggression but of endurance and responsibility within oppressive systems. Beletech exemplifies this through her tireless labor in the fields and her care for both family and animals. Her death while saving a cow from the flood epitomizes sacrificial strength an act that symbolizes communal responsibility rather than individual heroism. As Hudson-Weems (1993) notes, "the Africana woman's strength is spiritual, physical, and moral, designed for the survival of her people." Similarly, Beletech's quiet defiance her refusal to submit to patriarchal

commands and her insistence that “even I, a woman, won’t submit” renders her a figure of resistant endurance within the cycle of feudal oppression.

Beletech’s form of resistance also reflects what Karla Holloway (1992) calls “cultural literacy of endurance,” where survival itself becomes a radical act. Her labor, silence, and small gestures of care articulate a strength that is not loud but deeply rooted in moral conviction and self-knowledge.

In *Africana Womanism*, gender complementarity rather than antagonism defines male–female relations. Beletech’s interactions with her father and brother demonstrate this sense of mutual reliance. Her father’s silence and exhaustion mirror her own; both are trapped in a system that denies their humanity. Rather than depicting gender conflict in isolation, Haile Gerima portrays shared suffering, aligning with Hudson-Weems’ insistence that *Africana* women’s liberation is interdependent with men’s liberation, not oppositional to it.

Kebebe, the village “madman,” also functions as Beletech’s ideological counterpart. His revolutionary outrage complements her spiritual endurance, forming what Hudson-Weems (1997) describes as the “male-female partnership model” essential to *Africana* liberation. Both embody different registers of resistance: Kebebe’s through verbal denunciation and rebellion, Beletech’s through care and persistence. Their intertwined fates suggest that liberation requires a synthesis of masculine militancy and feminine nurturing strength.

Africana Womanism grounds identity in intergenerational respect and ancestral continuity. The grandmother’s presence in *Harvest: 3000 Years* anchors the family in historical memory. Her storytelling, silence, and rituals embody what Teshome Gabriel (1982) identifies as the “oral continuity of African cinema,” a form that transmits wisdom and resilience across generations.

The grandmother’s quiet authority exemplifies the *Africana Womanist* principle of honoring elders as cultural and spiritual custodians. Through her, Haile Gerima locates the peasant struggle not merely in socio-political terms but within an intergenerational lineage of survival, a theme echoed in the film’s titular song “Our bride, your dress three thousand years old,” signifying Ethiopia’s ancient endurance.

Beletech's dream sequences her visions of breaking free from the yoke of the plow symbolize ambition in its Africana Womanist sense: the quest for freedom, dignity, and education. Her yearning for knowledge, though denied by gendered labor expectations, aligns with Hudson-Weems' description of Africana women's ambition as "communal uplift rather than self-centered advancement."

In this light, Beletech's ambition transcends personal aspiration; it becomes a metaphor for the unfulfilled potential of the entire peasant class. Her tragic drowning therefore marks not only an individual loss but the extinguishing of collective hope. Yet, even in death, she transforms into a moral force her sacrifice inspiring the next generation, embodied in her brother's final pursuit of the departing grain cart.

Africana Womanism situates nurturing as both a survival mechanism and an ethical principle. Beletech's care for animals, her affection for her family, and her willingness to shoulder adult responsibilities all manifest this ethic. In the same way, the mother's domestic and agricultural labor reveals the dual role of women as life-sustainers and bearers of cultural stability.

Haile Gerima's cinematography emphasizes these nurturing acts through long, unbroken takes that foreground the repetitive rhythms of care. As Collins (2000) observes, such "community-centered nurturing" resists capitalist individualism and asserts collective resilience as the foundation of Black survival. In this sense, Beletech's death while performing an act of care symbolizes the continuity of life through sacrifice a maternal allegory that resonates with both Christian and African spiritual cosmologies.

Finally, spirituality in Africana Womanism is not confined to religion but constitutes an awareness of one's place within a divinely ordered cosmos. In *Harvest: 3000 Years*, spirituality is pervasive from the father's hymn-like song (performed by Haile Gerima's own father, a priest) to the cyclical imagery of harvest and rebirth. The land itself is rendered sacred, embodying what Hudson-Weems calls "the spiritual essence that binds the Africana woman to her Creator, her family, and her people."

The peasants' endurance under exploitation acquires a metaphysical dimension; their suffering becomes a form of sacred witness. Beletech's death, though tragic, takes on a spiritual significance her body returning to the river, symbolizing purification and cyclical renewal. This closing image reflects what Mercy Amba Oduyoye (1995) terms "the theology of survival," where women's suffering and resilience bear redemptive power for the community.

Viewed through an Africana Womanist lens, *Harvest: 3000 Years*, transcends its Marxist framework to become a profound meditation on gendered strength, communal responsibility, and spiritual endurance. Haile Gerima's portrayal of Beletech and the peasant women affirms Hudson-Weems' claim that the Africana woman "is the stabilizer and sustainer of her community." Their nurturing, ambition, and spirituality resist both patriarchal and colonial erasures, asserting that liberation is not solely political but moral and cultural.

In merging political allegory with Africana Womanist attributes, Haile Gerima reclaims African womanhood from the margins of revolutionary discourse. Beletech's strength, ambition, and spiritual depth embody the essence of Africana Womanist agency rooted in endurance, complementarity, and the sacred duty to sustain life amid oppression. Through her, *Harvest: 3000 Years* becomes not just a film about exploitation, but a cinematic hymn to the spiritual and moral resilience of African women whose lives and deaths hold the promise of collective redemption.

c. *Bush Mama*

Haile Gerima's *Bush Mama* (1975) articulates a cinematic philosophy grounded in the realities of Black womanhood and communal struggle, aligning closely with the principles of Africana Womanism as theorized by Clenora Hudson-Weems (1993, 2004). Shot on 16mm black-and-white film during Gerima's tenure at UCLA, the film critiques systemic racism, poverty, and state-sanctioned violence against Black communities in 1970s Los Angeles. Yet beyond its Marxist or Fanonian readings, *Bush Mama* resonates profoundly with the Africana Womanist ethos, which emphasizes the Black woman's strength, nurturance, spiritual grounding, and collective responsibility within her community rather than separation from it.

Hudson-Weems (1993) identifies several defining attributes of Africana Womanism: strength, family-centeredness, spirituality, ambition, respect for elders, and mutual compatibility with men that affirm Black women's historic resilience and leadership. Dorothy, the film's protagonist, embodies these attributes as she evolves from a passive welfare recipient into a self-aware defender of her family and community. Her journey is not one of feminist rebellion against Black men or motherhood but of Africana self-assertion, rooted in cultural survival and the defense of Black life.

At the beginning of the film, Dorothy's exhaustion and marginalization mirror the socioeconomic conditions of many Black women in urban America. Gerima's realist approach: documentary-style camerawork, overlapping bureaucratic dialogue and scenes of harassment by welfare officers renders visible what Hudson-Weems (2004) calls "the triple jeopardy" of racism, classism, and sexism that Black women face. Yet, in Africana Womanist thought, suffering does not define womanhood; it becomes a crucible for strength. Dorothy's endurance and care for her daughter, Luann, and her continued emotional bond with T.C., her imprisoned partner, demonstrate a communal orientation that places family and community at the center of liberation rather than individual autonomy (Hudson-Weems 1993).

T.C.'s letters from prison form a vital dialogic bridge between male and female consciousness. Through them, Gerima articulates an Africana complementarity: the cooperative relationship between Black men and women in shared struggle (Hudson-Weems 1993; Ogunyemi 1985). T.C.'s political awakening and Dorothy's transformation are interdependent, illustrating that liberation in the Africana context is never gender-exclusive but reciprocal. This mutual recognition affirms what Hudson-Weems (2004) calls *compatibility with men*, distinguishing Africana Womanism from Western feminist models that often position men as adversaries. Dorothy's commitment to T.C., even while navigating state-imposed maternal and reproductive oppression, reflects a collective, rather than individualist, notion of freedom.

Dorothy's nurturing spirit expressed through her protection of her daughter and empathy toward her neighbors embodies another Africana Womanist attribute: nurturance and community mothering. As Patricia Hill Collins (2000) observes, such "othermothering" has historically functioned as a survival strategy within Black communities, linking women's care work to

political resistance. Dorothy's eventual adoption of the "bush mama" identity a militant mother figure inspired by the image of an Angolan woman with a gun and child reconfigures nurturance as a revolutionary act. Her motherhood becomes inseparable from her defense of life and dignity, reflecting what Hudson-Weems (1993) terms the "strength of the mother as protector and moral center."

Moreover, Dorothy's transformation is undergirded by spiritual awakening, a central tenet of Africana Womanism. Her final act of resistance killing a police officer attempting to violate her daughter is not merely violent revolt but a spiritually charged assertion of divine justice and self-defense. As Hudson-Weems (2004) notes, spirituality in Africana Womanism sustains women's resilience and connects them to ancestral power. Dorothy's natural hair in the closing scene signifies this reconnection to spiritual and cultural authenticity, symbolizing rebirth and alignment with African-centered identity.

