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SLOW CINEMA: NARRATIVE, MINIMALISM, AND INDETERMINACY IN KENYAN CINEMA

by

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DECLARATION

I declare that the thesis, which I hereby submit for the degree PhD Drama and Film Studies at the University of Pretoria, is my own original work and has not previously been submitted by me for a degree at this or any other tertiary institution. Where secondary material has been used (either from a printed source, Internet or from any other source), this has been properly acknowledged and referenced in accordance with departmental requirements. I understand what plagiarism is and am aware of the University of Pretoria's policy in this regard.

EMMANUEL WANYONYI

Signature

Date: June 2022

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ETHICS STATEMENT

The author, whose name appears on the title page of this Doctoral thesis, has obtained, for the research described in this work, the applicable research ethics approval. The author declares that he has observed the ethical standards required in terms of the University of Pretoria's Code of Ethics for researchers and the Policy guidelines for responsible research.

DEDICATION

I dedicate this thesis to my wife, Wanjiku, and my children, Ava-Zyra and Throne who have been affected in every way possible by this quest. I hope the sacrifices you have borne for me to complete this process will be repaid to you with many opportunities for happiness and attainments in your future. I love you so much! I also dedicate this work to my mentors: James Mutua for stirring in me a passion for filmmaking and teaching that I cannot contain, and Alison Ngibuini for setting me on the path of true discovery as a filmmaker and as a person. Thank you for your mentorship! I could not have achieved this much if it was not for your support and guidance. Finally, this thesis is dedicated to the memory of my father, Humphrey Martin Sikuku.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

ABSTRACT

Contemporary scholars perceive Slow Cinema as a distinct art cinema movement (from contemporary mainstream cinemas) that emphasises the passage of time and an undramatic narrative designed for spectatorial contemplation of the cinematic image. Consequently, there is a growing body of literature seeking to locate the narrative-formal strategies of Slow Cinema within the historical, socio-cultural, economic, technological, and political contexts of diverse geographical backgrounds. While contemporary scholarship has interrogated and expanded the frameworks of Slow Cinema techniques particularly in Europe, Asia, and Latin America, there is no systematic research into Slow Cinema's deployment within an African (Kenyan) context. This study applies auteur theory to understand how Slow Cinema techniques (undramatic/de-dramatised narrative, minimalism, and indeterminacy) can resonate with Kenya's socio-cultural sensibilities while interrelating on aesthetic, technological, and political levels of the country's national cinema framework. Specifically, the aim of this study was to investigate how selected Kenyan film viewers, filmmakers, film critics, film scholars, and film policy-makers would visualise and interpret the narrative and aesthetic conventions of Slow Cinema deployed in the first-ever Kenyan Slow Cinema film, *Men of the Hill*. To answer the research question, I adopted a mixed-methods research design. I relied on qualitative data obtained from the textual analysis of existing Slow Cinema films, Practice-as-Research (PaR), and interviews. Quantitative data was obtained from a web survey of selected Kenyan film viewers.

Findings from the textual analysis of three selected Slow Cinema films: *Uncle Boonmee*, *The Turin Horse*, and *Skoonheid* confirmed that the narrative-formal strategies of Slow Cinema can be situated within the national framework of Kenyan cinema. These results also led to the conclusion that Slow Cinema's themes can resonate with Kenya's historical and socio-cultural sensibilities. Findings from PaR indicate that the performative and reflective techniques of making the first-ever Kenyan Slow Cinema film convey the form and style of Slow Cinema while retaining a sense of geo-cultural specificity. Results from the web survey and interviews showed that despite Slow Cinema being viewed as a predominantly new genre in Kenyan cinema, its form and style (undramatic narrative, minimalism and indeterminacy) can create a new reality for the viewer leading to contemplative experiences and practices. Results across the web survey and interviews also revealed that a significant majority of the participants appreciated Slow Cinema because of its potential to showcase Kenya's cultural tendencies and socio-physical reality, while addressing the existing historical and socio-economic challenges. However, the participants observed that it would take more time and knowledge for the average Kenyan viewer to appreciate Slow Cinema. Finally, the results permit this study to conclude that the availability of context-bound knowledge and the situatedness of different methodological approaches in the research of Slow Cinema can offer a unique opportunity to expand the frameworks of Slow Cinema techniques where none have been explored before.

Key terms:

Slow Cinema; context and situatedness; modernist aesthetic; slow narrative; minimalism and indeterminacy; narrative-formal expressiveness; *vraisemblance*; existentialism; hybridity; Kenyan cinema.

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CHAPTER ONE:

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Chapter Introduction

The last two decades have seen a growing interest in Slow Cinema.[1] This interest has led to a steady proliferation of discourses seeking to provide insights into Slow Cinema as a distinct movement from contemporary mainstream cinemas. For example, Çağlayan (2018: 3) perceives Slow Cinema as "perhaps the most exciting art cinema current in the twenty-first century". At the same time, Luca and Jorge (2016: 1) regard slowness as a "constitutive temporal feature of previous films, schools and traditions". Kunda (2018: 1) largely agrees with Luca and Jorge, emphasising that Slow Cinema is neither a new genre nor a passing trend. Nagib (2016: 27) is keen to underline that the incorporation of Slow Cinema as a genre in the last decade is attributable to digital technology, enabling the unrestricted use of the long take rarely seen in mainstream blockbuster films.

Recent discourses in Slow Cinema, most of which I have consulted in this study, suggest a common tendency to underscore the narrative strategies and aesthetic choices of renowned Slow Cinema film directors.[2] These directors include Abbas Kiarostami (Iran), Apichatpong Weerasethakul (Thailand), Béla Tarr (Hungary), Carlos Reygadas (Mexico), Gus van Sant (USA), Lav Diaz (Philippines), Lisandro Alonso (Argentina), Pedro Costa (Portugal), Nuri Bilge Ceylan (Turkey) and Tsai Ming-liang (Taiwan) to name a few. There is also a growing body of literature that recognises the significance of Slow Cinema on the historical, socio-cultural, economic, technological and political contexts of the global cinema

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[1] I purposefully capitalise the first letters of the term (as in Slow Cinema) throughout this thesis to suggest the novelty of such a cinematic movement within the context of Kenyan cinema. Leading Slow Cinema scholars (Çağlayan 2018; Luca & Jorge 2016; Jaffe 2014) frequently write the term in lower case (as in slow cinema) within the text.

[2] These narrative strategies and aesthetic choices are stylised to challenge the accelerated pace of global capitalism and praise the slowed down pace of life, as well as the quotidian, day-to-day reality that the characters face within the universe of the story. See Çağlayan (2014) and Schrader (2018).

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economy (Çağlayan 2018; Luca & Jorge 2016; Elsaesser 2011; Gott 2016; Jaffe 2014; Koutsourakis 2019; Nagib 2016; Rancière 2016; Stone & Cooke 2016).

As a result, one of the most significant current discussions is how Slow Cinema can be positioned as a distinct framework and style from which filmmakers can draw upon, irrespective of their historical, cultural and geographical backgrounds (Luca & Jorge 2015). Yet, research to date has not determined Slow Cinema's position within the context of African cinemas even though Malian film director Abderrahmane Sissako's films *Heremakono* (2002) and *Timbuktu* (2014) employ some techniques of Slow Cinema. South African film director Oliver Hermanus has also embraced different slowness forms as demonstrated in his highly acclaimed film, *Skoonheid* (2011). Little is known of Slow Cinema in Kenya, thus indicating a need to understand how the conventions of slowness can resonate with the country's socio-cultural sensibilities while interrelating on narrative, aesthetic, technological, and political levels of Kenyan cinema.

In light of the above, this study aims to chart a new path for Slow Cinema within the framework of Kenyan cinema. It relies on recent Slow Cinema films by renowned auteurs, wide-ranging discourses on Slow Cinema, and the first-ever creative production of a Kenyan Slow Cinema film, *Men of the Hill* (refer to Appendix A), to demonstrate how the conventions of slowness can be situated within the geo-cultural specificities of Kenyan cinema. This first chapter introduces the study's background and rationale by examining Slow Cinema's definitions, providing a historical perspective of Slow Cinema, and problematising Slow Cinema's context and situatedness in Kenyan cinema. After that, I describe the research question and aims of the study. I then explain the research design that I used in the study, arguing that the nonexperimental mixed-methods research, which applies a wide variety of methods, was an appropriate choice because Kenyan audiences and critics know little about Slow Cinema. The last section (see 1.5) outlines the organisation of each chapter and how it shapes the entire study.

1.2 Background and Rationale of the Study

Contemporary scholarship has interrogated and expanded the frameworks of Slow Cinema by theorising the slow techniques of past and recent Slow Cinema films from many different countries in Europe, Asia, and Latin America. As Luca and Jorge (2016: 2) observe, these

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expositions have notably created controversy over Slow Cinema's narrative, aesthetics and politics, aspects of which are worth discussing here. This section first probes Slow Cinema's definition from numerous scholarly writings. Secondly, it provides a historical perspective of Slow Cinema and, thirdly, problematises the context and situatedness of slow conventions and practices in Kenyan cinema.

1.2.1 Towards a definition of Slow Cinema

The term "Slow Cinema" has prompted a flurry of interest from journal editors, bloggers and film scholars, who have often characterised it as a genre of art cinema.[3] It was Nick James, the editor of *Sight & Sound* journal (April 2010 issue), who first contended that "Slow Cinema was a strand of international art films notorious for their languid narrative pace, implicit storytelling and minimalist aesthetics". Grønstad (2016: 274) and Schrader (2018: 10) further validate James's view by referring to Slow Cinema as a branch of art cinema insistent on long-duration and minimalism of narrative, action, and camera movement. Jaffe (2014: 5) and Schoonover (2016: 153) also share the view that many global art-house films had persistently confronted audiences with slowness since the Second World War. In a contemporary sense, this slowness, argues Çağlayan (2018: 5), has been viewed as "a reaction against the dominance of fast-paced mainstream cinema narratives" associated with Hollywood.

Nonetheless, providing a precise definition of Slow Cinema has been challenging for scholars in the discipline. According to Luca and Jorge (2016: 1) and Kunda (2018: 2), French film critic Michel Ciment is credited as one of the first thinkers to coin the expression "cinema of slowness" in 2003 at the 43rd International Film Festival in San Francisco. Ciment explicitly cited Abbas Kiarostami, Béla Tarr, and Tsai Ming-liang as the chief exponents of the movement. On the other hand, Çağlayan (2018: 4) strongly associates the term (Slow Cinema) with Jonathan Romney, whose review article, *A Tendency Within Art Cinema* in the 2000s was published in *Sight & Sound*'s tribute to 30 films linked to the Slow Cinema

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[3] The term circulates widely in popular and academic discourse and it is used to denote feature-length narratives that adhere to a specific set of aesthetic codes that are structurally opposed to mainstream films. Art cinema therefore operates at the intersection of commercial and avant-garde cinemas. See Hamblin, S. (2016).

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tradition. In 2008, Matthew Flanagan published an article titled, "Towards an Aesthetic of Slow in Contemporary Cinema", in which he advanced the idea of Ciment's "cinema of slowness" by precisely describing it as the deployment of long takes, de-dramatised narrative, and a prolonged emphasis on stillness and the mundane (Luca & Jorge 2016: 1). It was not until 2010, Luca and Jorge (2016: 2) note, that the term "Slow Cinema" became popularised among "Anglo-Saxon film critics and cinephiles". Nick James, for example, questioned the soundness and political usefulness of Slow Cinema films due to the demand they place on "the great swathes of our precious time" to achieve a transient aesthetics. In 2012, Flanagan followed up his discussion on "the aesthetic of slow" in his PhD thesis, "Slow Cinema: Temporality and Style in Contemporary Art and Experimental Film", which Boczkowska (2016: 228) states, can be considered as the first academic study of Slow Cinema. The study provides a detailed portrayal of the films' past and distinct styles to belong to the Slow Cinema genre. However, Flanagan (2012: 5) suggests that using the label "slow" readily implies "opposition to speed and motion evident in contemporary mainstream films". Still, he contends that "Slow Cinema" would be a more appropriate term because it elicits a sense of temporality concerning the world.

Despite the popularised use of the term "Slow Cinema", there have been attempts to characterise the movement using both positive and negative descriptors, especially in critical reviews of Slow Cinema films. Schrader (2018: 10) identifies some of these terms, including stasis, contemplative, austere, landscape, abstract, and even metaphysical, as being frequently used to describe the tendency towards slowness. Still, he recommends using a multipurpose and inclusive term, "Slow Cinema", which he argues is helpful due to its flexibility and inclusivity. Çağlayan (2018: 5) agrees, stating that using such descriptors as poetic, muted, oblique, quietude, reluctance, and anguish often leads to confusion because they often ignore the aesthetic merits of Slow Cinema and its emotional quality. In recent years, film bloggers and critics have been held responsible for negatively depicting Slow Cinema as a dull or boring synonym (Çağlayan 2018:6; Jaffe 2014:1). However, notes Misek (2012: 137), "boring" should not be synonymous with Slow Cinema films, especially because one can also view some fast films as boring. American film critic Roger Ebert (2007: 921), much like Misek, offers an intriguing perspective on Slow Cinema's potential and expressed capacity to portray the physical, mental and social spheres of human life compared with a thriller, which is rhythmically monotonous. He specifically states:

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> A slow movie that closely observes human beings and their relationships can be endlessly fascinating, while a thriller with nonstop wall-to-wall action can be boring, because it is all relentlessly pitched at the same tone.

Lim (2016: 91) then concludes that it would be highly subjective to use "boredom" as a slowness descriptor. Jonathan Romney[4], Nick James[5], and Steven Shaviro[6] have been among the Slow Cinema movement's leading critics. Romney (2000: 1) in his review of Béla Tarr's seven-hour film *Sátántangó* (1994), which he termed a "prodigy of dissidence", acknowledges the emergence of a cinema that subordinates events "in favour of mood and an intensified sense of temporality", signalling cinema's ability to reinvent itself. However, Romney attempted to dampen the enthusiasm around Slow Cinema as a movement. In concurrence with Romney's criticism, James (2010: 5) referred to Slow Cinema films as "passive-aggressive" due to their emphasis on the long duration that in his view amounts to wasting the viewer's precious time.

Shaviro (2010: 1), on his part, found it "regrettable that a cinema that attached great significance to the aesthetic of the long take, slow camera movement, and sparse dialogue style had become not only a default international style, but also a profoundly nostalgic and regressive cliché". In other words, Shaviro suggests that Slow Cinema tends to mimic older cinematic techniques and give them a new appearance while ignoring the social, political, and technological realities of past years. Blogger Harry Tuttle (2010) later wrote a response accusing James of promoting anti-intellectualism in his criticism of Slow Cinema, simply because such a style was not pro-entertainment.[7] Furthermore, Tuttle termed Flanagan's label of *Slow Cinema* "a mischaracterisation that induces contempt and caricature", preferring the expression "contemporary contemplative cinema" (CCC) instead. Tuttle then proceeded to list his four criteria for CCC as slowness, plotlessness, wordlessness, and alienation (Tuttle as quoted in Schrader 2018: 10). Luca and Jorge (2016: 4) agree with Tuttle in their attempt to question the applicability and usefulness of the term "slow" in light

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[4] Romney (2000). *Are You Sitting Comfortably? Guardian*, October 7, 2000, https://www.theguardian.com/film/2000/oct/07/books.guardianreview, accessed March 22, 2017.
[5] James (2010). *Passive Aggressive. Sight and Sound* 20, no. 4
[6] Shaviro (2010). *Slow Cinema vs. Fast Films. The Pinocchio Theory blog,* posted May 12, 2010, http://www.shaviro.com/Blog/?p=891, accessed March 22, 2017.
[7] Tuttle (2010). *Slow Cinema films, Easy Life, Unspoken Cinema* blog, posted May 12, 2010, http://unspokencinema.bl0gsp0t.c0m/2010/05/sl0w-films-easy-life, accessed March 22, 2017

of its theoretical and critical potential. However, they call for the label "Slow Cinema" to be retained and exploited for all intents and purposes.