The film's final merging of Dorothy's face with the MPLA poster of the Angolan warrior-woman situates her within a Pan-African spiritual continuum, linking the struggles of Watts to global liberation movements. Gerima thus translates Africana Womanist attributes into cinematic language: Dorothy's strength, nurturance, and spirituality transcend geographic and ideological boundaries, positioning her not as a victim but as a revolutionary mother-figure within a global community of resistance (Massood 2003; Wilderson 2010).

In sum, *Bush Mama* exemplifies what an Africana Womanist cinema might look like: one that centers the Black woman's strength, family, spirituality, and communal responsibility while embracing her as a co-participant in collective liberation. Dorothy's evolution from despair to defiance enacts Hudson-Weems's vision of the Africana woman as both nurturer and warrior one whose love, labor, and spirituality sustain her people amid systemic dehumanization. Through her, Haile Gerima asserts that the survival of the Black community rests not on individual emancipation but on the Africana Womanist synthesis of strength, compatibility, respect, and spiritual wholeness.

d. Ashes and Embers

Haile Gerima's *Ashes and Embers* (1982) is a deeply introspective film that explores trauma, identity, and generational resilience within the African American experience. While the film primarily follows Ned Charles, a disillusioned Black Vietnam War veteran, its emotional and ethical center rests with the figure of his grandmother. Through her voice, labor, and spirituality, Gerima constructs a cinematic world that embodies the Africana Womanist ethos articulated by Clenora Hudson-Weems (1993, 2004). The grandmother, rather than serving as a background character, emerges as a moral and cultural guide a living embodiment of Africana Womanist attributes such as strength, family-centeredness, respect for elders, nurturing, ambition, and spirituality (Hudson-Weems 1993).

The grandmother's presence in *Ashes and Embers* personifies what Hudson-Weems (1993) identifies as the defining strength of Africana womanhood an inherited and communal force born from centuries of resistance. Her "fighting spirit," as she tells Ned, is not individual heroism but the collective will to survive enslavement, segregation, and displacement. Even as she tends her garden with weary hands, her labor connects the land, memory, and identity, echoing the Africana Womanist valorization of work as survival and continuity.

Her strength contrasts sharply with Ned's alienation and rootlessness. Whereas Ned's trauma stems from his inability to reconcile war and racial oppression, the grandmother's strength reflects a grounded consciousness that refuses fragmentation. She represents what Patricia Hill Collins (2000) calls a "matrix of survival," where strength and care coexist as acts of defiance. In this sense, Gerima centers the grandmother as the film's ideological and spiritual compass a living archive of endurance that reorients Ned toward community and self-knowledge.

Africana Womanism emphasizes the centrality of family and community in the struggle for Black liberation. Dorothy, in *Bush Mama*, embodied the nurturing warrior; in *Ashes and Embers*, that mantle passes to the grandmother. Her garden, church, and home are spaces of intergenerational teaching and moral restoration. Her insistence that Ned "not forget" links family memory to historical consciousness, transforming her role from passive elder to active custodian of heritage.

Hudson-Weems (1993) argues that the Africana Womanist woman's "nurturing capacity" is not sentimental but political it is through nurturing that the community survives. In the grandmother's care for Ned, this nurturing extends beyond biological motherhood into what Collins (2000) calls "*othermothering*," the collective caregiving that sustains the Black family under racial capitalism. Her nurturing is intertwined with correction; she loves Ned fiercely but demands that he remember who he is and where he comes from. Through her, the film foregrounds, Africana notion of motherhood that fuses compassion, discipline, and continuity.

The grandmother's spirituality forms the backbone of her resilience. Her connection to the land, her churchgoing, and her invocation of divine justice reflect what Hudson-Weems (2004) calls the spiritual grounding of Africana Womanism an orientation that fuses faith, cultural memory, and political endurance. Spirituality in the Africana Womanist sense is not escapist; it is an active mode of resistance, a way to reaffirm dignity amid oppression.

Haile Gerima's use of spirituals in the soundtrack underscores this dimension. Songs of suffering and hope envelop the grandmother's presence, aligning her with the sacred traditions of the African diaspora. In the film's climactic moments, when she soothes Ned and reminds him not to forget his roots, the camera's slow pan and the rhythmic sound of the creaking swing evoke both lullaby and warning a cinematic gesture of ancestral transmission. Her spirituality, grounded in survival and memory, becomes a conduit for Ned's potential healing.

While Ned's girlfriend represents the militancy and intellectual radicalism of 1970s Black Nationalism, the grandmother embodies the Africana Womanist ideal of gender complementarity. Hudson-Weems (1993) rejects adversarial models of gender politics, emphasizing that Black men and women share a mutual struggle against racial and colonial domination. The grandmother's interactions with Ned do not undermine his masculinity; rather, they restore his humanity by reconnecting him to ancestral lineage and moral grounding.

Ned's alienation, born from both war and racial trauma, is met not with condemnation but with guidance. The grandmother's strength complements his weakness, her wisdom counterbalances his confusion. Through their dynamic, Haile Gerima visualizes Africana harmony, where gendered roles, though distinct, are interdependent and rooted in shared

liberation. Africana Womanism situates ambition not in personal advancement but in collective progress (Hudson-Weems 1993). The grandmother's ambition lies in her determination that Ney "not forget" that he reclaim his history and identity as an act of survival. Her stories of enslavement, migration, and endurance become a repository of communal ambition: the will to remember and to continue.

Haile Gerima's montage technique juxtaposing war imagery, ancestral memory, and present disillusionment renders this ambition visible. The grandmother's voice, layered over fragmented images of America's violence, transforms remembrance into resistance. Her ambition is to ensure that Ney and by extension, the Black community recognizes that trauma, when remembered through love and struggle, becomes a catalyst for liberation rather than despair.

In *Ashes and Embers*, the grandmother stands as the embodiment of what Hudson-Weems (2004) calls respect for elders, a cornerstone of Africana Womanist philosophy. Her authority derives not from institutional power but from lived experience and ancestral connection. She bridges past and present, grounding the younger generation in collective wisdom.

Ned's girlfriend and peers debate revolutionary theory, invoking Mozambique and Guinea-Bissau, yet it is the grandmother's lived history that anchors those abstract ideals. Her simple injunction "Don't forget" operates as both a moral command and a philosophy of being. It collapses the divide between personal and collective memory, reasserting the elder woman's role as cultural guardian.

Through the grandmother's presence, *Ashes and Embers* becomes an Africana Womanist film, one that centers Black women's spiritual, moral, and communal authority as the foundation of resistance. Haile Gerima's narrative resists linear closure because the struggle it depicts is ongoing the struggle to remember, to heal, and to reconnect across generations.

Where Ned's trauma symbolizes fragmentation, the grandmother's wisdom embodies wholeness. Her attributes strength, spirituality, family-centeredness, ambition, and respect for tradition anchor the film within the larger continuum of Africana Womanist thought. As Hudson-

Weems (1993) reminds us, the Africana woman's role has always been to nurture, protect, and sustain her community "with love, with courage, and with spirit."

Haile Gerima's camera honors this truth. In the grandmother's voice, gesture, and song, *Ashes and Embers* affirms that the path to liberation lies not only in political rhetoric or military struggle, but in the quiet, enduring strength of Black womanhood a strength that holds memory, faith, and survival together in one unbroken line.

e. *Wilmington 10: USA 10,000*

Haile Gerima's *Wilmington 10: USA 10,000* can be productively interpreted through the theoretical lens of Africana Womanism, a framework that centers African women's historical, cultural, and communal realities within liberation discourse. Coined by Clenora Hudson-Weems (1993), Africana Womanism rejects Western feminism's individualistic and gender-centered paradigm, instead emphasizing family-centeredness, self-naming, community, spirituality, and collective struggle as defining attributes (Hudson-Weems, 1993). Haile Gerima's documentary resonates with these principles through its portrayal of women as custodians of collective memory, moral anchors of resistance, and intergenerational transmitters of truth within a broader Black liberation struggle.

Hudson-Weems asserts that "Africana women must define themselves through their own historical and cultural lens" (1993). In *Wilmington 10: USA 10,000*, the act of testimony functions as self-definition. When the elderly Black women narrate the events of the 1898 Wilmington massacre, their oral accounts reclaim suppressed histories from white historiography. This aligns with the Africana Womanist insistence on "self-naming" and the recovery of agency in narrative representation (Hudson-Weems, 1998). Their voices often marginalized in both political and cinematic discourse disrupt historical silencing. As Dandridge (2004) notes, Black women's testimonies often "reconstitute history from the underside of power," transforming the personal into a vehicle for cultural restoration. Gerima's inclusion of their voices as central rather than supplementary thus enacts a womanist praxis of historical reclamation.

A core attribute of Africana Womanism is family-centeredness, reflecting the communal, rather than individualistic, orientation of African-derived social structures (Hudson-Weems, 1993, Ogunyemi, 1985). The film's female characters mothers, grandmothers, and community elders embody this ethos. They nurture both biological and political kinship, raising children amid racial terror while preserving a sense of cultural identity and purpose. Their insistence on education, literacy, and moral guidance underscores what Hudson-Weems calls "the Africana woman's commitment to the survival and elevation of the race" (1993). These women's domestic and moral labor is political; they keep the movement alive in the absence of men imprisoned or killed by systemic violence. Their perseverance affirms the communitarian foundation of Africana Womanist praxis, situating liberation not as an individual pursuit but as a collective familial mandate.

Haile Gerima's intercutting of elderly women's recollections of 1898 with the testimonies of contemporary youth visually enacts the intergenerational transmission of knowledge, an attribute Africana Womanism links to the preservation of heritage and continuity of struggle (Phillips, 2006). These women are not passive victims but active archivists of memory, mediating between trauma and survival. Their insistence on "telling the story so the young will know" embodies what Hudson-Weems (2004) describes as the "cultural anchoring function" of the Africana woman. Through these oral traditions, the film reveals that history is not static but a living resource a Sankofa act of "going back to fetch" lost truths for future empowerment.

Africana Womanist attribute spirituality appears throughout Gerima's film as a source of endurance and political clarity. The women's language of faith, songs, and invocations of divine justice fuse Christian spirituality with African ancestral consciousness, echoing what Hudson-Weems (1993) terms "the spiritual grounding that sustains Africana people through oppression". This spiritual base does not function as escapism but as a form of resistance, linking earthly struggle to cosmic justice. Their prayers and hymns, like those heard in the congregational gatherings at Gregory Church, are not depoliticized rituals but weapons of survival what Maparyan (2012) identifies as "spiritual activism," a means of merging inner strength with social transformation.

Africana Womanism emphasizes male–female complementarity rather than antagonism, viewing the struggle for liberation as collective rather than gender-segregated (Hudson-Weems, 1993). The film reflects this through its portrayal of women and men as co-strugglers in a shared resistance against white supremacy. The female prisoner’s account of torture and resilience parallels Benjamin Chavis’s declaration of political imprisonment; both articulate the same structural oppression, but from gendered experiences that reinforce rather than compete. As Phillips (2006) argues, “Africana womanhood situates itself alongside, not against, Africana manhood, within the holistic aim of racial survival”. Haile Gerima’s montage reinforces this complementarity by visually interlacing male political speeches with female testimonies, generating a choral solidarity that transcends gender binaries.

The presence of “community mothers” in the film reflects the activist-mother archetype central to Africana Womanist ethics. They embody what Collins (2000) calls “the politics of care,” where nurturing and resistance converge as one. Their domestic labor feeding, teaching, and protecting children is not a retreat from politics but its very heart. Through this framework, Haile Gerima visualizes Black motherhood as political agency, affirming the Africana Womanist insight that “motherwork is liberation work” (Hudson-Weems, 2004).

Haile Gerima expands the Africana Womanist principle of community to a transnational level, linking Wilmington’s struggle to global anti-colonial movements. This resonates with Hudson-Weems’s insistence that Africana Womanism must operate “within the global matrix of Africana oppression” (1998). By invoking Steve Biko and referencing Chile and South Africa, the film situates Black American women’s struggles within a diasporic continuum of resistance. The female subjects’ narratives of survival mirror those of African and Caribbean women fighting under colonial regimes, underscoring a shared womanist internationalism grounded in race consciousness and collective liberation (Oyewumi, 1997).

Viewed through an Africana Womanist framework, *Wilmington 10: USA 10,000*, becomes more than a documentary. It is a cinematic enactment of womanist ethics, affirming the inseparability of gender, race, and community in the Black struggle for liberation. Haile Gerima’s focus on women as transmitters of memory, moral strength, and collective survival articulates the very attributes Hudson-Weems outlines: self-naming, family-centeredness,

spirituality, complementarity, and struggle for communal wholeness. In reclaiming women's voices as vital to both past and future resistance, Haile Gerima aligns his film with the Africana Womanist assertion that liberation begins in the family, extends through the community, and culminates in the restoration of an empowered African humanity.

f. Sankofa

Haile Gerima's *Sankofa* (1993) powerfully enacts what Clenora Hudson-Weems (1993) theorizes as the Africana Womanist ethos: the reclamation of Black womanhood through self-definition, cultural memory, and collective liberation. Unlike Western feminism, which centers gender in isolation, Africana Womanism situates the struggle of women within the broader survival of the African family and community (Hudson-Weems, 1993). Through its dual protagonist, Mona/Shola, and its spiritual matriarch, Nunu, *Sankofa* embodies these womanist attributes in narrative, aesthetic, and ideological form. Gerima constructs a cinematic universe where the reclamation of ancestral identity becomes inseparable from political and spiritual liberation.

The film's central transformation from Mona, the alienated model, to Shola, the enslaved resistor visualizes what Hudson-Weems identifies as the first attribute of Africana Womanism: self-naming and self-definition (1993). Mona's initial disconnection from her African heritage posing in animal prints at a slave dungeon signifies the erasure of historical consciousness through colonial modernity. Her rebirth as Shola, through the ritual summons of the Divine Drummer, is the cinematic realization of self-naming: a reclamation of African identity denied by Western hegemony.

As Nunu tells her, "If you know your past, you know yourself if you know yourself, you know your future." This moment articulates the Sankofa principle and mirrors Hudson-Weems's claim that Africana womanist liberation begins with the restoration of self-knowledge rooted in African historical experience (Hudson-Weems, 2004). Mona's return from the past, reborn and politically conscious, thus constitutes a process of spiritual and cultural renaming, an act of defiance against both racial alienation and patriarchal commodification.

Africana Womanism prioritizes the family and community as the nucleus of liberation, emphasizing harmony and continuity rather than individual autonomy (Hudson-Weems, 1993). In *Sankofa*, the plantation functions as a fractured but resilient community where enslaved women sustain collective life through care, oral tradition, and resistance.

Nunu, the elder mother figure, epitomizes this womanist ideal. Her nurturing of Shola transcends biological kinship, representing what Patricia Hill Collins (2000) terms “othermothering,” a communal care ethic vital to Black survival. Through her instruction, Nunu transforms domestic labor and motherhood into acts of political preservation. Even in bondage, she remains a moral center, embodying what Hudson-Weems (2004) calls the “cultural anchoring role” of the Africana woman. Her teachings counter the master’s dehumanization, transmitting ancestral wisdom that binds the enslaved community into a collective consciousness.

Spirituality, another defining attribute of Africana Womanism, is not merely faith but a political force that bridges past and presents (Hudson-Weems, 1993). Haile Gerima saturates *Sankofa* with spiritual imagery: the Divine Drummer’s invocation, ancestral possession, ritual chants, and the repeated sound of the drum as both heartbeat and resistance.

For Africana Womanists, spirituality affirms continuity between the living and the ancestral world. Nunu embodies this principle; she mediates between memory and action, life and death. Her martyrdom refusing baptism and dying on her own terms expresses the sanctity of African spirituality against colonial Christianity. This act reclaims what Maparyan (2012) calls “spiritual activism,” where the sacred and the political merge as one. In *Sankofa*, the spiritual is not abstract belief; it is weaponized memory. Each drumbeat, each invocation of the ancestors, becomes a call to historical responsibility. “Without struggle, there is no life,” Haile Gerima declares (Hedges & Gerima, 1996). This dictum parallels Hudson-Weems’s assertion that struggle is the defining condition of Africana womanhood the daily negotiation between survival and liberation (Hudson-Weems, 1993).

Shola’s gradual politicization, from subjugation to rebellion, encapsulates this struggle. Her body, repeatedly violated, becomes a site of both oppression and resistance echoing Angela

Davis's (1981) analysis of enslaved women whose sexual exploitation symbolized the intersection of race, gender, and class domination. Yet, as Shola's transformation unfolds, her body is re-signified: from object to subject, from violated flesh to insurgent will. Her final declaration "I will not let them break me!" is both personal emancipation and collective manifesto. Through struggle, she reclaims control over her body and history, embodying the Africana Womanist ethic that liberation is achieved through perseverance and moral strength.

Africana Womanism rejects the adversarial gender binary of Western feminism, emphasizing male-female complementarity in the joint project of racial liberation (Hudson-Weems, 1993). In *Sankofa*, this principle materializes through the relationship between Shola and Shango.

Their bond is not romanticized but revolutionary: their shared resistance symbolizes gendered cooperation within the same struggle. Shango's physical rebellion complements Shola's moral and spiritual awakening, embodying what Phillips (2006) calls "co-liberation" a dialectic between Black manhood and womanhood in service of communal survival. Gerima visually reinforces this complementarity by pairing their images within the same frame, suggesting unity rather than hierarchy. Together, they recover a sense of African wholeness, rejecting the colonial dismemberment of gender, culture, and history. Nunu's narrative centrality situates her as what Hudson-Weems calls the "memory keeper" a woman whose existence sustains cultural identity across ruptured generations (Hudson-Weems, 2004). She embodies what Christina Sharpe (2016) terms "wake work," the ongoing labor of living with the afterlife of slavery. Nunu's oral teachings, her resistance to Christian indoctrination, and her final act of sacrifice preserve an unbroken chain of African consciousness.