In terms of what constitutes slowness and Flanagan's (2012) groundbreaking study of Slow Cinema, scholars have been divided between two approaches in defining Slow Cinema. While some scholars seek to define Slow Cinema in terms of its temporal quality, others focus on its distinct style. Regarding temporality, Schrader (2018: 11) offers a somewhat simplified definition stripped of aesthetic jargon by referring to Slow Cinema as "the art of making something take longer than the spectator has been conditioned to expect". Here, Schrader presumes that his hypothetical spectator has been "conditioned" by American mainstream commercial cinema to anticipate a specific duration of events in narrative film. Kunda (2018: 2) agrees with Schrader, calling Slow Cinema a simple term, which conveys the idea that the length of a take matters more than anything else as a genre. Dwyer and Perkins (2018: 103) describe Slow Cinema as a movement or filmmaking type that stands in opposition to other cinemas based on its relationship to time. Luca and Jorge (2016: 3) use more complex terms to associate Slow Cinema with a more significant socio-cultural movement, aimed at liberating the temporal structures of slowness against the culture of speed. This culture is often propagated by late capitalism and its insistence on brevity and quickly consumed entertainment.[8]

However, Luca and Jorge (2016: 3) underscore that not all films should be classified as slow because of their extended duration or employment of the long-take. They give the example of long-take films such as Alfred Hitchcock's *Rope* (1948), Orson Welles's *A Touch of Evil* (1958), and Mikhail Kalatozov's *I am Cuba* (1964) as films that do not qualify as slow due to their "eventful mise-en-scène" and a kineticism in their camerawork". Koutsourakis (2019: 388) offers similar views to Luca and Jorge, stressing that many contemporary Slow Cinema films have adopted formal characteristics of films associated with early cinema and "the silent era, which were not judged to be slow at the time". For these reasons, I use the term "Slow Cinema films" throughout this thesis to refer to films that adhere to the strategies

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[8] The extremes of late capitalism can be analysed through "Quibi", the short-form mobile streaming service, which raised capital of 1.7-billion American dollars from Hollywood's biggest studios to provide its paying subscribers with bite-sized premium video content that can be watched on-the-go or in-between moments of the day (Epstein 2020: 1). Further reading of Epstein's (2020) article: https://qz.com/1907265/why-quibi-failed/

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of extended duration and aesthetics of the long-take for purposes of "liberating the temporal structures of slowness against the culture of speed" (see Luca and Jorge 2016: 3). Since a Slow Cinema film cannot be defined based only on its temporal quality, Çağlayan (2018: 16) provides an all-inclusive definition of Slow Cinema that acknowledges the combination of the long take and extended duration. Çağlayan insists that this definition serves as a "means to detract from the imposition of narrative causality and elicit an aesthetic of experience", which he further argues, "is based on nostalgia, absurdism and boredom". Unlike Shaviro's (2010) use of the term "nostalgic" to suggest Slow Cinema's ignorant mimicking of older cinematic styles, Çağlayan considers "nostalgia" as an intrinsic dimension of Slow Cinema. The "nostalgic evocation of modernist film techniques" produces distinctive art forms that reexamine the purpose of cinema in a way that downplays the significance of narrative meaning (Çağlayan 2018: 42).

Grønstad (2016: 274) suggests stylistic preferences for the long-take in Slow Cinema, with the action unfolding in real-time to achieve hyperrealism and de-dramatisation of the plot, thereby undermining the value of speech or dialogue.[9] For Dwyer and Perkins (2018: 103), Slow Cinema is often recognised in its static camerawork, the slow movement of characters within the frame, and minimal editing. Moreover, Walsh (2016:69) argues that Slow Cinema refers to feature-length fiction films with minimal characters and plot development. These fiction films have been popularised by Slow Cinema film directors mentioned in section 1.1 (see p. 1). In retrospect, Boczkowska (2016: 229) acknowledges the descriptive vagueness and ambiguity of the terms used to describe Slow Cinema, but he downplays their significance, advocating instead for scholars to use them intentionally. He argues:

> Whatever label one chooses to use in their research should be intended to denote the kind of cinema that emphasises the passage of time in the shot and an undramatic narrative or non-narrative mode. A rigorous compositional form designed for contemplative spectatorial practice is also applicable.

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[9] The term "hyperrealism" or "hyperreality" is a process of systematic simulation in which symbols are increasingly utilised to replace actual objects and experiences. These symbols that have replaced the actual experience ultimately become more real than reality itself (see Harrison & Wood 2003: 1019; Chase 1973: 7). In the cinematic context, Bharathi and Ajit (2018: 1) note that in a film, hyperrealism is primarily a visual language that gives a hyperreal experience to the audience. In this sense, the audience is taken to the hyperreal scenario by images which showcase his/her mundane desires and needs.

While various definitions of the term "Slow Cinema" take different approaches, this study adopts Boczkowska's approach as quoted above. The definition proposed by Çağlayan (2018: 16), which combines the long-take, dead time, narrative causality and aesthetic features of slowness to elicit the experience of nostalgia, absurdism, and boredom, is also significant.[10] The following section offers a transitory perspective of the recent history of Slow Cinema.

1.2.2 A historical perspective of Slow Cinema

A framework accounting for Slow Cinema's history requires a brief discussion of how the Slow Movement associated with slow food; slow medicine, slow tourism, slow money, slow gardening, and slow cities came about. According to Bac and Aksoz (2013: 68), the larger *Slow Movement* started from the slow food movement, founded in 1986 by Carlo Petrini and other enthusiasts through his *Arcigola* foundation, to protest against the 1986 opening of the first McDonald's restaurant in Rome. Bac and Aksoz further indicate that these protests culminated in the 1989 Slow Food Manifesto, read in Paris in front of delegates from 15 countries. The manifesto stated, "Our defence should begin at the table with *Slow Food*. Let us rediscover the flavours and savours of regional cooking and banish the degrading effects of *Fast Food*" (Bac & Aksoz 2013: 68). The first Slow Food International Congress was held in Venice, Italy in 1990 signalling the *Osterie d'Italia* (slow travel guidebook) and the beginning of the *Slow Food Editore* publishing house. In the years that followed, the movement extended to several countries, including Germany, Switzerland, Japan, and the United Kingdom (2013: 68). Fundamentally, as Carl Honoré (2005: 278), a leading advocate of the slow movement, argues in his influential work, *In Praise of Slow*, the Slow Movement calls for questioning the untrammelled materialism that drives the global economy. Equally, Lim (2016: 88-89) argues that the *Slow Movement* emphasises organic roots, small-scale processes, and ethical products downsized to the local level and embedded within the global, as reflected in such slogans: "Think Globally, Act Locally".

Moreover, Lim (2016: 89), like other scholars and critics above, sees the call to "slowness" as an attempt to counter speed and technological changes. Similar to the larger

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[10] In Chapter Three, I discuss in detail how the concepts of nostalgia, absurdism, and boredom have been applied in the films of Apichatpong Weerasethakul, Béla Tarr, and Oliver Hermanus.

slow movement, according to Lim (2016: 89), "Slow Cinema forms part of a much broader cultural project", intentionally seeing itself as a reaction to accelerated continuity exemplified in – but not only practiced by – mainstream cinema dominated by Hollywood. In this sense, slowness becomes an act of harmonised defiance, similar to slow food's response to the expediency of fast food and mindless consumerism (Boczkowska 2016:228; Çağlayan 2018: 8; Elsaesser 2011: 117; Grønstad 2016: 277; Nagib 2016: 26). However, as Jaffe (2014: 4) points out, Slow Cinema is not concerned with enacting futurist manifestos. It seeks to underscore fundamental narrative and aesthetic choices that emphasise stillness, emptiness, and absence. Lastly, and more critically, Çağlayan (2018: 16) warns against "situating Slow Cinema as a cinematic reformulation of the slow movement". He terms such an attempt as an "oversimplification" of the slow aesthetic. Slow Cinema, in any event, prefigures the development of slowness in other forms of cultural expressions.

Campany (2008: 36) notes that the history of Slow Cinema dates back to the early 1920s when there was increasing uncertainty about the recorded image due to the tension between filmmakers' commercial qualities and filmmakers' artistic predispositions. Of greater significance, according to Campany, was the emphasis on speed and montage as witnessed in such Soviet films as "*Battleship Potemkin* (Eisenstein 1925), *Mother* (Pudovkin 1926), and *Man with a Movie Camera* (Vertov 1929)". The accelerated image in these films, Campany claims, led a group of artists, writers, critics, and filmmakers to embrace slowness against what they described as a dehumanising, repetitive, and monotonous culture of mass destruction precipitated by World War I (1914-1918) and leading many to question the values and assumptions of Western civilisation. Çağlayan (2018: 10) also locates the Slow Cinema debate in the 1920s by identifying some Scandinavian films, such as *The Phantom Carriage* (Sjöström 1921), which film critics at the time considered to be slow. Campany (2007: 10), however, insists that Slow Cinema gained a foothold after World War II (1939-1945) with Euro-American cultures contributing positively to its development through the ideologies of mainstream cinema, television, and lifestyle.

Consequently, speed lost its inventive credentials while being slow was seen as a more radical form of expression. For example, Italian Neorealism (1943-1952), which was popularised by Roberto Rossellini, Vittorio De Sica, and Federico Fellini among others during and after World War II, individuated itself as a national film movement that

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emphasised a slower pace, wandering characters, and a contemplation of the quotidian life. Italian neorealist films featured nonprofessional actors in opposition to American war films' exaggerated exploits (Çağlayan 2018: 10). The 1960s marked a defining moment for the aesthetic of slowness as reported by Çağlayan (2018: 9):

> The audience at the 1960 Cannes Film Festival found [Italian film director] Michelangelo Antonioni's *L'Avventura* (1960) outrageously slow and tedious and protested against the film's relaxed tempo by whistling and shouting "Cut!" during scenes in which dead time and stillness presided over causal action.[11] While the public rejected the film, the next day, the festival jury felt obliged to make an announcement proclaiming it a modern masterpiece, supporting Antonioni's 'cerebral and contemplative (as opposed to instinctual and dynamic) art film'.

The above response legitimises Slow Cinema's long history, traced back to the post-1960 experimental cinema and avant-garde. According to Jaffe (2014: 3), complaints related to the slow aesthetic were also levelled against American film director Andy Warhol[12] and his Belgian counterpart, Chantal Akerman.[13] Antonioni's films, in particular, inspired Italian film director and poet Pier Paolo Pasolini (1922-1975) to give a paper at the Pesaro Film Festival in 1965, in which he felt a receptivity budding in cinema that departed from the classical Hollywood and Italian realism.[14] He termed this new style as a "free indirect discourse"[15] (Pasolini, quoted in Armstrong 2001).[16] The style, Pasolini further argued, substituted objective realism. This form of realism summed up Hollywood's real effect or the

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[11] Antonioni's other films, *La Notte* (1961), *L'Eclisse* (1962), and *Red Desert* (1964) also exemplify key archetypes for Slow Cinema with their languid pace, sustained use of dead time, and accentuating of visual composition (Çağlayan 2018:10).

[12] Warhol's film *Empire* (1964) for example, lacks conventional narrative and characters. Warhol also insists on the passing of time with the film's eight hours and five minutes showing slow-motion footage of a static take of the Empire State Building. See Angell (1994).

[13] Akerman's film *Je Tu Il Elle* (*I, You, He, She* 1974), comprises of long static black-and-white takes, reminiscent of the films of Andy Warhol. See Foster (2018) in *Senses of Cinema*: Great Directors-Akerman, Chantal, Issue 86: http://sensesofcinema.com/2018/great-directors/chantal-akerman/. Accessed: 7 August 2020.

[14] See Pasolini's paper from the French translation by Marrianne de Vettimo and Jaques Bontemps, which appeared in *Cahiers du Cinéma* No. 171, October 1965). English translation available at *In Movies and Methods*. Vol. 1. Ed. Bill Nichols (1976).
https://dilipshakya.files.wordpress.com/2013/04/pasolini1976-cinema-n-poetry.pdf. Accessed: 9 August 2020.

[15] "Free indirect discourse", according to Verstraten (2012: 122), refers to a style in which the film's narrator is crosscut with the language of the film. In other words, it explicitly indicates that the world is interpreted from the angle of the character.

[16] See Armstrong (2001: 1): http://sensesofcinema.com/2001/book-reviews/modernity-2/. Accessed: 07/06/2020

ostensible facticity of neorealism, with the protagonist's neurotic subjectivity (Pasolini in Orr & Taxidou 2000: 44). More specifically, Pasolini indicated how intrigued he was by Antonioni's "obsessive framing" and the *temps mort* (slack period) technique, which involved characters entering and leaving the frame with the camera still lingering after they had departed. Pasolini, therefore, seemed concerned to define Antonioni's style as a "cinema of poetry" (Pasolini in Nichols 1976: 3). In his pontification, a cinema of poetry defied convention and description with its startling image and newness that was free of conventional devices of classical practice. For example, in a cinema of poetry, a dissolve need not signal the beginning or end of a dream sequence, hence speaking as an image rather than an association (Orr & Taxidou 2000: 44).

Of most significance to this current study, Orr and Taxidou observe that a cinema of poetry would become an auteurism benchmark, with Michelangelo Antonioni, for example, using the technique in his slow-moving auteurist films to inform his subjective views of and on existence. introduced Antonioni's worldviews that would become high auteurism benchmarks in time. Pasolini's writings on the cinema of poetry, it can be argued, resonate with the definition of Slow Cinema, which emphasises the ontologies of the image as discussed by Çağlayan (2018: 16). Çağlayan specifically uses the term "poetics" to refer to Slow cinema. Apart from the modernist masterpieces of Michelangelo Antonioni, other critically acclaimed films in the earlier world cinema can be associated with Slow Cinema (Çağlayan 2018: 10; Jaffe 2014: 2).[17] These films include *Tokyo Story* (Ozu 1953), *Pickpocket* (Bresson 1959), *Gertrud* (Dreyer 1964), and *The Red and the White* (Jancsó 1967). The above films feature intentionally vague characters, contemplative pacing, and an austere style that did not conform to Hollywood continuity cinema. Japanese director Ozu's slow aesthetics, for example, influenced the cinema of German filmmaker Wim Wenders, whose films *Alice in the Cities* (1974), *Kings of the Road* (1976), and *The American Friend* (1977) are characterised by static shots of buildings and frequent images of trains. Wenders also uses repetition as a principle of construction, a style that is reminiscent of Ozu's *I Was Born, but…* (1932) and *Tokyo Story* (1953) (Geist 1983: 234-239).

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[17] The term "modernist masterpieces" here refers to films that embrace older cinematic styles of realism and narrative coherence (see Wood 2011). I will discuss modernist cinema at length in Chapter Two.

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French film director Robert Bresson's depiction of characters who longed for spiritual redemption significantly influenced American screenwriter and director Paul Schrader's film, *American Gigolo* (1980). Schrader's transcendental style is considered seemingly only be Schrader himself, a precursor of contemporary Slow Cinema (Schrader 2018: 167).[18] Russian filmmaker Andrei Tarkovsky's film *The Sacrifice* (1986) also employed Bresson's ontologies of the image and transcendence.[19] Tarkovsky remains highly regarded as a modernist filmmaker and pioneer and practitioner of Slow Cinema (Sterritt 2012: 62). Lastly, two of the foremost Slow Cinema directors, Theo Angelopoulos (Greece) and Béla Tarr (Hungary), have been labelled as closest to the cinematic language that Hungary's Miklos Jancsó had forged: a contemplative style featuring consistent use of haunting landscape, long takes, and mobile cameras (Brooke 2016; Gorzo 2014; Powell 2015).

Now that it is possible to trace Slow Cinema back to the earlier movements and moments in film history, this study now focuses on how Slow Cinema acquired greater visibility as a global cinematic tendency over the past decade. This visibility occurred despite Slow Cinema's label as a philosophical and Eurocentric tendency (see Luca & Jorge 2016: 9-10). For Schrader (2018: 10), Slow Cinema has become more popular among filmmakers in the last fifteen years with slow movies "being made faster than we can see them". Schrader further notes that there are websites, conferences, blogs, books, film festivals and Video-on-Demand (VOD) websites associated with Slow Cinema. Additionally, forty to fifty Slow Cinema films premiered in 2017, primarily in film festivals worldwide (Schrader 2018: 10). In the paragraphs that follow, I will discuss how Slow Cinema has gained momentum in academia and how the topic has received coverage across traditional media outlets and social media platforms. The discussion of how Slow Cinema finds its expressions both in the academy and in the media is critical because it underscores the significance of recognising the aesthetic and contextual differences of Slow Cinema film directors from across the globe.

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[18] According to Schrader (2018), "the transcendental style in film expresses a spiritual state by means of austere camerawork, acting devoid of self-consciousness, and editing that avoids editorial comment". In Chapter Two, I discuss in more detail, the relationship between Slow Cinema and the transcendental style in film.

[19] Tarkovsky was so inspired by Bresson's style that he once wrote in his book, *Sculpting in Time* (1989): "I am only interested in the views of two people: one is called Bresson and one called Bergman".

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1.2.2.1 Slow Cinema and Film Studies

Slow Cinema has received considerable critical attention in film studies, with 2014 in particular, ushering several Slow Cinema academic studies (Brady 2016: 71; Çağlayan 2018: 3). Song Hwee Lim claims that his book "Tsai Ming-Liang and a Cinema of Slowness" (2014) is the first book to examine the concept of cinematic slowness within contemporary film culture. Lim seeks to provide a critical inquiry into the questions of aesthetics, temporality, and materiality while examining the "concepts of authorship, cinephilia, and nostalgia" (Lim 2014: 1). Contemporaneously, Ira Jaffe's book: "Slow Movies: Countering the Cinema of Action" (2014) draws together several Slow Cinema films and investigates their primary artistic and philosophical interests. Most importantly, Jaffe attempts to relate contemporary Slow Cinema films to the works of earlier directors such as Ozu, Bresson, Antonioni and Dreyer, to which these contemporary works are often compared (Jaffe 2014: 2).

Another essential publication in 2014 was Lutz Koepnick's: "On Slowness: Toward an Aesthetic of the Contemporary", concerned with reframing recent discourses on slowness to complicate its praise as much as its criticism. The year after, Tiago Luca and Nuno Jorge published an edited collection: *Slow Cinema (Traditions in World Cinema* 2015*)*, seeking to situate, theorise, and "map out cinematic slowness within contemporary global film production and across world cinema history". Emre Çağlayan's: "Poetics of Slow Cinema: Nostalgia, Absurdism, and Boredom" (2018) is one of the more recent publications on the topic. The book, according to Çağlayan, "marks the first study for treating Slow Cinema both as an aesthetic mode and as an institutional discourse". The book notably addresses "nostalgia, absurd humour and boredom as core dimensions of Slow Cinema". It also demonstrates how filmmakers such as Béla Tarr, Tsai Ming-liang and Nuri Bilge Ceylan have negotiated their oeuvres within the demands of global film culture.

In addition to the above, studies of Slow Cinema are available electronically in published and unpublished theses. Matthew Flanagan's doctoral dissertation: *Slow Cinema: Temporality and Style in Contemporary Art and Experimental Film* (2012), is, according to Çağlayan (2018: 3), the "first manuscript-length study of Slow Cinema". Flanagan attempted to situate Slow Cinema's historicity within a post-war modernist cinema and experimental tradition while addressing "natural forms of non-fiction cinema that focus on the monotony

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of daily realities and the impact of globalisation on contemporary artists' films". Julianne Ma Yang (2013) explored Swedish film director Roy Andersson's aesthetic and thematic concerns critical to Slow Cinema in her Master's dissertation: "Towards a Cinema of Contemplation: Roy Andersson's aesthetics and ethics". [20] Anna Schneider's (2014) Master's dissertation: "Slow Documentaries: The Long Take in Contemporary Nonfiction Films", focused on how documentary filmmakers create affective, sensorial images by foregrounding experience and duration through the long take. The extended shots in these non-fiction films inspire the audience to contemplate life's issues foregrounded in the film itself. The focus of Emre Çağlayan's (2014) doctoral thesis was: "The History and Aesthetics of Slow Cinema", in which he distinguished characteristics pertaining ultimately to narration, including "a mannered use of the long take and an unwavering emphasis on dead time". Other academic works include Jakob Boer's 2014 Master's dissertation: "Closed Faces, Open Spaces: Towards a Poetics of Slowness in the Films of Sharunas Bartas", and Nadin Mai's 2015 doctoral thesis: "The Aesthetics of absence and duration in the post-trauma cinema of Lav Diaz". Both Boer and Mai examined, albeit in different terms, what constitutes the viewer's experience of slowness through the lenses of two Slow Cinema film directors, whose works have received critical acclaim at the Cannes Film Festival and continued to appeal to audiences around the world.

A recent innovative research project conducted by Dwyer and Perkins (2018) sought to test the dominant perception that Slow Cinema draws on a different type of viewing experience. [21] Dwyer and Perkins conducted eye-tracking tests involving long-take sequences from *The Passenger* (Antonioni 1975) and *Cemetery of Splendour* (Weerasethakul 2015). They compared the results with data gathered from a faster film, *Now You See Me* (Leterrier 2013), which incorporates more intensive editing, more action and shorter durations. After analysing the eye-tracking heat maps and the dwell time data, Dwyer and Perkins pinpointed the specific areas that the viewers were drawn to and how

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[20] Andersson explores human behavior and its consequences in his films such as *Songs from the Second Floor* (2000), *You, the Living* (2007), *A Pigeon Sat on a Branch Reflecting on Existence* (2014), and *About Endlessness* (2019). See Ratner (2015).

[21] Furthermore, the findings by Dwyer and Perkins highlight the role of subtitling within the transnational production, exhibition and distribution of Slow Cinema, which has, so far, received limited critical attention and also falls beyond the scope of this current study.

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they looked when confronted with sequences of duration. This innovative research project is significant to the study of Slow Cinema because, unlike most scholarly works on the topic, it demonstrates that the researchers went beyond a mere description of literature to achieve a higher level of analysis, which considers whether or not slowness prompts a unique form of viewing experience.

The Slow Cinema phenomenon also enjoys the attention of academic conferences and Film Festivals around the world. The University of Chicago's Department of Cinema and Media Studies, for example, organised a graduate student conference in April 2016 themed: *Still Walking, Still Sleeping, Still Life: Slow Aesthetics and the Moving Image*.[22] The conference sought to engage with the contextual dispositions of slowness to expand upon discussions about Slow Cinema from a local and historically-informed perspective. Similarly, the biennial AV Festival, which was broadcast to a broader audience in Newcastle in March 2012 and themed: *As Slow as Possible*, saw a panel of filmmakers and critics engage in discussions that focused on an "alternative slower pace and relaxed rhythm to counter the accelerated speed of today". The conceptual questions raised in the discussion "culminated in an academic symposium titled *Fast/Slow* at Anglia Ruskin University, Cambridge, in April 2013" (Çağlayan 2018: 3). Of particular importance in the Slow Cinema context is the *Slow Cinema Film Festival* (SFF) in 2016, in Mayfield, East Sussex, UK.[23] The festival celebrates works that employ an aesthetic tendency popularised over the past three decades of world art cinema.

The Slow Cinema debate has also received its fair share of attention in social networks and mainstream media. Both champions and detractors engage in stimulating discussions on the aesthetics of slow and historicity (Grønstad 2016: 274). Çağlayan (2018: 2) asserts that the debates transpired rapidly via blogs, websites, and discussion boards rather than periodic print publications. Slow Cinema aficionado Nadin Mai's *The Art(s) of Slow Cinema*, for example, is "the first and only blog site dedicated to Slow Cinema films".[24] The site reviews books, articles, films, interviews, papers and current research on Slow Cinema from

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[22] For more details on the conference visit https://call-for-papers.sas.upenn.edu/node/65058. Accessed: 7 July 2017.

[23] Visit https://slowfilmfestival.com/ for more information on the festival. Accessed: 26 May 2017.

[24] For more information on Nadin Mai's Website, visit: https://theartsofslowcinema.com/. Accessed: 22 March 2017.

all over the world. In December 2018, Mai published the first issue of "The Art(s) of Slow Cinema" magazine, which features the oeuvres of Slow Cinema film directors, the state of cinema in the 21st Century, and various discussions related to Slow Cinema. In Çağlayan's (2018: 3) analysis, the pace at which the Slow Cinema debates have developed, especially across the social networks, demonstrates the global reach of Slow Cinema films conceptualised and made within a local framework that emphasises national, cultural and aesthetic sensibilities.

1.2.2.2 Slow Cinema's circulation

Lastly, the nature of Slow Cinema's circulation (its distribution and exhibition) has been an area of interest, with different authors providing valuable accounts of the global promotion and consumption trends of Slow Cinema films. There is unanimity among scholars that Slow Cinema thrives within a specific economic and cultural sphere facilitated by the International Film Festival framework (Luca & Jorge 2016: 11; Jaffe 2014: 2; Lim 2016: 92; Dwyer & Perkins 2018:107). Some of the festivals that have enabled the global promotion of Slow Cinema include those prestigious festivals hosted in the cities such as Cannes, Berlin, Venice, Sao Paolo, Toronto, and New York, to name a few. For instance, Slow Cinema films that have received the *Palme d'Or* at the Cannes Film Festival include *Taste of Cherry* (Kiarostami 1997), *Eternity and a Day* (Angelopoulos 1998), and *Elephant* (Sant 2003). Other notable films that rose to prominence at this festival include *4 Months, 3 Weeks and 2 Days* (Mungiu 2007), *Uncle Boonmee Who Can Recall His Past Lives* (Weerasethakul 2010), and *Winter Sleep* (Ceylan 2014). For its part, The Rotterdam International Film Festival (IFFR), known for its Hubert Bals Fund (HBF), has provided financial assistance to Slow Cinema film directors in Latin America, Africa and Asia, including but not limited to Lisandro Alonso, Carlos Reygadas, Lav Diaz, and Apichatpong Weerasethakul (Luca & Jorge 2016:11) (see also https://iffr.com/en/about-the-hubert-bals-fund).

In light of the above developments, Lim (2014: 27-28) calls for the liberation of Slow Cinema from its economic closet and "the larger category of art cinema to underscore its status as a global niche market with attendant institutions, mechanisms, and agents". For Luca (2017: 346), Slow Cinema currently sits at the intersection of two distinct social spheres and aesthetic projects, namely feature films and installations. He provides examples of Akerman, Ming-liang, Kiarostami, Weerasethakul, and Costa as Slow Cinema film directors,

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who have made moving image installations that recycle and expand upon their feature films over the past decades. The discussion in this sub-section suggests a re-theorising of Slow Cinema and its situatedness within the historical, cultural and production contexts of Kenyan cinema, as I will explore in subsequent paragraphs.

1.2.3 Problematising Slow Cinema: context and situatedness in Kenyan cinema

For the first time, the present research explores the interplay between Slow Cinema's context within the national framework of Kenyan cinema and the situatedness of specific filmmaking practices used in Slow Cinema towards the conceptualisation and production of the first-ever Kenyan Slow Cinema film (discussed extensively in Chapters Five, Six and Seven). Slow cinema cannot be generalised (Schrader 2018: 11) and Slow Cinema film auteurs such as Lav Diaz, Béla Tarr, and Tsai Ming-liang employ similar "slow" techniques for reasons that are very specific to their respective geo-cultural contexts. As Çağlayan (2018: 16) contends: "not all filmmakers belonging to the tradition [of slowness] share an identical, homogenous or overarching purpose". For these reasons, using Slow Cinema as a generalised "umbrella category", as proposed by Luca and Jorge (2016), is problematic. I argue that the production of context-centred knowledge of Slow Cinema in Kenya can be more informative to the much-debated question of Slow Cinema's appeal in the global film economy.

As Dixon (2008: 124) points out: "the specificity, or the uniqueness of the results because of the locale, can provide insights on how to approach an answer to a problem". Central to the context of Slow Cinema, in this case, is the question of how Kenyan film viewers, filmmakers, critics and scholars may receive and make sense of a Kenyan Slow Cinema film. Addressing the concerns raised by Çağlayan (2018: 3) on whether Slow Cinema films are "politically or aesthetically fascinating, or just self-satisfied creations made for cultural elitists", this study complicates the relationship between cinema and spectator by attending to the visualisation and interpretation of Slow Cinema. This reception often privileges the conventions of narrative, minimalism and indeterminacy (see Jaffe 2015).[25] I argue these

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[25] Jaffe (2015). *Slow Cinema: Resistance to Motion and emotion*. Available at: https://christine-jakobson.squarespace.com/issue/time/slow-cinema (Accessed: 22 March 2017).

three concepts are significant ways of understanding the mode of spectatorship elicited by Slow Cinema.

These concepts become the basis on which a Kenyan Slow Cinema film is evaluated for its political implications, cultural purposes, and artistic contribution. Such situatedness, argues Vannini (2008: 815), refers to "involvement within a context". For Costley (2019: 26), situatedness requires and acknowledges sociocultural influences, which arise between the researcher, situation, and context. This situatedness is applicable mainly in my experiences as a researcher-practitioner of Slow Cinema within the context of Kenyan cinema. Being situated in the local setting, Vannini (2008: 815) adds, means that the researcher is physically present on-site. As a result, it allows the research, and the researcher-practitioner, to be shaped by personal relationships, language, historical, political, economic, and cultural dimensions. As such, the knowledge generated from the notion of situatedness offers a theoretical and critical understanding of contemporary Slow Cinema's diverse intercultural discourse.