Through Nunu, Haile Gerima visualizes the Africana Womanist conviction that the mother is history itself: she carries the burden and the promise of continuity. Her death catalyzes Shola's rebirth, linking motherhood, memory, and rebellion into a single moral continuum. The camera's lingering focus on Nunu's face, followed by rhythmic drumming, marks her transformation from individual to ancestral presence affirming that Black womanhood, in Haile Gerima's vision, is the eternal site of historical transmission.

The *Sankofa* principle returning to the past to move forward mirrors the Africana Womanist call for historical reclamation as the foundation of liberation. For Hudson-Weems (1998), to be Africana Womanist is to live “with the past as guide, not chain”. Mona/Shola’s temporal journey thus represents not regression but recovery. Her return to the present at Cape Coast Castle signals a rebirth grounded in ancestral consciousness. She no longer poses for Western consumption; she becomes the subject of her own history. In this sense, Haile Gerima’s film itself functions as a womanist text: an aesthetic act of *Sankofa*, reclaiming cinematic space for Black self-representation and ancestral truth.

Read through the lens of Africana Womanism, *Sankofa* is a cinematic hymn to Black womanhood as the heart of historical consciousness and resistance. The film’s women Mona/Shola and Nunu embody Hudson-Weems’s attributes: self-naming, family-centeredness, spirituality, struggle, complementarity, and cultural memory. Haile Gerima visualizes these principles not through rhetoric but through ritual, silence, and visual grammar that re-centers the enslaved woman as both victim and liberator.

In doing so, *Sankofa* rejects the Western feminist narrative of individual emancipation and instead situates freedom as a collective, ancestral inheritance. The film’s closing image the Sankofa bird turning backward with an egg in its beak epitomizes this philosophy: only through remembering, through the woman’s voice and her continuity, can liberation be sustained.

g. Adwa: An African Victory

Haile Gerima’s *Adwa: An African Victory* (1999) can be understood not only as a historical documentary but as an *Africana Womanist cinematic text* that foregrounds the interdependence of gender, culture, and collective struggle. Through oral histories, spiritual memory, and visual narration, the film embodies key Africana Womanist attributes, self-naming, family-centeredness, role flexibility, male compatibility, and a commitment to community and spiritual balance (Hudson-Weems, 1993).

Africana Womanism begins with self-naming, or defining oneself from an African-centered worldview rather than through Eurocentric or feminist frameworks (Hudson-Weems, 1993). *Adwa* exemplifies this through its reclamation of Ethiopian history and voice. Haile

Gerima's narration in Amharic, the inclusion of his father's oral storytelling, and the testimonies of elders and clergy situate knowledge production within indigenous epistemology rather than colonial historiography.

The act of naming Adwa as "*An African Victory*," rather than merely an "Ethiopian war," asserts Pan-African solidarity a self-definition that aligns with Hudson-Weems's (2004) call for Africana women and men to reclaim their collective narratives. The inclusion of oral testimonies further decenters Western authority in historical discourse, emphasizing cultural authenticity and self-knowledge (Kolawole, 1997).

A defining feature of Africana Womanism is family-centeredness, the idea that liberation is collective rather than individualistic (Hudson-Weems, 1993; Ogunyemi, 1985). *Adwa* portrays Ethiopia's victory as the outcome of an entire nation's mobilization peasants, merchants, clergy, and royalty all united as one extended family.

Haile Gerima's use of intergenerational voices his father recounting oral history, children singing the national anthem, and a blind boy learning about Adwa enacts this intergenerational transmission of memory. This mirrors the Africana Womanist emphasis on interconnectedness across generations and the duty to sustain community through oral tradition (Hudson-Weems & Wright, 2014).

Moreover, the scenes of women preparing food, nursing the wounded, and praying alongside soldiers reflect collective gendered participation in nation-building rather than isolated heroism. In Africana Womanist thought, women's domestic and spiritual labor is recognized as political work integral to survival and resistance (Kolawole, 1997).

Africana Womanism rejects the notion of gender antagonism and instead emphasizes role flexibility and complementarity between men and women (Hudson-Weems, 1993). Haile Gerima's film visualizes this philosophy in its portrayal of Empress Taytu Betul, whose leadership, diplomacy, and military strategy are given equal narrative weight to Emperor Menelik's authority.

Taytu's command of her own contingent, her decision to cut off Italian water supplies at Mekele, and her spiritual leadership through prayer and strategic insight embody what Hudson-Weems (1993) calls male compatibility: women and men operating as partners in liberation, not competitors.

As one clergyman in the documentary recalls, Taytu's prayer "Ayrefda" meaning she will not be let down captures both her faith and her willpower. Her strength complements Menelik's authority, demonstrating what Kolawole (1997) terms womanism as complementarity: the mutual empowerment of men and women in the struggle against oppression.

Africana Womanism insists on spiritual grounding as an integral aspect of Black life and struggle (Hudson-Weems, 2004). Haile Gerima's film situates the Adwa campaign within Ethiopia's spiritual landscape monasteries, churches, chants, and prayers serve not as background but as sources of divine sanction and psychological strength.

The priests at Chelencot Monastery blessing Menelik's army and Empress Taytu's invocation of St. Mary represent spirituality as an activating force in resistance, echoing the Africana Womanist belief that survival and liberation are sustained through spiritual continuity with ancestors and divine power (Ogunyemi, 1985). Haile Gerima's choice to show elders narrating under sacred trees and within monasteries transforms these spaces into cinematic shrines of memory, bridging the sacred and political.

Another central Africana Womanist attribute is mothering, which extends beyond biological motherhood to communal care and historical preservation (Hudson-Weems, 1993). In *Adwa*, women's nurturing roles are rendered not as passive domesticity but as revolutionary praxis.

The testimonies of women feeding soldiers, tending to the wounded, and sustaining morale during the battle reflect what Hudson-Weems and Wright (2014) describe as "the politics of care"—a survival ethic rooted in nurturing the community. Taytu's maternal leadership over her contingent and her spiritual intercession symbolize this ethos. Her strength is protective, generative, and strategic, embodying what Kolawole (1997) calls "motherism" the harmonization of nurturing and militant defense.

Furthermore, the intergenerational scenes children learning from elders and parents recounting victories translate mothering into cultural continuity, aligning with Africana Womanism's belief that memory itself is a form of mothering (Hudson-Weems, 1993).

Africana Womanism defines Black women's identity through *struggle and survival* within collective liberation movements (Hudson-Weems, 1993). Haile Gerima's *Adwa* constructs a cinematic archive of such survival. By including not only royal figures but also peasants, Muslims, and rural women, the documentary expands the definition of heroism to encompass communal perseverance.

The voice of the blind boy learning about Adwa through storytelling exemplifies what Hudson-Weems (2004) terms the will to survive through knowledge and cultural transmission. Haile Gerima's framing of ordinary Ethiopians as historical agents rather than mere spectators subverts colonial historiography that renders Africans passive.

As Africana Womanism insists, liberation must emerge from within the community, guided by ancestral memory and cultural self-definition (Hudson-Weems, 1993; Kolawole, 1997).

Finally, *Adwa: An African Victory*'s Pan-African message resonates with Africana Womanism's communal and global vision. The film connects Ethiopia's victory to anti-colonial and civil rights movements across the Black world, situating Black freedom as transnational and interdependent.

When Andrias Eshete asserts that Adwa "represents freedom for all Black people," he articulates the Africana Womanist ideal of collective uplift. The testimonies from diaspora figures and references to Pan-African congresses link Ethiopian women's and men's resistance to the broader struggle for Black dignity, echoing Hudson-Weems's (2004) insistence that Africana Womanism is inherently Pan-African and liberationist.

Viewed through the lens of Africana Womanism, *Adwa: An African Victory*, emerges as more than a documentary it becomes a cinematic enactment of Africana familyhood, female agency, and spiritual resistance. Empress Taytu, alongside unnamed women laborers and caregivers, embodies *Africana Womanist virtues* of strength, compassion, and communal

leadership. Haile Gerima's narrative reclaims women as co-architects of national and continental freedom, reflecting the Africana Womanist assertion that "the survival of the race is the survival of the woman and man together" (Hudson-Weems, 1993). Through its intergenerational storytelling, spiritual grounding, and celebration of collective agency, *Adwa* reaffirms that Black liberationlike womanist identity is inseparable from history, memory, and struggle.

h. Imperfect Journey

Haile Gerima's *Imperfect Journey* (1994) is a powerful cinematic meditation on Ethiopia's collective trauma and fragile hope in the aftermath of authoritarian repression. Commissioned by the BBC the film function as a visual testimony of; survival, memory, and communal healing. Through oral accounts, ritual imagery, and the voices of mothers, children, and intellectuals, Gerima constructs what can be understood as an Africana Womanist narrative of recovery a narrative that prioritizes community-centered survival, role flexibility, spirituality, familyhood, and the interconnectedness of men and women in the liberation process (Hudson-Weems, 1993; Kolawole, 1997).