This study makes an original contribution to several important areas of Slow Cinema scholarship. Indeed, studies exist of how Slow Cinema can be expanded geographically and historically (Brady 2016; Çağlayan 2018; Luca & Jorge 2016; Jaffe 2014; Lim 2016). However, there is no systematic research into Slow Cinema's deployment within an African (Kenyan) context. This inadequacy offers a unique opportunity for the present study to explore applicable practices in Slow Cinema attendant to cultural nuance and critically productive to Kenyan cinema. Many Slow Cinema studies also rely too heavily on an exclusively qualitative analysis of Slow Cinema films relative to their narrative and stylistic strategies, temporality, and politics (Boer 2016; Boczkowska 2017; Çağlayan 2016; Luca 2016; Elsaesser 2011; Flanagan 2012; Mai 2015; Taberham 2018). Dwyer and Perkin (2018) rely on the experimental design to analyse eye-tracking heat maps and dwell time data to test the prevailing view that Slow Cinema elicits a different viewing style. Still, their study fails to establish precisely how slowness is implied and subsequently experienced by the spectator. This present study of Slow Cinema is the first to adopt a mixed-methods analysis of qualitative data obtained from the textual analysis of Slow Cinema films, Practice-as-Research (PaR), and interviews with Kenyan filmmakers, film critics, film scholars, and

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film policy-makers, and quantitative data obtained from a web survey of selected Kenyan film viewers (see section 1.4 on research design).

Regarding the situatedness of Slow Cinema's practices, the study also examines and redresses issues of the didactic narrative technique often deployed in Kenyan cinema. Didacticism can be traced from the British colonial era, which instilled the belief that cinema should primarily be used for instructional purposes (Slavkovic 2014: 192; Diang'a 2016: 6). Consequently, as Maina (2015: 24) posits, a significant weakness of Kenyan film narratives is their constant effort "to provide the spectator with too much narrative information that outs every one of its meaning to the surface". In such a case, the spectator is left with little material to contemplate. One of the leading Kenyan film scholars, Rachael Diang'a (2016: 9), has also pointed out that the narrative structures of some Kenyan films such as *Saikati* (Mungai 1992) facilitate extended explanations and flashbacks, leaving little room for inference. Such cinematic didacticism is contrary to the strategies used in Slow Cinema, which emphasise characters' quotidian routine, Spatio-temporal qualities, aesthetic minimalism, and contemplation (Jaffe 2014: 2).

Studies on Kenyan cinema over the past decade have also provided important information on the history of Kenyan cinema (Diang'a 2007; Kinyanjui 2014; Nyutho 2015; Okioma & Mugubi 2015); a general appraisal of filmmaking in Kenya (Edwards 2008; Ogunleye 2014; Slavkovic 2014); thematic concerns in Kenyan cinema (Adetunji 2019; Diang'a 2016, Diang'a 2017; Karimi 2016); and style and content (Diang'a 2013; Hodapp 2014; Maina 2015; Wamalwa 2018). Based on these sources, evidence of an alternative approach to the narrative and aesthetic tendencies currently at play in Kenyan cinema remains limited. My study postulates that Kenyan films can be imbued with a slow aesthetic that emphasises an undramatic or de-dramatised narrative, minimalism, and plot indeterminacy. More specifically, I situate Slow Cinema's narrative and aesthetic conventions within my local Nairobi-based Kenyan setting while focusing on making sense of the slow aesthetic in my practices as a researcher-practitioner.

1.3 Research Question and Aims of the Study

Anchored in the historical context of Slow Cinema and the rationale discussed in subsection 1.2.3, the research question that informs this study is:

How can a Kenyan Slow Cinema film convey the form and style of Slow Cinema while retaining a sense of geo-cultural specificity?

Specific aims related to this research question are as follows:

- Find out the salient features in cinema's history and development that can contribute to the existing body of literature in Slow Cinema.

- Demonstrate how the narrative and aesthetic conventions of slowness have been deployed in the selected films of world-renowned Slow Cinema auteurs.

- Explore how Slow Cinema's narrative and aesthetic conventions can be situated within Kenyan cinema's local, historical, and intercultural contexts.

- Make the first-ever Kenyan Slow Cinema film, with emphasis on narrative, minimalism, and indeterminacy.

- Investigate how selected Kenyan film viewers and film experts would visualise and interpret the narrative and aesthetic conventions of Slow Cinema used in *Men of the Hill* as a Kenyan Slow Cinema film.

The following section illustrates the research design used in the study, based on the above aims.

1.4 Research Design

The term research design refers to and includes decisions about the conceptualisation of the research itself, how it is conducted, and its contribution to the development of knowledge in a particular area (Cheek 2008: 761). Therefore, the choice of the mixed-methods design was presumed to be appropriate for this study to situate slowness within the Kenyan context and then use the findings to inform theory and practice in narrative, minimalism, and indeterminacy in Slow Cinema. As I have demonstrated in sub-section 1.2.3, Slow Cinema is context-bound and situated. Using various research methods to investigate Slow Cinema's context and situatedness within the Kenyan cinema framework allows me to draw causal inferences from "a diversity of voices, possibilities, and interpretations existent within

the research site" (Cheek 2008: 761). Indeed, Plowright (2019: 195) asserts that mixed-methods design facilitates collecting different data types by adopting more than one method, approach or strategy. This strategy is derivative from more conventional research paradigms that draw on different epistemologies and explanations – hence informing and underpinning knowledge claims. Therefore, my study employs qualitative and quantitative approaches to varying stages of the research process to suggest what Skinner (2008: 448) calls "new lines of inquiry, new foci of investigation, alternative statistical models, and novel interpretations". Skinner's approach is crucial to the study of Slow Cinema's context and situatedness in Kenyan cinema. The qualitative and quantitative data obtained through the mixed-method design are interconnected in a sequential format as follows.

In the first phase (see Chapter Three), I conduct a textual analysis of three Slow Cinema films, including *Uncle Boonmee Who Can Recall His Past Lives* (Weerasethakul 2010), *The Turin Horse* (Tarr 2011), and *Skoonheid* (Hermanus 2011). The textual analysis of these Slow Cinema films, as I will explain, enables me to analyse the narrative and aesthetic conventions that shape the cultural and philosophical underpinnings of Slow Cinema in different cultural contexts, namely Thailand, Hungary and South Africa. In the second phase (see Chapter Five), I draw on the theoretical assumptions derived from the textual analysis instrument to deploy Practice as Research (PaR) as a methodological approach to studying Slow Cinema within the context of Kenyan cinema. Significantly, PaR allows me to situate myself as a researcher-practitioner in the context of my study, and to write and direct a Kenyan Slow Cinema film (*Men of the Hill*). The third phase (see Chapter Six) involves collecting quantitative data from a web survey of selected Kenyan film viewers to investigate how they perceived Slow Cinema with specific reference to *Men of the Hill*. In the fourth and final phase (see Chapter Six), I use the survey findings to conceptualise the next qualitative data collection phase. The stage involves interviewing Kenyan filmmakers, film scholars, and film critics to provide insights into a Kenyan Slow Cinema film.

These phases laid the groundwork for me to analyse the qualitative data obtained from the interviews and clarify and enhance the survey's quantitative research findings. Skinner (2008: 449) supports this approach, arguing that "the extent to which the study includes feedback loops between methods influences the ability to use both sets of data to triangulate results". Creswell (2014: 100) refers to the research design explained in this section as

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"explanatory sequential mixed methods" because the qualitative phase follows the initial quantitative phase. Still, according to Creswell, the mixed-methods research design poses several challenges for the inquirer, such as:

- The need for extensive data collection,

- A considerable amount of time to analyse both qualitative and quantitative data, and

- The requirement to be conversant with both quantitative and qualitative forms of research (Creswell 2014: 682-683).

Below, I discuss the data collection instruments in more detail.

1.4.1 Data collection instruments

Before commencing data collection, I obtained ethical clearance from the University of Pretoria's Research Ethics Committee (refer to appendix B). The initial plan was to employ the traditional pen-and-paper method, which would ensure a representative sample of 400 Kenyan film viewers drawn from the counties of Nairobi, Mombasa, and Embu, which are known for their vibrant film cultures. However, due to the safety and prevention protocol against the Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic in Kenya, it was impossible to rely on such techniques to collect data in the third and fourth phases discussed in the previous section.[26] Consequently, I adopted Internet-mediated-research (IMR) techniques, which according to Hewson (2017: 59), "can generate valid, reliable data, comparable to offline research settings." Hewson points out the benefits of IMR, including cost and time efficiency, more access to specialist populations, and reasonably rich and elaborate interactions achieved at high anonymity and privacy levels. For my study, IMR enabled data collection from a representative sample of participants using instruments composed of a web survey and interviews. Since the explanatory sequential mixed methods approach is central to this study, I shall begin by discussing the textual analysis instrument, followed by PaR, then the web survey and interviews.

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[26] Click on the link below to see the Kenyan President's address to the nation on COVID-19 prevention measures. https://www.president.go.ke/2020/03/15/address-to-the-nation-by-h-e-uhuru-kenyatta-c-g-h-president-of-the-republic-of-kenya-and-commander-in-chief-of-the-defence-forces-on-covid-19-commonly-known-as-coronavirus/. Accessed 15/03/2020.

1.4.1.1 Textual analysis

The existing literature on textual analysis is extensive. It focuses mainly on the examination of either "content and meaning of texts or their structure and discourse" (Lockyer 2008: 865), text interpretation, both for verbal and filmic discourses (Wildfeuer 2013: 10), using the techniques of semiotics to analyse text as a sign that can be interpreted for its meanings (Bateman 2014: 13), and lastly, the practice of closely examining film texts to understand how to generate meaning and communicate within them (Forrest 2017: 1). Wildfeuer (2013: 9) is mainly interested in questions concerning the notion of film as text, arguing that "they are dynamically unfolding discourses analysed according to their contextual embedding and their social functions." Similarly, Lockyer (2008: 865) suggests that "film researchers use textual analysis to assess texts from various cultural settings". Lockyer further offers a broader perspective for adopting textual analysis as a qualitative method to conduct "genre analysis, mise-en-scène analysis, narrative analysis, discourse analysis, structural analysis, and post-structural analysis". Wildfeuer and Bateman (2017: 1) also highlight film text analysis's relevance as a skill grounded in "looking and listening" intently to what is distinctly existent in individual films and film extracts.

Based on the above literature, the textual analysis framework involves analysing narrative discourse in Slow Cinema, further elucidated in Chapter Three of this study. In this sense, it would be possible to show with this framework how specific conventions of slowness such as narrative, minimalism, and indeterminacy have been deployed in the works of prominent Slow Cinema film directors. The framework also enables the analysis of how life's philosophical meaning is constructed in the filmic text of slowness while complicating a viewer's interpretation of the narrative discourse. The textual analysis of the three selected Slow Cinema films (*Uncle Boonmee*, *The Turin Horse*, and *Skoonheid*) equally involves analysing patterns, cultural contexts, and the broader application of slow aesthetics. Lockyer's (2008: 865) suggestion that "a small number of texts is required to create an adequate data set" primarily informed the choice of three Slow Cinema films for textual analysis. These Slow Cinema films were available and accessible, expediting the research process and minimising ethical challenges in terms of accessibility and biases associated with creating data sources for analysis. I subjected the selected Slow Cinema films to textual analysis based on the following parameters:

- thematic meanings and understanding of the slow narrative structure;

- dialogue and characterisation;

- the visuality of the slow image and its analysis; and

- deriving meaning from social, cultural, historical, and ideological contexts.

While textual analysis has proved to be a productive methodology used to increase understanding of constructed meaning in various cultural texts, critics have interrogated the approach's validity, maintaining "that a reading of a text echoes the researcher's perspective" (Lockyer 2008: 865). In contrast to this criticism, I argue that the process of textual analysis requires the researcher to be self-reflexive while acknowledging the fact that all close readings of film texts are socially situated. Lastly, combining textual analysis with PaR, survey, and interviews eased the constraints of perceiving Slow Cinema specifically in terms of texts and neglecting the spectator's importance in constructing meaning.

1.4.1.2 Practice-as-Research (PaR)

According to Nelson (2013: 8), PaR is a qualitative inquiry method in which practice (film, visual exhibition, dance, creative writing, musical performance, and other cultural performances) "is submitted as substantial evidence of a research project".[27] Nelson takes his cue from Niedderer and Stokes (2007: 7), who place 'practice' squarely within the theoretical framework provided by the "Arts and Humanities Research Council" (AHRC) in Britain. In positing the relationship between research and practice, AHRC (2006:85-86) states:

> Creative output can be produced or practice undertaken as an integral part of a research process. However, the Council would expect this practice to be accompanied by documentation of the research process and some form of textual analysis or explanation to support its position and demonstrate critical reflection. Work that results purely from the creative or professional development of an artist, however distinguished, is unlikely to fulfil research requirements.

AHRC guidelines, as quoted above, emphasise the need for researcher-practitioners to analyse the creative production in conjunction with the research exegesis through self-

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[27] The PAR initiative, as Nelson (2013: 11) calls it, "has a history spanning at least two decades and may have originated in Finland in the mid-1980s before emerging in the UK about that time". PaR is more popular in Australia, Nordic countries, France, Canada, and South Africa.

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reflexivity, research questions, theoretical framework, and literature review. McNamara (2012: 8) supports this view, stating that the creative practice and exegetical research framework can produce knowledge, yielding unique understanding and insights. Nelson (2013: 26), for his part, lists three deliverables of a PaR project, including:

- a product (film, exhibition, score, performance) with a durable record (DVD, CD, Video);
- documentation of process (sketchbook, photographs, objects of material culture); and
- complementary writing (locating practice in a lineage of influences and a conceptual framework for the research.

Nelson (2013: 9-10) though clarifies that other terms can be used synonymously with PaR. They include "Practice-led research (commonly used in Australia) and Practice-based research, articulated in traditional word-based forms such as books and articles". However, Nelson discourages using the term "practice-led research" because it may suggest that knowledge is secondary to the practice. He asserts that 'practice' is at the heart of the project's methodology and presented as substantial evidence of new insights. In the same vein, he concedes that "PaR projects require more labour and a broader range of skills to engage in a multi-mode research inquiry than more traditional processes" (Nelson 2013: 9).

In this study's context, PaR as a data collection instrument applies to me as a researcher-practitioner involved in the creative process of making the first-ever Kenyan Slow Cinema film. The film, which targets explicitly Kenyan film viewers, serves as a context-centred body of knowledge on how Slow Cinema conventions can be transposed into Kenyan cinema. The PaR research instrument is derived from filmmaking and is more likely regarded as valid and reliable. Since a PaR submission must be accompanied by complimentary writing as suggested by Nelson (2013: 26), I have incorporated into the interpretive inquiry (see Chapter Five) intellectual discussions from Slow Cinema scholars. These discussions point to the narrative and aesthetic strategies used in *Men of the Hill*, cultural contexts, historical precedents, and shared themes explored in other Slow Cinema films. Of greater significance, I offer my reflexivity, which involves writing the methodological decisions and changes that occurred in the research process with particular reference to my past experiences as a researcher-practitioner.[28] As such, PaR situated me firmly within the

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[28] For a detailed explanation of PaR (and specifically my journey as a practitioner-researcher) see Chapter Five (section 5.2.1)

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dynamic research process of making a Kenyan Slow Cinema film in a consistent, deliberate, and methodological manner. Costley (2019: 29) claims that by adopting PaR throughout the research process and beyond, practitioner-researchers can create valued products that make personal and professional differences to a specific community. Lastly, PaR, as with any research method, has limitations, as I will demonstrate in Chapter Five. Nonetheless, PaR is open to engagement with other research instruments, which include an audience web survey and interviews with experts.