At the foundation of Africana Womanism lies the principle of self-naming the act of defining one's reality through indigenous epistemologies rather than through Western paradigms (Hudson-Weems, 1993). Gerima's *Imperfect Journey* enacts this self-naming through its narrative structure and linguistic choices. Shot in both Amharic and English, the film situates Ethiopian experience within Ethiopian voices, resisting the Western documentary tendency to "speak for" African subjects.

Haile Gerima's decision to co-narrate with the Polish journalist Ryszard Kapuściński reflects dialogue rather than dependence: the cross-cultural exchange remains grounded in Gerima's Ethiopian sensibility. Kapuściński's role is interpretive but not authoritative his perspective offers comparative resonance rather than control. In this way, Gerima retains what Hudson-Weems (2004) describes as the Africana capacity to interpret the world through one's cultural lens, asserting historical and narrative agency.

The film's journey through Ethiopian landscapes Addis Ababa, Gondar, and Abay Gorge serves as an act of *cultural re-mapping*. By revisiting the land scarred by violence yet rich in

memory, Haile Gerima affirms the central Africana Womanist tenet that liberation begins with reconnection to roots and history (Kolawole, 1997). His voiceover “My umbilical cord is buried in Gondar” literalizes this notion of cultural self-grounding, positioning identity as both geographical and spiritual inheritance.

Africana Womanism is inherently family-centered, viewing the survival of the community as the survival of both men and women together (Hudson-Weems, 1993). *Imperfect Journey* visualizes this through the testimonies of grieving mothers, displaced families, and disillusioned intellectuals whose collective pain forms the moral core of the film. These women, mourning sons lost to the Derg’s Red Terror, embody what Hudson-Weems and Wright (2014) calls the “collective mother” a symbol of both nurturing and resistance.

In Gondar, mothers recount how their hopes for educated children were betrayed by the state. Their lamentations transcend personal grief, expressing the wound of an entire generation. Rather than portraying them as passive victims, Haile Gerima frames them as bearers of historical truth, those who remember and narrate when institutions refuse to. This function of mothers as preservers of memory echoes Ogunyemi’s (1985) definition of womanism as “a philosophy that celebrates black life and emphasizes the necessity of nurturing the community.”

The film’s emphasis on the family both literal and metaphorical illustrates that healing from repression cannot occur through individual recovery but through restoration of social bonds. The final image of peace walkers crossing borders with white flags underscores this Africana Womanist ideal: the search for peace and wholeness must be a collective journey toward renewal, not a solitary path.

Unlike Western feminist frameworks that often center gender antagonism, Africana Womanism advocates male compatibility and role flexibility, recognizing that men and women share the responsibility for liberation (Hudson-Weems, 1993). In *Imperfect Journey*, this complementarity manifests in the partnership between Gerima and Kapuściński and in the balanced portrayal of male and female voices.

Haile Gerima’s on-screen presence as a listening figure rather than a domineering director exemplifies role fluidity: he becomes filmmaker and witness, scholar and son. Likewise,

Kapuściński's role as observer rather than savior disrupts Eurocentric hierarchies. The interplay of male voices (intellectuals, priests, peasants) with the testimonies of women (mothers, rural girls, peace walkers) enacts a gendered dialogue of healing that resonates with the Africana Womanist notion of "cooperative struggle" (Hudson-Weems, 2004).

Even the rural girl who declares, "Fear is not in the body; it is in the heart," becomes a symbol of gendered resilience and role fluidity. Her voice embodies both strength and tenderness, a balance central to womanist ethics. She is neither a victim nor an abstract symbol but a young subject embodying courage and self-definition in a fractured society.

Africana Womanism affirms that spirituality anchors the survival of the African world, connecting the living to ancestral power and divine will (Hudson-Weems, 1993; Kolawole, 1997). *Imperfect Journey* opens with sacred chanting on a hillside, establishing Ethiopia's spiritual terrain as both historical and redemptive. Throughout the film, Haile Gerima's camera returns to images of churches, mourning rituals, and prayers for the dead. These moments are not ornamental they represent what Hudson-Weems (2004) terms spiritual consciousness, the "invisible energy" that sustains African peoples through oppression. When the families of the Derg's victims gather for reburial ceremonies, the ritual transforms the political into the sacred, turning mourning into communal resistance.

Haile Gerima's narration often blurs the line between history and liturgy, suggesting that remembrance itself is a sacred act. In doing so, the film embodies Kolawole's (1997) assertion that womanist spirituality merges "the religious, the social, and the political" as dimensions of a holistic worldview.

A central Africana Womanist attribute is mothering a practice of care and preservation that extends beyond biological motherhood (Hudson-Weems, 199). *Imperfect Journey* transforms mothering into a political act. The grieving mothers of Gondar not only lament their losses but mother the nation through their truth-telling. Their narratives resist erasure and nurture the moral conscience of post-revolutionary Ethiopia.

By juxtaposing these mothers with young students and peace walkers, Haile Gerima emphasizes intergenerational mothering: the transmission of values, warnings, and hopes from

one generation to another. This corresponds with Hudson-Weems's (2019) expanded notion of mothering as "the sustaining heartbeat of Africana survival." The young girl in the fields tending crops and guarding her siblings embodies this continuum, symbolizing the endurance of maternal strength under national duress.

Haile Gerima's own filmmaking practice mirrors this ethic. His return to Gondar, his father's land, is an act of cinematic mothering: nurturing the wounded memory of his nation through storytelling. The documentary itself becomes what Kolawole (1997) calls "a ritual of remembering" the gathering of dismembered histories into a coherent, life-affirming narrative.

Hudson-Weems (1993) identifies survival as both the core and the method of Africana Womanism. In *Imperfect Journey*, survival is not merely physical endurance but psychological rebirth after terror. The testimonies of intellectuals like Eshetu Chole and dismissed professors illuminate the persistence of critical thought despite systemic suppression. Haile Gerima's refusal to romanticize either the Derg or the new EPRDF regime reinforces the Africana Womanist understanding that liberation is an ongoing process, an "imperfect journey." The film's fragmented structure abrupt cuts, incomplete interviews, unresolved questions mirrors the unfinished nature of postcolonial healing. In Hudson-Weems's (2004) words, "the Africana womanist journey is never static; it is a process of becoming, of struggle toward wholeness".

The closing scene of the youth peace march encapsulates this dynamic of survival. The young people, carrying white flags across borders, represent what Kolawole (1997) calls "continuity in motion": the next generation's commitment to healing where their elders endured suffering. Their march is both metaphor and prophecy an unfinished, evolving movement toward collective renewal. Finally, *Imperfect Journey* articulates a vision of communal and global consciousness that resonates with Africana Womanism's Pan-African dimension. Gerima's closing narration that the younger generation imagines itself in Pan-African and global terms echoes Hudson-Weems's (2004) view that Africana Womanism transcends national boundaries to embrace the global Black family.

By linking Ethiopia's trauma to postcolonial and post-socialist struggles in Eastern Europe, Gerima expands the horizon of solidarity. Kapuściński's reflections bridge continents,

suggesting that oppression and resistance are shared human conditions. Yet Gerima ensures that Ethiopia remains the moral and narrative center affirming the African locus of authority within global discourse.

Viewed through the lens of Africana Womanism, *Imperfect Journey* becomes more than a chronicle of post-revolutionary Ethiopia it is a meditation on the collective healing of an Africana people. Haile Gerima's emphasis on community, spirituality, family, and survival aligns with Hudson-Weems's (1993) insistence that liberation cannot be achieved through gendered isolation or Western paradigms of individual emancipation.

The film's title, *Imperfect Journey*, epitomizes the Africana Womanist understanding of struggle as a continuous process. Through grieving mothers, resilient youth, and reflective intellectuals, Haile Gerima visualizes the ongoing work of reconstruction the journey toward wholeness that, though imperfect, remains sacred and necessary. As Hudson-Weems (2004) reminds us, "The Africana Womanist journey is not a straight path, but a circle of endurance, faith, and rebirth". Haile Gerima's documentary thus stands as a cinematic articulation of that circle imperfect yet profoundly transformative.

i. *Teza*

Haile Gerima's *Teza* stages the psychic and social wreckage of post-colonial Ethiopia while repeatedly returning the viewer to the moral labor performed by women: remembering, nurturing, mediating, and sustaining spiritual and communal continuity. Read through Clenora Hudson-Weems's Africana Womanist framework whose defining attributes include strength, family-centeredness and nurturing, compatibility with men, respect for elders, ambition grounded in community, and spirituality *Teza* becomes not only a portrait of a fractured intellectual (Anberber) but a cinematic testimony to the often-unseen womanist work that undergirds survival and possible repair (Hudson-Weems, 1993, 2004).