1.4.1.3 Web survey

The use of web surveys (also referred to as Internet or online surveys) is a well-established quantitative research strategy approach. As the term suggests, this approach uses web browser-based technologies for self-administered data collection but excludes recent and specialised devices such as mobile surveys (Couper & Bosnjak 2010: 528). A web survey often involves sampling respondents and gathering data from them via the Internet (Nathan 2008: 356). Using web surveys instead of the traditional pen and paper methods to collect data presents many opportunities for researchers. They permit a far greater range of adopted tasks, thus enhancing reliability (Hewson 2017: 60). Respondents can also complete the questionnaire at the time, place, and pace of their choice, with a higher privacy level. Simultaneously, the absence of interviewers significantly reduces research costs and contributes to higher data quality (Katja & Manfreda 2017: 144). Lastly, web surveys can be used alongside other methods, giving respondents another option for survey participation (Horner 2008: 955).

This research's key objective is to investigate how selected Kenyan film viewers and film experts would visualise and interpret the narrative and aesthetic conventions of Slow Cinema used in *Men of the Hill* as a Kenyan Slow Cinema film. Hence, I selected a survey as one of the more practical ways of achieving this objective. A significant reason for using a web survey for that purpose, as I have indicated in subsection 1.4.1, was because of COVID-19 safety and control protocols in Kenya. Nonetheless, the instrument itself was far more suitable for this research given Kenya's increasing Internet penetration rate, estimated at 112.7% in 2017 by the Communications Authority of Kenya (CAK).[29] The report further

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[29] See CAK report on Internet penetration: https://ca.go.ke/internet-penetration-hits-112-per-cent-latest-report-shows/. Accessed: 19/07/2020.

showed considerable growth in the number of people using smartphones and other mobile devices to access the Internet. These findings gave me the impetus to host a YouTube premiere for *Men of the Hill* and sample respondents and collect data from them via the Internet. Hewson (2017: 61) emphasises the need to select web-based survey software contingent on the crucial desirable features. I used *Google Forms* to create the web survey (refer to Appendix C) because of its flexibility and robustness, and considering budget and technical expertise constraints.[30] I designed, published, and controlled the web survey questionnaire appropriately to minimise unique error sources, affecting how respondents process the questions. In the paragraphs that follow, I present the target population, the survey population, the sample size, and sampling method for the web survey.

i.   *Target population*

The web survey targeted the Internet-user population (IUP) rather than the general population in Kenya. This exclusion is because not all members of the general population have access to the Internet. According to a February 2020 report published by DataReportal, there were at least 22-million Internet users in Kenya by January 2020.[31] These users formed the population accessible for sampling in the web survey.

ii. *Survey population*

Since it was impossible to obtain a list of all the human participants in the target population available for sampling, the randomisation requirement could not be met (see Horner 2008: 956). In essence, I had to use a purposive definition that only included the participants of interest in my study, (Morgan 2008: 800). The survey population was limited to Kenyan citizens residing in Kenya or abroad, over the age of eighteen, fluent in English and Kiswahili (since the characters in *Men of the Hill* speak the two languages), and having regular access to the Internet and technology. However, as Fricker Jr. (2017: 164) stated, errors of coverage occur in a web survey because some members of the population are excluded from the sample.

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[30] *Google Forms* compares favourable to *Survey Monkey*, which requires a monthly or annual subscription fee while its free version has limited functionality.
[31] See report by Simon Kemp (2020) for DataReportal: https://datareportal.com/reports/digital-2020-kenya. Accessed: 20/05/2020

iii. _Sample size_

The appropriate sample size for research depends on the research topic, population variability, aim of the study, and research design (Delice 2010: 7; Singh & Masuku 2014: 21). Louangrath (2017: 45) suggests that the minimum sample size for social science research should be 30-200. Similarly, Delice (2010: 8) found that a sample size between 30 and 500 at a 5% confidence level and variability is generally sufficient for many researchers. For my research, I selected a precise sample size because the web survey's primary goal was to determine how selected Kenyan film viewers would make sense of a Kenyan Slow Cinema film. The web survey's designated sample size was 100 respondents, with the margin of error set at 5% and a confidence level of 95%. Delice (2010: 13) argues that it is possible to get reliable results with better planning and smaller sample size while considering time and budgetary constraints.

iv. _Sampling method_

Morgan (2008: 799) asserts that when it is impossible to "give each member of the target population a known probability of being included in the sample", it may be impractical to generate a probability sample. In this case, one can only use a nonprobability sample. Likewise, Katja and Manfreda (2017: 147) believe that most web survey questionnaires are non-probability type, either self-administered or by comprehensive utilisation of nonprobability online panels Internet users. For Trobia (2008: 783), probability sampling from the entire IUP is impossible, especially when a researcher wants to study a film's audience. In that regard, I used a nonprobability snowball recruitment strategy to sample Kenyan film viewers. "Snowball sampling uses an initial set of human sources for locating additional participants" (Morgan 2008: 800) and should be done so that the researcher does not influence the respondents' selection to avoid impacting the results (Saris & Gallhofer 2014: 9).

The snowball strategy's first step was to recruit ten participants who matched the selection criteria but were as diverse as possible regarding age, occupation, gender, and economic background. Next, I gave them a detailed explanation of the research project, requested them to nominate other volunteer participants through phone calls, emails, and conveniently posting participation requests in chat groups. I

insisted that these requests would need to adhere to netiquette rules (set of rules for acceptable online behaviour). This approach provided access to a broad, diverse population of potential respondents, increasing the chances of acquiring a larger sample size and reducing the nonresponse bias. Finally, I made it clear that the volunteer participants had the right to withdraw from the study at any stage of the data collection processes, but not after the research has been completed and published. After termination, the snowball recruitment strategy yielded an adequate volunteer sample of 188 participants for the web survey.

1.4.1.4 Interview

The interview was a logical data collection instrument for this study because first, the research objectives were based on understanding the experiences, opinions, attitudes and processes of visualising and interpreting a Kenyan Slow Cinema film. In effect, there was a need to attain highly personalised data and opportunities for probing (see Gray 2017: 514). Secondly, the interview can be used in conjunction with other research instruments, and in this case, the web survey, to follow up emerging issues. Consequently, 13 web survey respondents purposively sampled from a target population of Kenyan filmmakers, film scholars, film critics, and film policymakers were interviewed using semi-structured schedules (refer to Appendix D), with each interview lasting a minimum of one hour. A sample size of 13 was large enough to address the research question at hand sufficiently. In qualitative research, as Firmin (2008: 868) notes, "data collection typically occurs to the point of saturation" – meaning to the point where participants share little information. Nevertheless, these participants met the study criteria. They represented "the richest and most complex information source" pertinent to a highly contextualised understanding of Slow Cinema within the Kenyan cinema framework (see Eide 2008: 743).

As mentioned in subsection 1.4.1, it was impossible to have face-to-face interviews due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Thus, all the interviews were Internet-mediated through *Zoom* – a synchronous cloud-based video conferencing service to virtually meet other people.[32] Zoom also enables the host of the meeting to initiate a local recording, saved and accessed

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[32] See a recent study by Archibald, Ambagtsheer, Casey and Lawless (2019) on "Using Zoom videoconferencing for qualitative data collection"*:* Article published online: https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/1609406919874596. Accessed 20/09/2020.

on the host's recordings page. Finally, the experts who participated in the Interviews did so based on informed consent. I briefed them on the research goal and their involvement, the potential risks and benefits of taking part, and the fact that participation was voluntary, in which case they could withdraw at any time (see Eynon, Fry & Schroeder 2017: 24). Since the participants signed an informed consent allowing an online video recording of our interview, I ensured that my computer's data was encrypted to protect their identities and also for confidentiality purposes.

1.4.2 Data analysis plan

Another significant aspect of the research design, according to, according to Cheek (2008: 763), is how to analyse the collected data. Quantitative data from the web survey was directly processed using the *Google Forms* built-in tool for analysing responses. Further processing was achieved through *Microsoft Excel* and *Google Sheets* to do extra calculations, analyse open-ended questions, and enhance data visualisation. This process lessened the burden of data capturing, editing, and coding, limiting the errors associated with traditional data collection methods. One of the challenges of qualitative research, according to Gray (2017: 875), is that there are no widely accepted rules about how to analyse qualitative data except that the approach should be inductive and involve the coding of data. For this study, I did not want to analyse qualitative data in quantitative terms. As such, qualitative data collected through semi-structured interviews was thematically coded. The coding process began with identifying and listing known and anticipated themes in the data set because I had overtly incorporated those concepts in data collection (see Ayres 2008: 867). The essential concepts and commonality patterns within the qualitative data were then analysed thematically with the research question.

1.4.3 Phases of the research process

The complexity of the research design, as Creswell (2014: 683) argues, calls for a clear, visual representation to understand the details and the flow of research activities. Table 1.3 summarises the critical phases of the research process in this study.

Table 1.3: Phases of the research process

Phases	Processes	Sources and documentation	Ethical considerations
1. Initiation	• Picking the research phenomenon • Reading theoretical works to address the research question • Consideration of how an existing theory could impact the research question	Books, journal articles, scholarly websites, and existing Slow Cinema films	This phase did not require any responses from human subjects
2. Writing	• Organising notes and other relevant research information • Refining research question • Outlining and drafting Chapters 1-4 (done progressively)	Literature review notes and summary table	This phase did not require any responses from human subjects
3. Construction of research design and methodology	• Choosing an appropriate research design and development of field sampling plan. The plan includes guidelines for sampling frequency and sample size to ensure the statistical validity of the results. • Implementation of data collection instruments/mixed methods approaches	Selected Slow Cinema films for textual analysis, Robin Nelson's multi-mode PaR visual model, draft sampling plan, web survey questionnaire, interview schedule, revision notes, and emails to/from respondents.	The information provided by the respondents was password-protected for confidentiality
4. Production of a Kenyan Slow Cinema film: *Men of the Hill*	• Story development: screenwriting • Pre-production: obtaining a film license, storyboarding, funding, crewing, casting, location scouting, acquiring filming gear and props, scheduling and script revisions • Production: direction, script supervision, cinematography, sound recording, and performance • Post-production: synchronising picture and sound, creating a paper edit, rough cut, and online edit, sound design, and exporting final picture. • Exhibition: organising a YouTube premiere, recruiting potential Kenyan film viewers, and screening the film • Writing of Chapter 5: an exegesis of *Men of the Hill*	Personal diary, final locked screenplay, still and moving images of location scouting, shooting schedule, application forms for film license downloaded from Kenya Film & Classification Board (KFCB) website, preparing a director's binder, preparing audition forms and notes, behind the scenes (BTS) photos and videos of dress rehearsal, storyboard app (Shot designer), and production paperwork.	All participants read and signed informed consent forms, indemnity forms and participant information sheets before engaging in the project. Password protection of electronic data files containing cast's private discussions with director and crew. At the end of this phase, there was a debriefing process for all participants to prevent or address any potential emotional or physical harm.

5. Data collection	• Sequential data collection from quantitative and qualitative methods • Provide necessary information about the project to the respondents • Debrief respondents and address any of their questions • Transcribing interview data	Field notes, final web survey questionnaire, final interview schedules, personal research diary to document research procedures, invites to respondents and obtaining transcribing services (Otter.ai).	All respondents read and signed informed consent forms and participant information sheets before participating in the research. Password protection of electronic data files containing sensitive information from the respondents. In the end, there was a debriefing process for all respondents to prevent or address any potential emotional harm.
6. Data analysis and reporting	• Processing of quantitative data on *Google Forms* and *Microsoft Excel* • Identifying important concepts and patterns of commonality in the qualitative approach • Application of systematic logic across the process of presenting findings from mixed-methods • Embedding extant literature in the analysis to address contested viewpoints and affirmation of consistency with Slow Cinema scholarship • Completion of saturation • Drafting of Chapter 6-7 • Share results of the final report with the academic supervisor • Write an article for a peer-reviewed journal and conference presentation from the data/results of the study	Completed questionnaires, audio-visual recordings of interviews with film experts, field reports and notes, research design and analysis texts, final bound report as per submission guidelines, journal articles for references.	Coding of personal and potentially identifiable individual information. Protection of respondents' identities as stated in consent forms and other descriptive documents provided to the respondents.

1.5 Chapter Outline

The overall structure of the study takes the form of seven chapters. Chapter One has presented the background and rationale of the study. It has further engaged with the broader body of scholarly literature on the phenomenon of inquiry to advance my theoretical understanding of how Slow Cinema's definition and historical perspectives have shaped current debates on Slow Cinema's context and situatedness beyond Europe. The chapter

has also described the research question and aims of the study and demonstrated how the nonexperimental mixed-methods design was appropriate to situate Slow Cinema within Kenyan cinema.

Chapter Two sets up the more significant theoretical and conceptual underpinnings through which contemporary Slow Cinema emerged. The chapter develops the analytical framework of theorising Slow Cinema in section 2.2, and then attempts to locate Slow Cinema's aesthetics and functions within cinema's broader context (section 2.3). Subsection 2.3.1 explains and portrays Slow Cinema as a modernist aesthetic, while subsection 2.3.2 demonstrates how Slow Cinema interrelates with durational cinema and the transcendental style in film. On this basis, the chapter then positions Slow Cinema as an alternative cinema in subsection 2.3.3. Furthermore, section 2.4 gives a detailed explanation of narration in Slow Cinema concerning André Bazin's and Gilles Deleuze's reflections on neorealism, which is a crucial concept in understanding Slow Cinema's functions (subsection 2.4.1). The above considerations lay the groundwork for discussions on Slow Cinema's narrative (subsection 2.4.2), in terms of cinematic minimalism and indeterminacy, and how to apply them in the slow narrative itself. Finally, section 2.5 provides a conceptual framework diagram that maps out how the concepts discussed earlier relate to each other. Section 2.6 concludes the discussions in the chapter.

In Chapter Three, the previous chapter's analytical framework is applied to the textual analysis of three different Slow Cinema films using the narrative discourse analysis approach discussed in section 3.3. The three films have been chosen for analysis to provide important insights into the narrative and aesthetic techniques used in contemporary Slow Cinema and demonstrate the relevance of this textual analysis to Kenyan cinema's context and situatedness. Therefore, in section 3.4, I show how slowness, *vraisemblance* and the dream vision have been narrativised in *Uncle Boonmee Who Can Recall His Past Lives* (Weerasethakul 2010). Section 3.5 explains how Friedrich Nietzsche's existential nihilism has been stylised through slowness in Béla Tarr's *The Turin Horse* (2011). Lastly, section 3.6 discusses the slow narrative, aestheticism and thematisation in Oliver Hermanus's *Skoonheid* (2011).

Chapter Four demonstrates how the textual analysis of the three selected Slow Cinema films in the preceding chapter provides strong justification for situating Slow Cinema in

Kenyan cinema. In section 4.2 the chapter addresses African cinemas' concept and how to define them by a new sensibility that is open to dialogue with other cinematic tendencies elsewhere in the world. Section 4.3 then suggests that Slow Cinema can be hybridised in Kenyan film viewers and filmmakers' experiences. Consequently, section 4.4 advances the argument that Kenya's film culture plays a crucial part in promoting new cinema movements at the national level and resonant with Slow Cinema films. Lastly, section 4.5 attempts to make a preliminary mapping of how slowness can be situated within Kenyan cinema concerning the factors and suppositions made in the previous sections. Overall, Chapter Four intends to position Slow Cinema as an alternative point of reference in Kenyan cinema's ongoing debates.

Chapter Five draws on the justification for situating Slow Cinema in Kenyan cinema as discussed in Chapter Four. Chapter Five explains the creative process of experimenting with slowness in Kenya's national cinema while also drawing on the textual analysis of successful Slow Cinema films presented in the third chapter. Additionally, the chapter is divided into three sections. Section 5.2 describes my journey as a practitioner-researcher, the creative inspiration for experimenting with cinematic slowness, and the theoretical constructs underpinning a Kenyan Slow Cinema film's production. In section 5.3, I recount my experiences in Men of the Hill's creative production, from pre-production and production phases to post-production and exhibition. Finally, in section 5.4, I present a close reading of *Men of the Hill* as the first-ever Kenyan Slow Cinema film, which contributes to scholarship that deals with narrative, minimalism, and indeterminacy.

Chapter Six contains the presentation of findings and analyses derived from the web survey and semi-structured interviews to answer the research question. More explicitly, the chapter provides the background to the respondents, followed by a range of quantitative and qualitative findings concerning how the selected Kenyan film viewers and film experts visualise and interpret a Kenyan experimental Slow Cinema film. These findings are presented based on the analysis in the preceding chapter, which gives evidence of the narrative and aesthetic conventions deployed in *Men of the Hill*. Therefore, Chapter Six combines the spectatorial and expert readings of *Men of the Hill* with a functional consideration of the creative process of experimenting with slowness in Kenyan cinema discussed in Chapter Five.

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Finally, Chapter Seven gives a concluding overview of the main ideas discussed in each of the preceding chapters regarding how Slow Cinema conventions, namely narrative, minimalism and indeterminacy, can be transposed into Kenyan cinema. Furthermore, the chapter suggests the study's main contributions to Slow Cinema scholarship, acknowledges the study's limitations, and sets out recommendations for further research work and practice.

CHAPTER TWO:

A THEORETICAL AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK FOR UNDERSTANDING SLOW CINEMA

2.1 Chapter Introduction

This chapter builds on the historical and philosophical foundations presented in the previous chapter by constituting the theoretical and conceptual framework for the study. Given the various definitions of Slow Cinema discussed earlier (subsection 1.2.1), this current chapter provides a spectrum for understanding the study's theoretical conception, how the different elements of existing literature on the subject align with the research question, and what knowledge the study will add to Slow Cinema scholarship.

First, the chapter discusses the development and contextualisation of auteur theory in light of the study design, and mainly, how such a theory helps to understand the film author's role in Slow Cinema, including the conceptions that inform the artistic works of cinematic auteurs. Second, it offers the necessary justifications for locating the aesthetics and functions of Slow Cinema within the broader context of cinema's past and present. Third, it explains Slow Cinema's narrative construction and its distinctive role in shaping the Spatio-temporal image of slowness. Lastly, it presents a conceptual framework diagram, which describes how the research question will be explored while describing the relationship between the main concepts discussed in the preceding sections. Overall, the chapter aims to identify the salient features of the history and development of Slow Cinema, and how, if at all, they can be applied to contemporary Slow Cinema studies.

2.2 Theorising Slow Cinema

Before discussing the auteur theory, it is necessary to acknowledge that scholarship reveals a pattern of divergent views in theorising Slow Cinema. Çağlayan (2018: 222) states, for example, that many paradoxes characterise the discursive and theoretical framework in which Slow Cinema operates in large part due to the indeterminate, impervious and elusive nature of Slow Cinema films. However, Stone and Cooke (2016: 313) are more optimistic in

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their attempt to resituate auteurism as the dominant theory in Slow Cinema because of art cinema being part of the global film economy. Unlike Stone and Cooke, Dwyer and Perkins (2018: 105) assert that screen theory strongly informs scholarship on Slow Cinema because it seeks to understand the relationship between image and viewer in the context of spectatorship. Drawing on auteurism as a dominant theory in Slow Cinema (Stone & Cooke 2016: 313), this study uses the auteur concept in two ways: firstly, as a critical tool in examining the oeuvres of Slow Cinema directors (see Chapter Three), and secondly as an approach to making a Slow Cinema film (see Chapters Five & Six). It is, therefore, necessary to explain the development of auteur theory in the next part of this section.

2.2.1 The development of auteur theory

Auteur theory has been studied extensively since the late 1940s. The term *auteur* refers either to a director's noticeable style through mise-en-scène or filmmaking practices. In this regard, the director's signature is evident on the script as it is on the film product itself (Hayward 2018: 34). The above definition is significant to this research because it is crucial to demonstrate how auteur theory propagates and predisposes the role of the film director in situating Slow Cinema within the local, historical, and intercultural contexts of a national cinema framework. This propagation concerns how I experiment with the narrative and aesthetic conventions of slowness through a Kenyan Slow Cinema film in my capacity as a researcher-practitioner, hence transposing Slow Cinema into Kenyan cinema (see Chapters Five & Six).

According to Kovács (2007: 219), French film critic Alexandre Astruc formulated "the first theoretical basis about the film director as an independent auteur". Similarly, Gabara (2016: 44) and Grosoli (2018: 81) note that Astruc's most famous article, "Birth of a New Avant-Garde: La Caméra-Stylo published in 1948, greatly influenced the works of French filmmakers, critics, and cinephiles at *Cahiers du Cinéma*, who began writing about cinematic authorship in the mid-1950s as they rediscovered and reread Hollywood films. I will examine the views of the *Cahiers* critics in the paragraphs that follow, but for now, Astruc's arguments are worth further consideration in this context. In the article, Astruc summarises the role of the film director as "no longer a means of illustrating or presenting a scene, but a true act of

writing with his camera as a writer writes with his pen" (hence *caméra-stylo*).[33] In Kovács' (2007: 219) understanding, Astruc upheld the film director's auteurism above the producer's influence because the director's creative work is analogous to a writer's creativity, and the film directly expresses the director's judgments and feelings. Kovács further observed that Astruc urged the scriptwriter to make his own films to emphasise the independence of the film director. In other words, filmmakers had to agitate for their privileges against the producers and writers, who asserted control (auteurism) over the film (Kovács 2007: 220). Of even greater significance, Kovács (2007: 220) reveals that Astruc's presuppositions about auteurism were anchored in the same understanding of film as a form of creative endeavour, similar in conceptual attribute to literature. Astruc's concept provided the foundation for auteur theory, which as stated by Kovács (2007: 218), holds that "the director's autonomy in the creative process is equal to that of the producer or writer and that the real auteur of the film is the director rather than the producer or the writer".

Auteur theory gained popularity in the 1950s and 1960s when French film critic and theorist André Bazin (1918-1958) founded the renowned film magazine *Cahiers du Cinéma* in 1951. Film critic François Truffaut also received credit for helping to launch the magazine (Braudy & Cohen 2009: 41). Bazin is credited for initially linking film directors' names to stylistic trends without denigrating them to "simple inventors of technical solutions of storytelling" (Kovács 2007: 219). Bazin, Kovács concludes, emphasised that a particular film's form ultimately depended on the film director's stylistic choice between possible narrative and aesthetic solutions. Later, Truffaut joined Bazin in rejecting the concept of montage editing in favour of mise-en-scène, which underscored the inclusion of all the creative elements in front of the camera. Jeong and Szaniawski (2016: 2) further explain how the *Cahiers* critics invoked the political position of filmmakers' authorship (*politique des auteurs*) as equivalent to that of artists in other media. Truffaut, for example, glorified cinematic auteurs while condemning what he termed as mere *metteurs-en-scène* or "stagers", who conventionally transposed literature onto the screen.

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[33] Astruc's article was originally printed in *'L'Écran française' 30 March 1948 as "Du Stylo à la caméra et de la caméra au stylo"*. See Astruc's article: http://www.newwavefilm.com/about/camera-stylo-astruc.shtml. Accessed: 15/10/2020.

Consequently, Gabara (2016: 44) notes, the *Cahiers* critics led by Truffaut started praising English film director Alfred Hitchcock and American film director Howard Hawks as masters of the medium because of "their focus on visual narrative and strong heroes". It was on that basis that Truffaut, in 1954, wrote an article titled: *A Certain Tendency in French Cinema* that characterised the new filmmaking strategy modelled on "the almighty individual genius" of Hitchcock and Hawks as "la politique des auteurs" (the politics of auteurship) rather than "the theory of auteurship" (Kovács 2007: 220).[34] Tregde (2013: 6) expounds Truffaut's concept further, clearly stating that it advocates an expression of the auteur's personality, thereby transforming the film into a personal undertaking. In conclusion, Elsaesser (2005: 48) credits the *Cahiers* critics for effectively helping to rewrite the history of Hollywood to a remarkable degree, and by extension, identifying the canon of Auteur cinema and its great tradition.

To further explain the auteurist approach, Braudy and Cohen (2009: 451) credit American film critic Andrew Sarris (1928-2012) for coining the concept of *auteur theory*. As Braudy and Cohen suggest, the idea first appeared in an article titled "Notes on the Auteur Theory" authored by Sarris for the fledgling journal *Film Culture* in 1962. The paper served as an introduction to Truffaut's *la politique des auteurs* for an American film discussion. Tregde (2013: 5) adds that Sarris "used the auteur theory to categorise directors based on their level of artistic authorship, thus solidifying the idea that a director is the sole author of a film". Sarris himself (see Braudy & Cohen 2009: 451-453) offered three premises in an attempt to describe his theory. The first premise in Sarris's observation is the technical competence of a director. He postulated that a poorly directed or undirected film had no importance in a critical scale of values. However, one could still make sense of the subject, the script, the acting, the colour, the cinematography, the editing, and the music, to name a few. The second premise, according to Sarris, has to do with the director's distinguishable personality as a criterion of value. He argued that a director should exhibit specific style characteristics, which can serve as his signature. In this sense, Sarris likens how the film looks "to the way a director thinks and feels" (Braudy & Cohen 2009: 453). Sarris also emphasised that American directors were generally superior to foreign directors because their films were an

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[34] The *term auteur* theory was a mistranslation by the American film critic Andrew Sarris. The French critics originally used the phrase "la politique des auteurs" because it was aimed at power. It was a policy rather than a rule (see Hayward 2018: 35).

extension of their distinguishable personalities. The third and final premise of the auteur theory in Sarris's view, according to Braudy and Cohen (2009: 453), is concerned with interior meaning, resulting from "the tension between a director's personality and his material". In other words, it refers to a personal but ambiguous worldview, which the director presents in a particular film. In summary of the three premises above, Sarris maintains that the director may therefore be viewed as an auteur, a technician, and a stylist.

The critical conception of the auteur theory as discussed in the preceding paragraphs provides a framework for understanding how the role of a director is propagated and predisposed to show thematic and stylistic consistencies in the context of Slow Cinema. Similarly, as Elsaesser (2005: 48) has argued, the auteur theory points to the artist's role as "a standard-bearer of the values and aspirations of his culture". This view is particularly significant for my study because I am more interested in how Slow Cinema conventions can be situated within Kenyan cinema's local, historical, and cultural contexts. Jeong and Szaniawski (2016: 5) also indicate that auteurs are philosophers in their own right because they carry philosophical concerns in their films. [35] In Chapter Three, for example, I demonstrate how the works of critically acclaimed Slow Cinema auteurs, Apichatpong Weerasethakul and Béla Tarr, crucially exhibit their technical competencies and distinguishable personalities. I also show how these directors' worldviews blend into a set of cultural and philosophical parameters for extrapolation of interior meaning. In the end, this understanding informs my intellectual and artistic autonomy as a researcher-practitioner involved in the creative production of a Kenyan Slow Cinema film. Wollen (2009: 456) supports such an undertaking by insisting that the auteur theory not only acclaims "the director as the principal author of a film", but also reveals authors where none existed before. Wollen's assertion paves the way for the second part of this section to discuss the auteur theory in context.

2.2.2 Contextualising the auteurist approach

At this point, it could be argued with conviction that the notion of auteurship has cogency in the global age, as confirmed by Jeong and Szaniawski (2016: 1). Similarly, Kovács (2007: 224) has suggested that contemporary filmmakers adhere to the Astrucian view,

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[35] For more on Film as Philosophy studies, see, for example, Herzogenrath (2017).

emphasising a knowledgeable, fictional, subjective, even poetic filmmaking while deemphasising narrative. On his part, Elsaesser (2016: 21) points out that the auteur in the global context is both a "construct and a personality because he/she is at the intersection of a theoretical impossibility and a practical indispensability". In this sense, Elsaesser, for example, explains that the contemporary director's control is exercised financially, politically, artistically, and intellectually to make, market, and distribute the film. Since my study seeks to situate the narrative and aesthetic conventions of Slow Cinema within the local Kenyan context, it is worth exploring, for example, how the auteur theory may express itself in the way that African film directors capture the continent's realities.

Considering the opportunities for auteurism in the African contexts, Gabara (2016: 46) offers an analysis of the politics of African auteurs. However, she also notes that scholarly discussions of auteur theory for decades have tended to focus almost exclusively on European and North American films. In Gabara's analysis, this focus has created an uneasy relationship between African cinemas and auteurist filmmaking. It is with this in mind that Gabara critically reflects on the auteurist approach within African cinemas. Gabara foregrounds the tension between African cinemas and auteurism within the purview of early African filmmakers and critics, who, like their Latin American colleagues, specifically rejected auteur cinema. In the 1975 Algiers Charter on African Cinemas, the African filmmakers and critics refuted "the stereotyped image of the solitary and marginal creator", instead choosing to "see themselves as creative artisans at the service of their people" (Gabara 2016: 46).

Despite the earlier rejection of auteur cinema by African "creative artisans" and critics, there is substantial evidence of how the auteurist approach expresses itself in the works of certain critically acclaimed African filmmakers. First, Gabara (2016: 46) duly stresses that Senegalese film director Ousmane Sembéne has overwhelmingly been recognised as an auteur filmmaker considering that his films, including *Borom Sarret* (1963), *Xala* (1975), and *Moolaadé* (2004), among others, constitute a significant contribution to both African Cinemas and World Cinema.[36] Additionally, Gabara (2016: 56) identifies Malian film director

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[36] Sembéne is frequently called "the father of African Cinema". Discussing the "Uniqueness of Ousmane Sembéne's Cinema", Pfaff (1993: 14), for example, hails Sembéne's ability to tackle with ease a multiplicity of topics, many of which are related to his own life experiences. For Pfaff, it is as "an attentive and concerned griot that Sembéne interprets the socio-historical and cultural heritage of his community". This confirms Elsaesser's (2005: 48) claim that "the auteur theory points to the role of the artist as a standard bearer of the values and aspirations of his culture".

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Abderrahmane Sissako as a contemporary African auteur based mainly on the evidence of his directorial competence in *Heremakono* (2002) and *Timbuktu* (2014). Secondly, Sanogo (2009: 227) credits the auteurist tradition or what he calls "directorial cinephilia" for creating a new language of cinema and "producing a fine school of filmmaking that included such auteurs as Souleymane Cissé, Med Hondo, Haile Gerima, Djibril Diop Mambéty, and Idrissa Ouedraogo, among others".