Hudson-Weems foregrounds strength as a central Africana womanist attribute: a historical, embodied durability that transforms private suffering into collective survival (Hudson-Weems, 1993). In *Teza* this strength appears in multiple female figures Anberber's mother, Azanu, Cassandra, Gabi and in the quotidian practices that sustain life under terror (feeding

hidden children, tending the ill, performing burial rites). Haile Gerima's camera lingers on mothers' faces and ordinary tasks; these longueurs translate into a politics of endurance. Where Anberber is fragmented and intellectually dislocated, women appear whole in functional competence: their courage is ethical and practical rather than heroic spectacle. These shows onto Hudson-Weems (2004) insist that, Africana women's resilience is the backbone of communal survival.

A central intervention of Africana Womanism is rejection of gender antagonism in favor of cooperative struggle (Hudson-Weems, 1993). *Teza* dramatizes the failure of elite masculinities (coopted intellectuals; authoritarian leaders) even as it preserves models of complementarity in intimate and familial spaces. Anberber's moral rehabilitation is catalyzed by elders and women his mother's welcome, Azanu's embodied care, and the counsel of village figures rather than through confrontation with male revolutionaries. Haile Gerima thus stages redemption as relational: men's recovery depends on women's moral labor. This enactment of interdependence resonates with Ogunyemi's and Kolawole's readings of womanism as a politics of mutuality rather than antagonism (Ogunyemi, 1985; Kolawole, 1997).

Respect for elders both filial and communal is a hallmark Africana Womanist attributes because elders are the custodians of history and cultural continuity (Hudson-Weems, 1993). *Teza* repeatedly returns to elder testimony and ritual pedagogies: the mother's voice, dream-interpreting elders, and village elders who reframe traumatic memory through ritual (holy water, story, song). These sequences function as mnemonic institutions: they teach Anberber and younger viewers how to re-anchor identity in non-colonial genealogies. Haile Gerima's formal decision to intersperse dreams and oral testimony with documentary-like close ups transforms elder speech into a site of epistemic sovereignty precisely the cultural anchoring Hudson-Weems locates in elderly Africana women and community keepers (Hudson-Weems, 2004).

Hudson-Weems distinguishes Africana ambition from Western individualism: it is oriented toward family and communal uplift rather than self-aggrandizement (Hudson-Weems, 1993). *Teza* stages this tension through Anberber's thwarted intellectual ambitions medical training invested in European models and the film's alternative valorization of modest communal roles (the future schoolteacher, the parent who nurtures children in hiding). Haile Gerima's

narrative arc moves ambition away from the province of technocratic expertise and toward community-rooted aspiration: hope is embodied by Tesfaye (the child) and by local practices that reconstitute social life. Here the AfricanaWomanist critique is explicit: true ambition serves the family and cultural continuity, not imported ideological models (Hudson-Weems, 2004).

Nurturing in Africana Womanist thought is a political practice “motherwork” that reproduces culture, memory, and resistance (Collins, 2000; Hudson-Weems, 1993). *Teza* makes this visible in scenes that might otherwise be read as purely domestic: women’s feeding of hidden conscripts, Cassandra’s anguished reproductive choices, Azanu’s care of the child. Gerima frames these acts as reproductive labor that preserves the possibility of a future generation. In doing so he recasts caregiving as central to national survival a claim in line with Patricia Hill Collins’s formulations of “othermothering” and Hudson-Weems’s valorization of womanist mothering (Collins, 2000; Hudson-Weems, 1993).

Spirituality, an African-centered faith that binds ancestors, community, and moral order, is a defining feature of Africana Womanism and a central thread in *Teza* (Hudson-Weems, 1993; Maparyan, 2012). Gerima infuses the film with ritual imagery holy water, church processions, and dream rites using spiritual interpretation as a means to reorder trauma, as seen in the elder’s dream reading that catalyzes Anberber’s transformation. As Belachew (2025) observes, women in Gerima’s films frequently embody this spiritual legacy, Nunu in *Sankofa* and Tata Tadfe in *Teza*, serving as intermediaries who safeguard memory, perform rites, and sustain communal ontology. Spirituality thus becomes a gendered praxis: a sacred labor through which women preserve cultural continuity and provide ethical strength against both Derg violence and the alienation of imported ideologies. This mirrors Hudson-Weems’s assertion that spirituality is a core Africana Womanist source of resilience (Hudson-Weems, 2004; Maparyan, 2012).

Read through Africana Womanism, *Teza* is not only a critique of failed revolutionary masculinities and neocolonial state power; it is a film that returns the viewer to the moral economy sustained by women strength in endurance, nurturing as nation-building, elders as historical anchors, spirituality as resistance, ambition reoriented toward communal uplift, and a politics of male–female compatibility. Haile Gerima’s formal devices (spiral temporality, dream sequences, sustained close ups of domestic care) are not aesthetic flourishes alone but cinematic

enactments of Africana Womanist knowledge: the film insists that recovery from political trauma must be rooted in the womanist attributes that reproduce community, memory, and hope (Hudson-Weems, 1993; Collins, 2000; Kolawole, 1997).

5.2.3. *Hour Glass and After Winter: Sterling Brown*

Although *Hour Glass* centers on a male protagonist, Gerima's portrayal resonates with Africana Womanist principles, especially the emphasis on self-naming, self-definition, and communal liberation. Clenora Hudson-Weems (1993) asserts that Africana Womanism rejects Eurocentric feminism's focus on gender antagonism, instead foregrounding a collective struggle against racism and economic oppression that affects men and women alike. In this sense, Gerima's basketball player embodies the Africana Womanist "self-namer," who must reclaim his identity from racist commodification. His silent defiance and eventual intellectual awakening signify what Hudson-Weems calls the "reclaiming of one's authentic self" (1993). The film's use of revolutionary voices Angela Davis, Elaine Brown, and others reinforces the female presence as a guiding moral force, grounding his transformation not in masculine heroism but in a gender-complementary ethos. The Black woman's voice thus becomes a symbol of ancestral guidance, positioning female consciousness as integral to the liberation of the race.

In *After Winter: Sterling Brown*, Haile Gerima extends this communal ethos by constructing Brown as both patriarch and cultural nurturer figures deeply compatible with Africana Womanist ideals of family-centeredness and male-female complementarity. Hudson-Weems (2021) emphasizes that Africana Womanism upholds the African male as a partner, not an adversary, and that survival of the race depends upon nurturing interdependence. Haile Gerima's lens captures Brown not as an isolated genius but as an elder whose pedagogy mirrors the nurturing spirit of Black motherhood teaching, mentoring, and transmitting culture. The documentary's inclusion of voices such as Hughes, Toomer, and Locke situates Brown within a kinship network, where art and education become acts of care. In this framework, Brown's humility, humor, and collective vision parallel the Africana Womanist "mothering principle," which Layli Phillips (2006) defines as the ethic of sustaining community through creativity and moral instruction.

Haile Gerima's cinematic ideology closely parallels the core principles of Africana Womanism, particularly its emphasis on cultural authenticity, historical consciousness, and collective resistance. He critiques mainstream Western cinema for perpetuating cultural imperialism and distorting African-descended peoples, advocating instead for an independent Africana cinema grounded in community experience. His insistence that Africana men and women collaboratively reclaim their narratives reflects Africana Womanism's commitment to gender solidarity against racial, economic, and cultural oppression. Gerima further argues that Africana women must be central storytellers, countering their historical erasure a position consistent with Africana Womanism's focus on women's empowerment within communal liberation. His films accordingly foreground Africana women as bearers of memory, cultural continuity, and resistance. Together, Gerima's Pan-African, community-based film practice and Africana Womanist ideology converge as a unified project of self-definition, cultural reclamation, and decolonial representation.

CHAPTER SIX

6. CONCLUSION

6.1. Summary of Major Findings

This study sets to identify Haile Gerima's cinematic ideology and analyze it through an Africana Womanist perspective and recognized that his cinematic ideology emerges at the intersection of Black radical thought, Pan-African humanism, and de-colonial aesthetics, Ethiopian autonomy, gendered reclamation. The central argument developed throughout this study is that Haile Gerima's filmmaking constitutes a coherent philosophical, political, and aesthetic project that can be conceptualized as *Black Radical Memory-Praxis Cinema*. Rather than functioning only as a medium of representation, cinema in Gerima's vision operates as an instrument of historical reconstruction, cultural regeneration, and collective liberation. Memory, therefore, is not a nostalgic return to the past but a transformative process through which suppressed histories are recovered, colonial narratives are challenged, and new forms of communal consciousness are articulated.

At the philosophical level, the cinematic ideology presented by Haile Gerima is based on the revolutionary humanism expressed by other philosophers like Frantz Fanon, Amílcar Cabral and Kwame Nkrumah, who have made culture a material force in the liberation struggle. In this context, culture reinstates the ontological existence, recovering the lost humanity during colonial rule and memory provides a source of the epistemological knowledge and through which communities regain historical consciousness. Liberation is thus not understood as a personal or individual accomplishment, but an ethical and collective endeavor. In this regard, Haile Gerima turns cinema into a kind of praxis: a place where the cultural knowledge, political struggle, and spiritual renewal intersect. His films can therefore be seen as philosophical operations that remake cinema as a means of restoring dignity and reviving life.