Still, other African filmmakers consider the auteurist approach as retrogressive to the development of African cinemas and the audience of African films. Gabara (2016: 47), for example, quotes Congolese filmmaker Mweze Ngangura, who argues for entertainment cinema rather than 'the infatuation with a cinema of authors', a trend he says has only served to alienate the African audience from its cinema.[37] Gabara links Ngangura's comment to the fact that auteur-based cinema was made possible by French funding, which then raises the question of whether "a contemporary African auteurist practice can exist without being contaminated by European film style, festival preferences, and funding" (Gabara 2016: 47). However, for Sanogo (2015: 149), projects such as "Africa First" have been a step in the right direction to renew "clear-sighted and globally ambitious auteurist tradition".[38] *Africa First* also calls for long-lasting and viable enabling institutions in Africa and abroad to set the terms of the debates in world cinema. In conclusion, Gabara cites Gabonese filmmaker Imunga Ivanga, who argues for the right of African filmmakers to be recognised as auteurs like the "New Wave directors who contributed to and were celebrated in *Cahiers du Cinéma*".[39]

Considering the authors' views cited in the preceding paragraphs, the main question regarding this study is how the auteur concept, as it applies to the film director, can manifest, transmit, and alter itself through Slow Cinema in the Kenyan context. In establishing a framework that demonstrates how the auteurist approach can achieve the above goal, it

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[37] Ngangura's debut feature-length film, *La Vie est Belle* (1987) and prior to that, his documentaries such as *Cheri-Samba* (1980), and *Kin Kiesse* (1982) set him apart as an African filmmaker who juxtaposes social critique with absorbing entertainment (See Akudinobi 2000: 369-395).

[38] According to Sanogo (2015: 141-142), "Africa First" was a short-lived experiment that sought to improve the relationship between auteurist African cinema and Hollywood. It was initiated in 2008 by *Completion Films* founder Kisha Cameron to facilitate the production of "first-rate short fiction films from Africa by discovering or enabling early-career film directors".

[39] Ivanga's popular films include *Dôlé* (2001) and *L'Ombre de Liberty* (2006).

would be necessary to draw on Elsaesser's (2016: 33-34) case for the author's evolution. Elsaesser affirms that filmmaking has become popular, inexpensive and easy to distribute with the deployment of digital tools, equipment, and platforms of "self-expression-as-self-exhibition" such as YouTube. In Chapter Five (Section 5.4), I proceed to demonstrate how I applied the auteurist approach in the creative production of a Kenyan Slow Cinema film (*Men of the Hill*) through all the phases with the aid of digital tools and equipment. *Men of the Hill* was also exhibited through YouTube in concurrence with Elsaesser's views on the platform's strength as a tool of self-expression and self-exhibition.

As far as my discussion of the auteur theory in this section is concerned, I deem it essential to briefly explain in more specific terms how I intend to apply the auteurist approach in my study. First, Astruc's conception of "*caméra-stylo*" (camera-pen) urges the scriptwriter to make his films. This approach is "rooted in the understanding of film as a form of artistic expression similar to the intellectual quality of literature" (Kovács 2007: 220). This form of independence, for example, enables the cinematic auteur to infuse his signature in the narrative and visual elements of the film, as I will demonstrate in the oeuvres of Apichatpong Weerasethakul, Béla Tarr, and Oliver Hermanus in Chapter Three. Likewise, drawing on Astruc's concept of *camera-stylo* and Bazin's emphasis on the stylistic and narrative choices available to the film director, I develop a particular aesthetic approach that can in future represent a signature style of slowness. I also address the thematic concerns and visual elements in a Kenyan Slow Cinema film that can be transposed into Kenyan cinema through this aesthetic. In this context, the auteurist approach allows me to add to my film an intellectual dimension that raises it above mere entertainment, thus qualifying me as an artist rather than a commercial director. However, I should emphasise that I consider auteurism as descriptive of the creative outputs in *Men of the Hill* as a Kenyan Slow Cinema film, not as a prestige claim to "higher" artistic accomplishment. In other words, I am only borrowing from parts of the auteurist approach without calling myself an "auteur" who addresses a collection of films.

Another aspect of the auteurist approach that my study explores is the fact that *Men of the Hill* takes its inspiration from the artistic works of renowned Slow Cinema auteurs such as *Uncle Boonmee Who Can Recall His Past Lives* (Weerasethakul 2010), *The Turin Horse* (Tarr 2011), *Skoonheid* (Hermanus 2011), *Taste of Cherry* (Kiarostami 1997), *Winter Sleep*

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(Ceylan 2014), and *Norte, the End of History* (Diaz 2013). These cinematic references position me as a Kenyan researcher-practitioner in dialogue with other Slow Cinema films and Slow Cinema auteurs. Furthermore, as the *Cahiers* critics led by Truffaut and other directors from the French New Wave suggested, I endeavour to incorporate the aesthetic qualities typical of auteurs mentioned above in *Men of the Hill*. In this sense, auteurs strive to tell stories and expand the language of cinema.[40] Through this practice, I demonstrate what Kenyan filmmakers in mainstream commercial cinema rarely do.

Lastly, I draw upon Andrew Sarris's three premises of auteur theory to position *Men of the Hill* as a Kenyan Slow Cinema film that adopts an auteurist approach. First, I assert my centrality as a screenwriter, director, actor, cinematographer, editor, and production designer in the film regarding the director's technical competence. Second, I exhibit my distinguishable personality through what Sarris (1962: 562) theorised as "the way a film looks and moves should have some relationship to the way a director thinks and feels". The first step involves the imprinting of my consciousness and dreams on the ideation process of the film's narrative. In the second step, I include material of close personal meaning (poetry) in the film's plot.[41] Lastly, in the third premise concerning auteur theory's "interior meaning", I present a subjective point-of-view of the Kenyan society and some individuals who inhabit it, including my philosophy and approach (as writer and director) to existence. For instance, the characters in the film talk to discuss life, not to advance dialogue. Their discussions represent my indeterminate views on spirituality, existentialism, and morality in the Kenyan context (see Sarris 1962: 562-563).[42] In closing, I share Wollen's (2009: 455) view that auteur theory could be understood and applied on rather broad orientations due to the original theory's diffuseness. As a result, Jeong and Szaniawski (2016: 8) conclude:

> The new, multifaceted phase of film authorship we are witnessing today, about the current world and film academia, merits an even more comprehensive range of case studies. These map out political implications in which prominent contemporary film auteurs (make us) reflect on twenty-first-century issues, including in highly philosophical ways or concerning aestheticized space and style.

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[40] In Chapter Four (Section 4.3.4) I discuss the common aesthetic features used in mainstream Kenyan cinema, and then in Chapter Five (Section 5.3.2) I demonstrate how *Men of the Hill* expands the cinematic language using the aesthetic conventions of Slow Cinema.

[41] For a detailed explanation of the first and second steps, see Chapter Five, section 5.3.1.1.

[42] See Chapter Five, section 5.4.1 for a detailed discussion of thematic concerns in *Men of the Hill*.

Crucially, Jeong and Szaniawski urge scholars to focus on individual case studies of contemporary auteurs. These auteurs use highly philosophical approaches and aesthetics in their films to address current issues. As such, this thesis presents three case studies of Slow Cinema auteurs and their philosophical narratives (see Chapter Three). In the next section, I present the conceptual framework for this study.

2.3 Locating the Aesthetics and Functions of Slow Cinema

In Chapter One (subsection 1.2.2), I began by tracing the aesthetic of slowness back to the earlier waves of cinema to build a framework to historicise Slow Cinema. I suggested that Slow Cinema found its roots after World War II when ideologies of mainstream cinema and mass destruction began to dominate European and North American cultures (see Campany 2007: 10). This section now constructs the conceptual framework that I use to locate the aesthetics and functions of Slow Cinema in the historiography of cinema. More importantly, it provides historical, conceptual and philosophical contexts for the textual analysis of three selected Slow Cinema films in Chapter Three. This undertaking serves as a prologue for situating Slow Cinema in Kenyan cinema (see Chapter Four) and making a Kenyan Slow Cinema film (see Chapter Five). Çağlayan's (2018: 9) remarks on the emergence of slow aesthetics from a specific film-historical genealogy offer a prelude to my discussion in this section. I start by exploring Slow Cinema's association with the modernist aesthetic conceived by a few authors with comparable portrayals of modernism. The second part deliberates a common point of departure for considering the largely debatable issue of the interrelations between durational cinema, transcendental style in film, and Slow Cinema. Finally, the section concludes with the framing of Slow Cinema as alternative cinema that will come to define my conception of how the aesthetics and functions of slowness can then be situated in Kenyan cinema.

2.3.1 Slow Cinema and the modernist aesthetic

A discussion of the modernist aesthetic in this section is significant because, drawing on Campany (2007: 36), I have demonstrated that the history of Slow Cinema coincides with early modern cinema, which dates back to the early 1920s (see Chapter One, section 1.2.2). Furthermore, scholars such as Ford (2011: 165) and (Koutsourakis 2019: 391) have observed the re-emergence of modernist aesthetics in contemporary Slow Cinema through

the works of auteurs such as Béla Tarr (Hungary), Hou Hsiao-Hsien (Taiwan), and Tsai Ming-liang (Taiwan). The term "modernism" in cinema, according to Hayward (2018: 261), focuses on questions of aesthetics and artistic construction. Therefore, the "modernist aesthetic" within its formal probings and experimentation "foregrounds formal concerns over content while addressing questions of subjectivity and sexuality" (Hayward 2018: 262). The Soviet cinema of the mid-to-late 1920s embraced modernist aesthetics, which emphasised the production of meaning from editing styles. Soviet filmmakers, Hayward (2018: 261) further explains, were interested in the visual representation of the character's interior life. This interiority was a formal rather than narrativised projection onto the screen of the character's subjective fantasies and dreams.[43] I will now discuss the modernist aesthetic in more detail to show how it influences contemporary Slow Cinema.

Kovács (2007: 16) attributes the increasing uncertainty about the recorded image during the early 1920s to the emerging debates regarding the identity of cinema and its inventiveness, leading to a rigorous analysis of a sort of dramaturgical mass production of European films.[44] Kovács aptly argues that these debates ushered in the notion of what he refers to as "early modern cinema", which did not necessarily refute the narrative standards that had taken root during the 1920s, constituting them instead as a continuous narration of the American model (Kovács 2007: 16). Key to the emergence of early modern cinema, as Kovács (2007: 17) further points out, was the fact that cinema lacked the inventiveness necessary for its modernisation. Kovács proceeds to outline various forms that led to the achievement of this goal. The first step was to align cinema with narrative and visual conventions of the national artistic legacy by creating "cinematic versions of modernist movements in fine arts, theatre, and literature". This approach, Kovács notes, gave rise to German Expressionism, which constituted early modern cinema (Kovács 2007: 17).[45]

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[43] See, for example, *Fievre* (Delluc 1921) a film about female subjectivity, hallucination and desire.

[44] András Bálint Kovács's book, "Screening Modernism: European Art Cinema, 1950-1980" is a key text in my discussion of the modernist aesthetic as it relates to Slow Cinema. I draw on his views to position Slow Cinema as a movement that seeks to reactivate past modernist tropes. Later in the section I include other source references to enrich the discussion.

[45] According to Saul and Ells (2019: 103-126), Expressionism was an avant-garde movement traced back to the early 1900s; before it was then taken up in theatre, literature, architecture, and finally in film in the early 1920s. The German Expressionist style emphasised on *mise-en-scène*, uncanny atmosphere and composition, and was less on story and editing unlike Hollywood. German art director Hermann Warm (1889-1976) argued that "the film image must become graphic art". Other expressionist techniques included unrealistic sets, self-conscious or obtrusive camera, horror films, and the American *film noir* of the 1940 and 1950s. For further reading see: Saul, G. & Ells, C. (2019).

Thus, Expressionism attempted to conceive cinema as art related to artistic modernism. This effort played a crucial role in institutionalising cinema as "a medium capable of modern visual abstraction" (Kovács 2007: 17). Again, as Kovács (2007: 17) emphasised, German expressionist films respected most classical rules and were not "anti-Hollywood in their principles". Examples of German Expressionist films include *The Cabinet of Dr Caligari* (Wiene 1920), *Nosferatu* (Murnau 1922), and *Metropolis* (Lang 1927). These films were stylised with an uncanny atmosphere, deep shadows and high contrast lighting, and extreme camera tilting. The second step in expressing the artistic potential of cinema in early modernism, as Kovács (2007: 18) stated, involved searching for the "pure form of cinema". This trend, as Kovács demonstrates, affirmed cinema as an independent art form different from literary works and theatre. Kovács cites Walter Ruttmann,[46] Jean Vigo, [47] and most importantly, Dziga Vertov[48] as proponents of "pure cinema" aesthetics, which sought to construct an image of reality as a substitute for classical narrative cinema's formal strategies (Kovács 2007:18).

The third and last step in which modernism inspired the cinema of the 1920s was known as French Impressionism.[49] Kovács argues that this trend was less striking, yet it had great significance for the future growth of modernist cinema (Kovács 2007: 18). The driving force of this movement, Kovács asserts, was to position cinema as a self-sufficient form of artistic expression. Still, like their German expressionist counterparts, French impressionists did not contradict the narrative quality of cinema. However, they excluded the dramaturgical enactment of a psychological fiction and the visualisation of a literary plot (Kovács 2007:

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[46] Ruttmann (1887-1941) was a German cinematographer and film director best known for abstract experimental films such as *Lichtspiel: Opus II* (1923), *Lichtspiel: Opus IV* (1925), and *Wochenende* (1930) - was an experimental film with sound only, and no image. For further reading on Ruttmann's cinema, see: Cowan, M. (2014).

[47] Vigo (1905-1934) was a French film director who was instrumental in the establishment of poetic realism in film in the 1930s. It is important to note that his work was a major influence to the French New Wave cinema of the late 1950s and early 1960s. For further reading see: Temple, M. (2005).

[48] Vertov (1896-1954) was a Soviet Film director and cinema theorist who is widely credited for pioneering the *Cinéma vérité* (truthful cinema) style of documentary filmmaking. His film, *Man with a Movie Camera* (1929), is famous for the range of cinematic techniques (avant-garde style) it employed such as "multiple exposure, fast motion, slow motion, freeze frames, match cuts, jump cuts, split screens, Dutch angles, tracking shots, reversed footage, stop motion", among others. For further reading see: Vertov, D. (1995: 56).

[49] According to Kovács (2007: 18), French film archivist and cinephile Henri Langlois (1914-1977) was the first to name the movement "French Impressionism". Additionally, Kovács identifies auteurs like "Germaine Dulac, Louis Delluc, Jean Epstein, Abel Gance, and Marcel L'Herbier" as representatives of French Impressionism.

18). In other words, Kovács stresses the impressionistic argument that elevated cinema's potential to represent especially the internal forms of human actions (see Kovács 2007: 19).