Politically, Haile Gerima's work advances a vision of structural autonomy and collective self-definition rooted in Pan-African and Black radical traditions. His films critique the historical and ongoing cultural dependency of African cinema on Western production, distribution, and aesthetic frameworks. Through independent initiatives such as Mypheduh Films and the Sankofa Cultural Center, Haile Gerima demonstrates that the decolonization of cinema requires not only

new narratives but also alternative institutional structures capable of sustaining African and diasporic modes of cultural production. In this respect, his filmmaking practice embodies a broader decolonial ethics in which artistic creation becomes inseparable from political self-determination.

Aesthetically, Haile Gerima evolves what can be called an aesthetic of liberation where imperfection, memory and experimentation are used as conscious decolonial tools. His films refuse the polished realism and narrative closure of the mainstream cinematic traditions: they use nonprofessional actors, documentary realism, nonlinear plot constructions, and symbolic imagery based on African spiritual traditions. These formal decisions capture the fractured and stratified histories of colonialism, slavery, feudal oppression, exile and resistance that define African and diasporic experience. Imperfection, thus, emerges as a pressing aesthetic value, breaking the established conventions of the cinema and allowing other ways of narration based on the African epistemologies and cultural memory.

One of the main findings in this study is that the work of Gerima represents a dialectical interconnection between politics and aesthetics. His films are not a simple demonstration of revolutionary ideas; they accomplish them with the help of narrative structures, use of visual language and forms of production. He uses fragmentation, overlaying of history, and emotional dissonance to make cinema a dialogic place whereby the viewers are welcomed to critically approach issues of identity, memory, and liberation. By doing this, he contradicts the presupposition that political cinema should already have an ideological meaning, which should be articulated either transparently or didactically. Rather, his work places spectators as the participants in the interpretation and reconstruction of historical knowledge.

The study also follows the ideological development of the cinematic project of Haile Gerima. His early films, which were created in the L.A. Rebellion movement setting, indicate the militant intellectual environment of the Black Power and Civil Rights into the world, expressing a protest against racial capitalism and imperialism through radical experimentation with form. *Hour Glass Child of Resistance* and *Bush Mama* demonstrate the possibilities of films as pedagogy of resistance and agents of political awareness. Later in his works, such as with *Sankofa*, *Adwa: An African Victory*, and *Teza*, Haile Gerima broadens his criticism by placing

the African descendant's struggle in its larger historical contexts of slavery, colonialism, exile, and cultural survival. These films signify the end of militant nationalist models and the newfound contemplation of a diasporic humanism where liberation is seen as a process that is never-ending, historical and philosophical between Africa and its global diaspora.

The study also examines how Haile Gerima reacted to Third Cinema and African film theory. Despite the fact that it preserves the revolutionary thrust of Third Cinema, he simultaneously transforms it by placing the historical self-examination, aesthetic experiment, and the made diasporic consciousness on the foreground. In comparison with the former models, his movie gives preference to Formal ambiguity, memory and emotion resonance as the most significant instruments of the decolonial reflection. In this way, he enlarges the theoretical possibilities of political cinema since it demonstrates that liberationist filmmaking is to be receptive to various inter-reliant historical voices and interpretative approaches.

Haile Gerima's Cinema criticizes the structural hierarchies integrated into the very cinematic production offered by Haile Gerima. It provides a challenge to the racialized and masculinized history of film production through his de-mystification of the technical and creative processes of filmmaking and his advocacy of collective authorship. This study has shown that the practice of filmmaking in Haile Gerima is a model of communal cultural production whereby the creative authority is rebalanced between the genders and social lines. In this connection, the filmmaking is politically transformative in a way that the films that are created in this manner are.

One of the most crucial aspects of this study is that it addresses the Africana Womanist implications of the cinematic ideology of Haile Gerima. He has intended breaks the colonial and patriarchal thoughts, which have historically marginalized women in the field of cinema, by pre-empting the functions of Africana women as narrators and as intellectuals, historical agents of consciousness. In his films, Africana women are not victims without a voice but active, intelligent, ethical leaders, guardians of cultural memory, whose lives show how racial, class, gender, and colonial oppression are all intertwined.

Within Haile Gerima's cinematic contribution, Africana women occupy a central place in the collective struggle for liberation. Specially, characters in films such as *Child of Resistance*,

Harvest 3000 years, *Bush Mama*, *Ashes and Embers*, *Imperfect Journey* and *Adwa: an African victory* and *Teza* demonstrate women's intellectual agency, spiritual strength, and commitment to communal survival. These representations affirm that gender justice is inseparable from broader struggles against colonialism, racism, and economic exploitation. Rather than framing gender relations through antagonism, he emphasizes male-female alliance and communal cooperation, reflecting principles aligned with Africana Womanism's emphasis on complementarity, collective empowerment, and cultural authenticity.

By situating women not only as subjects of representation but also as participants in the creative processes of filmmaking, Haile Gerima expands the scope of de-colonial cinema to include gender-inclusive cultural production. His commitment to redistributing technical and creative authority within filmmaking practices challenges the exclusionary structures that historically positioned cinema as a white and masculine domain. In doing so, he reclaims film as a communal artistic practice grounded in solidarity, creativity, and shared responsibility.

Taken together, the findings of this study demonstrate that *Black Radical Memory-Praxis Cinema* represents a comprehensive decolonial intervention in the fields of African cinema, Black cultural studies, and film theory. By integrating Pan-African humanism, Ethiopian historical consciousness, Africana Womanism, and de-colonial aesthetics, Haile Gerima constructs a cinematic language capable of confronting colonial epistemologies while affirming African-centered perspectives. His films function simultaneously as historical archives, philosophical reflections, political interventions, and cultural pedagogies.

Thus, this study contributes to the scholarship in a number of ways. First, it theoretically organizes the cinematic ideology of Haile Gerima and proves that his work is a consistent intellectual system and not a set of politically involved films. Second, it applies Africana Womanism to the field of film studies and emphasizes the significance of gender-sensitive approaches to African and diasporic film studies. Third, it builds the notion of the Africana Womanist Gaze that preempts the epistemological orientation and experience of Africana women in cinema. Lastly, the investigation repositions Haile Gerima as one of the principal architects of African cinema consciousness whose films have informed the philosophical and political promise of Africana cinema.

To sum up, despite the fact that the films of Haile Gerima are not easily available in Ethiopia, he has created the most intellectually intensive and politically activist interventions of African and diasporic cinema in this film project. His *Black Radical Memory-Praxis Cinema* is not only a type of resistance but epistemic revolution one which breaks the colonial and patriarchal structures of knowledge ingrained in the practice of cinema. He re-invents film-making as a moral, communal, and conscious practice of liberation by coming together Black radical thought, Pan-African humanism, and Africana Womanism. His vision demolishes the binaries of art and politics, aesthetics and morals, and even makes the cinema itself a place of conflict and rebirth. By repossessing the image, he repossesses history; by democratizing production, he democratizes authorship, and by making Africana women the central figures in telling the stories and co-authors in the creation, he makes the decolonization of representation complete.

6.2. Recommendations

Building on the foundations of this study, future scholarship should continue to expand the critical and contextual understanding of Haile Gerima's cinematic legacy. Comparative analyses between Haile Gerima and other Pan-African filmmakers such as Ousmane Sembene, Med Hondo, and Safi Faye could illuminate the diverse models of de-colonial authorship and cultural sovereignty that define Pan-African cinema. Further exploration of his pedagogical legacy, particularly through the Sankofa Center and his mentorship of emerging filmmakers, may reveal how his ideological and aesthetic principles continue to shape twenty-first-century independent cinema across Africa and the diaspora. Audience reception studies could also examine how African and diasporic communities engage with his films as dynamic texts of resistance and empowerment. Finally, interdisciplinary and trans-media approaches that position Haile Gerima's work within broader artistic, literary, and digital movements would deepen appreciation of his enduring impact on global de-colonial visual culture.

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Annex 1. Pictures from all films Analysed

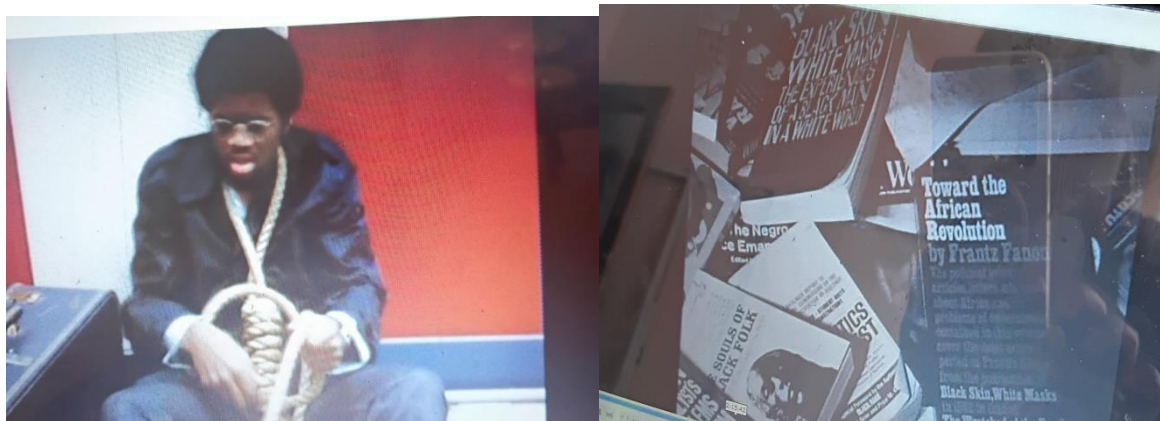
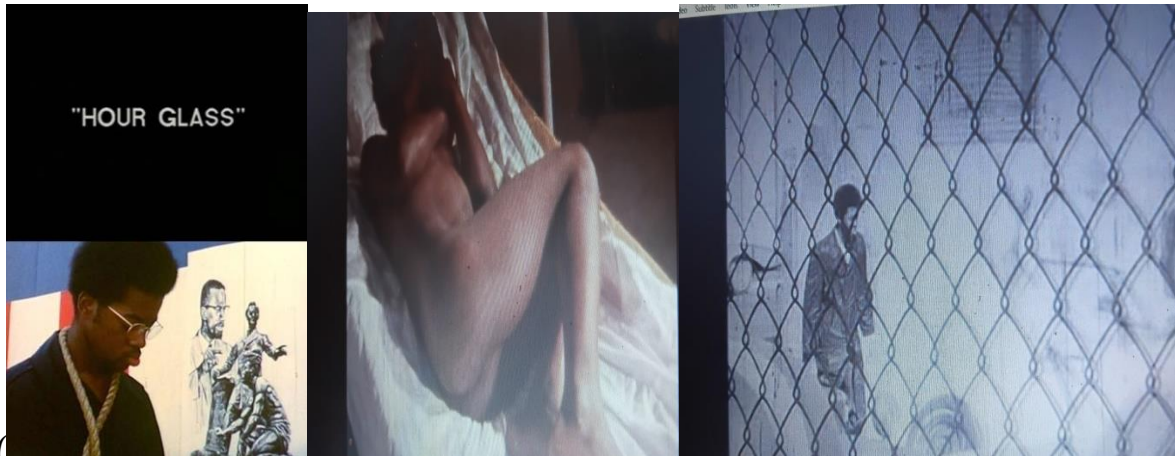


Plate 1- Pictures from *Hour Glass* (1971)





Plate 2- Pictures from *Child of Resistance* (1972)

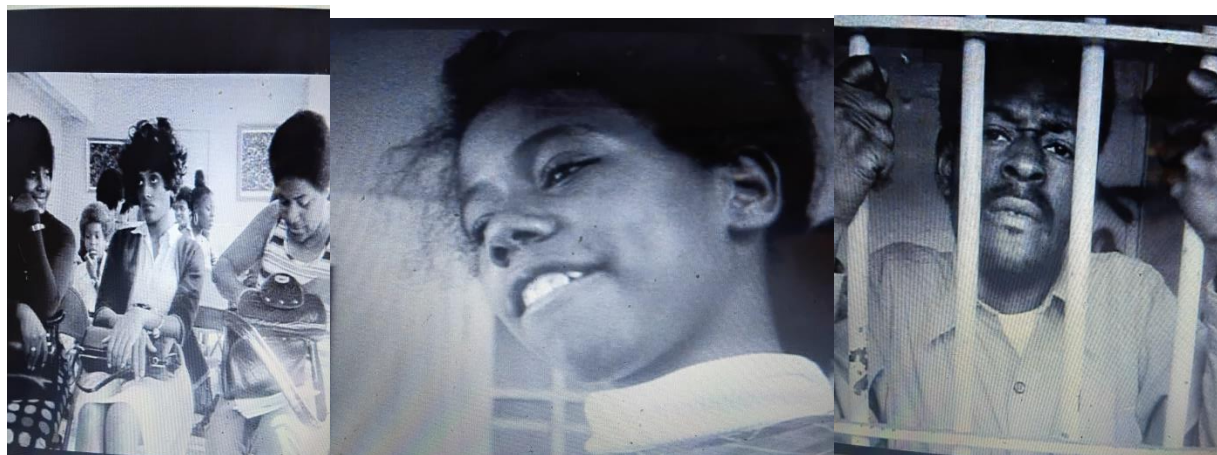


Plate 3-Pictures from *Bush Mama* (out in 1976)



Plate 4- Pictures Harvest 3000 years (ምርት ፬ ሺህ አመት) -1976

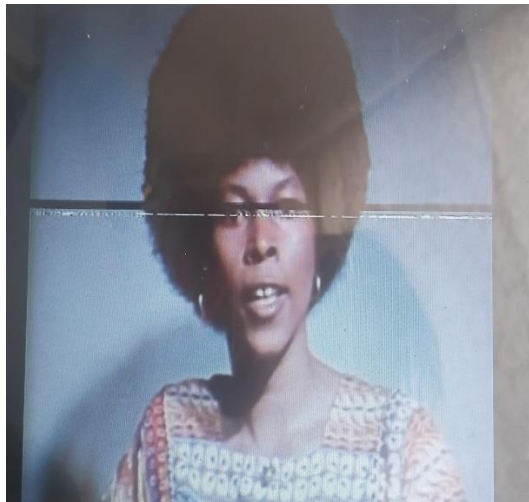
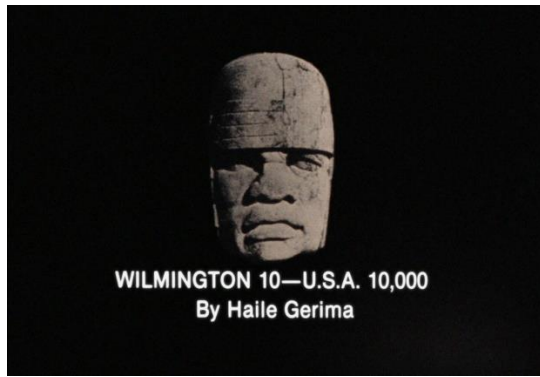


Plate 5- Pictures from *Wilmington 10-U.S.A. 10,000*(1979)



Plate 6-Pictures from *Ashes and Embers* (1982)



Plate 7- Pictures from *After winter: Sterling Brown* (1985)



Plate 8-Pictures from *Sankofa* (1993)



Plate 9- Pictures from *Adwa: An African victory* (1993)



Plate 10- Pictures From *Imperfect journey* (1994)





Plate 11- Pictures from *Teza* (2008)

Annex 2. Pictures of Haile Gerima in public discussions and Interview



Plate 1- Haile Gerima and Aboneh Ashagrie at Addis Abeba University Cultural center- Discussion on Haile Gerima's Experience of Cinema (2003)



Plate 2: Haile Gerima and Jhon L. Jackson Jr.- Aconversation on black Aesthetics (2016)



Plate 3: Interview with Seifu Fantahun o his his experience on Cinema and upcoming film (2023)

Annex 3- Pictures of the informants with the researcher in the interviews



Plate1. Pictures of an Interview with author and researcher Tekletsadik Belachew (2025)



Plate 2. Pictures of an Interview with the chairperson of Alatinos Ethiopian film makers association, Minilik Meried (2025)

Annex 3. Semi-Structured Interview Guide

1. To begin, could you briefly reflect on your personal and artistic biography? How have your life experiences shaped your creativity consciousness and your filmmaking practice?
2. How do you conceptualize cinema? What, in your view, distinguishes cinema as an art form, a cultural force, and a mode of storytelling?
3. How do you define and differentiate various cinematic traditions such as Black Independent Cinema, African Cinema, Third Cinema, and Ethiopian Cinema? In what ways do these traditions intersect or diverge in their ideological and aesthetic orientations? Additionally, several scholars have associated your work with each of these movements at different moments. How do you understand or respond to these affiliations, and where do you see your own cinematic practice positioned within or beyond these categorizations?
4. How do you understand the concept of cinematic ideology? What role does ideology play in shaping film narratives, aesthetics, reception, and purpose?
5. Do you see your body of work as expressing a distinct cinematic ideology? If so, how would you articulate the core principles or commitments that guide your filmmaking?
6. What is your view on the role of women within cinema both behind the camera and as character within film narratives?
7. Many of your films foreground women as central characters. How do you envision and construct women characters in your cinema? In particular, how do you respond to critiques or interpretations viewing your work through womanist or gendered lenses?
8. Could you describe the essential elements of your filmmaking process? What guides your formal, aesthetic, and narrative choices from conception through production?

Questions specially prepared for other informants

9. How is Haile Gerima's cinema conceptualized in your view?

10. How can the key ideas and overall discourse from Haile Gerima's discussion with Ethiopian filmmakers be characterized?
11. How does Haile Gerima articulate his filmmaking process during this discussion, including his creative philosophy and approach to cinematic storytelling?
12. In what ways does Haile Gerima employ religious and spiritual symbols within his films, and to what effect?
13. In your view, how are women represented in Haile Gerima's cinema?