Moreover, in Kovács's observation, French impressionists saw cinema as deeply symbolic and capable of creating an experience that leads to emotions for the spectator. To make these impressions, cinema had to evoke feelings rather than make direct statements. Similarly, impressionists considered cinema a pure medium that could provide access beyond reality. They achieved this goal with such extra-cinematic artistic effects as superimpositions, filters, Point-of-View (POV) shots, out of focus lensing rapid editing. They also ensured that, at the same time, cinema remained fundamentally narrative-based (Kovács 2007: 19). Examples of French impressionist film include *La Dixième Symphonie/The Tenth Symphony* (Gance 1918), *Rose-France* (L'Herbier 1919), *Fièvre* (Delluc 1921), *Coeur Fidèle/The Faithful Heart* (Epstein 1923) and *Nana* (Renoir 1926) to name a few.[50]

During the post-war period (1945-1980), André Bazin dismissed the modernist cinemas of the 1920s and modernism's obsession with speed as a whole. By doing so, he sought to define his notion of modern cinema as one "largely premised on extended duration and an accent on the everyday", which as Luca and Jorge (2016: 8) reveal, provided in the post-war period the combination of modernism, realism, and politics in film.[51] For Thomson (2016: 50), the modernist cinema advocated by Bazin was founded on indistinct images, whose indeterminate narrative and temporal qualities created space for contemplation and involvement by the spectator. Similarly, Mello (2016: 139) notes that following Bazin's conception of modern cinema during the post-war period, Gilles Deleuze's "movement-image and time-image" gained shape. Deleuze emphasised the use of long takes, a slow-acting style, and a focus on dead time (time of non-action). These devices effectively delayed the narrative efficiency of cause and effect as crafted and perfected by commercial

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[50] For further reading see: Harries (2018: 1) https://www.movementsinfilm.com/blog/french-impressionist-films-1918-1929

[51] Examples of modernist films in the 1960s and 1970s include *Charlotte and Her Jules* (Godard 1960), *Jules and Jim* (Truffaut 1962), Michelangelo Antonioni's trilogy of *L'avventura* (1960), *L'eclisse* (1962), and *Red Desert* (1964), *8 ½* (Fellini 1963), *Cantata* (Jancos 1963) *Persona* (Bergman 1966), *Andrei Rublev* (Tarkovsky 1966), *Zabriskie Point* (Antonioni 1970), *Arabian Nights* (Pasolini 1974), *Mirror* (Tarkovsky 1975), amongst many others. See Csóka's (2017: 1) full list of modernist films from the 1950s to the 2000s at https://mubi.com/lists/modernism. Accessed: 29/10/2020.

cinematic practices. Kovács (2007: 21) then clarifies that the term "modern cinema" appeared in the 1940s as a post-war creation to describe the opposition between classical cinema and modern cinema. The essence of this characterisation, as Kovács further explains, was predicated on the view that before the Second World War, filmmakers had the "option of making a documentary, a narrative film, or an avant-garde film, but a 'modern film' did not exist yet as a choice" (Kovács 2007: 21).

Furthermore, important to note in this context is Ford's (2012: 10) assertion that post-war modernist cinema was concerned with American popular films and the quickly transforming modern world. Kovács (2007: 17) had earlier claimed that "the action-centred Hollywood narrative was an essential inspiration for late modern cinema instead of the dead classicism of European bourgeois middle-class drama", which had shown a little appreciation for classical narrative norms. Ford, however, cautions that the term "modernity" can no longer be used as a catch-all appeal presuming an enclosed European narrative of progress (Ford 2012: 11). It is also increasingly important to acknowledge, as does Koutsourakis (2019: 391), that the term "modernism" should not simply be seen as a "series of stylistic devices but as an appreciation of art as material intervention". According to Koutsourakis, "this implies that aesthetic modernism reacts to the conditions of its emergence", thus envisaging a different modernity (Koutsourakis 2019: 391). Kovács (2007: 11) is keen to substantiate that since the diffusion of modernity as a positive idea in the nineteenth century, "other variations of this notion, such as modernity, modernism, or modernist have emerged". These terms, Kovács insists, "have been widely used in art history and aesthetics ever since".

For this reason, I elect to use the terms "modernist aesthetic" to designate a form of art-making that informs Slow Cinema's approach to the artistic utilisation of the cinema. Finally, the rise of late modernism in the 1950s and 60s reestablished cinema as a distinguished cultural tool within society, with filmmakers increasingly seeing themselves as eminent representatives of contemporary western culture (Kovács 2007: 1). Next, I identify and substantiate the tenets of the post-war modernist aesthetic, how it differs from postmodernism, then lastly, given the preceding arguments on modernism, demonstrate the function of Slow Cinema in reactivating past modernist tropes.

Koutsourakis (2019: 406) explains that aesthetic modernism was neither concerned with a set of formal elements nor the "attention to its aesthetic production". Instead, he sees

modernism as an aesthetic of negation, "whose formal responses to modernity point toward a crisis of representation in a world that has become more sophisticated and fragmented". Koepnick (2014: 14) offers equally significant views, stating that modernism valorises both speed and slowness, with slow modernism, for instance, negating the age of enlightenment marching and its attendant progress. Kovács (2007: 15) chose to address modernism as an art-historical period characterised by aesthetic nuances, such as self-reflexivity. Still, he wondered whether the modernist aesthetic content could be deemed a set of identical features. In this sense, Kovács affirms that modernist cinema is often associated with auteurism or what he calls "cinema of auteurship" (Kovács 2007: 2). An auteurist modern cinema, Kovács clarifies, hardly suggests that such films are so dissimilar that they are incomparable with each other since it would be impossible for each auteur's work to represent an autonomous aesthetic vision (Kovács 2007: 3). Therefore, it is possible to understand why Kovács (2007: 3) is keen to locate the modernist aesthetic in different geographical regions, countries, cultures, and individual auteurs. Modern auteurs take a cue from German aesthetic thinkers, who believed that the aesthetic perfection of antique Greek art could be reproduced in a different manner (Kovács 2007: 9). In this regard, it would be necessary to discuss Koutsourakis's views on postwar cinematic modernism to substantiate how the modernist aesthetic can be reproduced in various forms.

First, Koutsourakis (2019: 393) stresses that modernity produces conditions of development and modernisation and "conditions of underdevelopment that are the dialectical materialism of modernisation". In other words, Koutsourakis suggests that development in Europe tends to produce impoverishment in different countries and cultures simultaneously. As such, Ford (2012: 10) has questioned the notion of modernity as a valid concept in the 21st Century, in light of the historically possessive Eurocentric application of cinematic modernism.[52]Still, Koutsourakis (2019: 394) identifies Roberto Rossellini (Italy), Michelangelo Antonioni (Italy), Glauber Rocha (Brazil), Ousmane Sembéne (Senegal), and Theo Angelopoulos (Greece) as key representatives in postwar cinema who "responded aesthetically to historical conditions of development and underdevelopment" in their countries. However, their films gained visibility beyond their borders. Second, Koutsourakis (2019: 392) considers the pessimism of post-war modernism "as a response to the historical

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[52] See also Kovács (2007: 3), who confirms that modern cinema started in Europe, where it remained the most influential.

ordeals of totalitarianism, the concentration camps, and the gradual end of European colonialism". Hence, postwar cinematic modernism reflects the above traumas and questions of "individual alienation and desolation" (Koutsourakis 2019: 40). Third, Koutsourakis discusses postwar modernism's concern with the quotidian life to express disillusionment with modernity rather than an ecstatic acceptance of modernity as progress (Koutsourakis 2019: 406). As I will demonstrate later in this section, a preoccupation with the everyday life is one of the many remarkable characteristics of contemporary Slow Cinema.

Lastly, I should mention that Kovács (2007: 14) has identified the role of aesthetic modernism in affirming art as an independent world or what he calls in other terms, "the avant-garde work of art often associated with a socio-political or philosophical manifesto". However, Kovács contends that it would be necessary to differentiate between "modernism" and "avant-garde". Kovács sees avant-garde as a term that describes "politically conscious and activist art movements associated with some socially alienated artists" (Kovács 2007: 14). Kovács insists that the avant-garde was "an extreme case of modernism" because the artists associated with the movement were eager to upset and ultimately conquer the entire bourgeois system of values. To conclude this part, the above-cited authors have made it clear that post-war modernist cinema has created its genres and conventions that have progressively influenced modern auteurs' beliefs and tastes beyond European film industries. Kovács (2007: 2), for example, has noted the growth of this influence in the Far East and Iran to an extent where it is evident that "contemporary art cinema in Asia is more innovative and stronger than it is in Europe".

The craze of the "modern", according to Kovács (2007: 10), lasted until the early 1970s. At that point, the concept of the "postmodern" surfaced and disregarded the impression that art could pass through aesthetic revolutions. Kovács foregrounds the decline of modern cinema to demonstrate how the vanishing of the modernist inspiration created anxiety among cinephiles, critics, and filmmakers, which led to the massive closures of movie theatres throughout Western Europe in the late 1970s and early 1980s (Kovács 2007: 2). On his part, Koutsourakis (2019: 391) attributes the decline of modernism to postmodern cinema's ability to reinforce "a fragmented market reality of ceaseless capital circulation and reproduction" that Kovács alluded to earlier. For Boggs and Pollard (2001: 159), postmodern

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cinema emerged as "a powerful creative force in Hollywood filmmaking, helping shape the historic convergence of media culture, technology, and consumerism". Boggs and Pollard further explain how postmodern cinema "departs from the modernist cultural tradition grounded in the enlightenment and norms of industrial society" because it is characteristic of "fragmented narratives, a dark view of the human condition, images of chaos and random violence, and death of the hero" (Boggs & Pollard 2001: 159). More substantially, Boggs and Pollard (2001: 166) underscore postmodern cinema's association with American film director David W. Griffith (1875-1948) and Soviet directors of the early period. These directors used the montage approach to assemble several shots, images, and scenes to convey a jumble of social reality that is not readily discernible, as in *Pulp Fiction* (Tarantino 1994).[53]

In summary, Boggs and Pollard point out that modernist cinema's "approach to reality is characterised by surface images" rarely associated with a fundamental continuous development process, commonly exhibited in postmodern cinema (Boggs & Pollard 2001: 121). Thus, I have instigated a critical reevaluation of the modernist aesthetic in the context of postmodern cinema to show how the notion of modernity can react to the core practices of contemporary cinema. Next, because of the preceding scholarly arguments on modernism, I seek to demonstrate how Slow Cinema reactivates past modernist tropes.

Koutsourakis (2019: 401), who has discussed "modernist belatedness in contemporary Slow Cinema" in great detail, emphasises that "Slow Cinema uses an approach typical of the cinematic practices that characterised post-war modernism". Boczkowska (2016: 230) argues along similar lines that the movement toward slowness emerged in post-war art and cinema. This emergence either directly or indirectly opposed the dominant capitalism-driven systems of the mainstream culture, including cinema and mass media, which were still prevalent in European and North American countries. Ford (2011: 165) had earlier contributed to this notion, emphatically noting the return of modernism through the works of contemporary Slow Cinema auteurs such as Béla Tarr (Hungary), Hou Hsiao-Hsien (Taiwan), and Tsai Ming-liang (Malaysia). From Ford's perspective, these auteurs' films

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[53] *Pulp Fiction* is considered "a postmodern film because it looks back and makes constant reference to earlier films" with particular attention to the "French New Wave film *Band à Part*" (Band of Outsiders) (Goddard 1964). Further reading: McAteer, J. (2015: 22).

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frequently go further than the modernism of the 1950s and 1960s in terms of sheer slowness.[54] Despite the agreement by the scholars cited above regarding Slow Cinema's apparent reactivation of aesthetic tropes linked to modernism, Koutsourakis (2019: 394) sees a problem with the argument that seeks to "treat modernism merely as an aesthetic rather than a political project". Koutsourakis contends that the recent "historical experience has equally invigorated the modernist critique of the Enlightenment".

Additionally, Koutsourakis continues to argue that Slow Cinema's "modernist belatedness" and its reactivation of the tropes associated with modernism has not been situated historically to show the relationship "between the past and the present concerning politics and aesthetics". While I agree with Koutsourakis's argument for modernism to be viewed as both "an aesthetic and a political project", I will not explore the issue further because it is beyond this study's scope. Instead, I want to foreground Slow Cinema's retrieval of the aesthetic strategies belonging to the modernist aesthetic.

Indeed, as Boczkowska (2016: 230) suggests, the scope of Slow Cinema as a genre has been recently expanded to include post-1960 experimental and avant-garde film. This aspect emphasises the reflective elements of slowness, especially in a world that is still experiencing, according to Koutsourakis (2019: 392), the consequences of overdevelopment and underdevelopment. It is, therefore, possible to suggest, for instance, as Koutsourakis (2019: 401) notes:

> …The renewed prominence of modernist tropes in contemporary slow cinema may be seen as a response to concrete social realities whose visualization has been suppressed. This endeavour to make something invisible visible characterizes the work of filmmakers whose works are subsumed under the banner of slow cinema.

Koutsourakis's characterisation of the political aspect of post-war modernism that the Slow Cinema movement has reactivated gives credence to the recurring themes of alienation, economic changes, egoism, and community dysfunctions in most Slow Cinema

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[54] It is worth reminding here that Tarr's *Sátántangó* (1994), shot in black-and-white runs for more than seven hours. However, as I have noted in Chapter One (Section 1.2.2), duration is not the only determinant of slowness in film. Aside from its long duration, *Sátántangó* addresses pessimistic philosophical themes associated with Slow Cinema such as existential nihilism, which I discuss at length in Chapter Three with respect to *The Turin Horse* (Tarr 2011).

films. For instance, *Sátántangó*[55] (Tarr 1994), *Ossos*[56] (Costa 1997), and *Sanxia haoren*[57] (Zhangke 2006) among others. Koutsourakis (2019: 405) goes further, suggesting that the post-war modernist aesthetic lends itself to Slow Cinema's portray of the complex world in an austere manner, which stimulates our understanding of past conflicts and historical anxieties "that neither modernity nor late modernity has managed to resolve".[58] Furthermore, in his comprehensive evaluation, Koutsourakis (2019: 405) identifies specific post-war modernist strategies that Slow Cinema has reactivated. These strategies include a tendency towards minimalism in the narrative, flat acting, and an emphasis on time, the quotidian lifestyle and everyday places, which may not contribute to dramatic consistency and development. Finally, Koutsourakis insists that the re-emergence of modernist aesthetics in contemporary Slow Cinema "should not be seen as a nostalgic return to the past" but as a desire to respond to the historical and social realities of the present (Koutsourakis 2019: 391).

Meanwhile, Walsh (2016: 69) alludes to a more complex discourse than does Koutsourakis. He argues that if the concept of Slow Cinema is to avoid the fate of terms such as "postmodernism", which ended up subsuming the very high modernism against which it was primarily defined, then it (Slow Cinema) must designate an element that can be differentiated from preceding and equivalent tendencies. Hence, an evaluation of modernism focuses on the factual status of Slow Cinema and where it lies, be it closer to the principle of cinematic modernism or postmodernism. Taking a cue from the preceding scholarly arguments, I am particularly keen to establish how the materialist aspects of modernism about Slow Cinema, can be reactivated in a Kenyan Slow Cinema film (*Men of the Hill*). The film embraces a minimalist and indeterminate narrative and a methodical

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[55] *Sátántangó*, for instance, is a story of socioeconomic struggles and the attendant problems they bring in tow such as alcoholism. In particular, the film is a tale of grim and uncompromising greed, ambition, and the cruel expression of power. See film review by Moffitt (2019: 1): https://nwfilmforum.org/news/jackie-moffitt-reviews-satantango/. Accessed 06/07/2020.

[56] In *Ossos*, as Rosenberg (2019) describes it, Pedro Costa documented the day-to-day lives of the inhabitants of a slum in Lisbon, Portugal known as the Fontainhas district. These inhabitants are marginalised and forgotten, just like the shanty structures they live in.

[57] In his reading of *Sanxia haoren* (Still, Life) Johnston (2007) describes Zhangke's portrayal of individuals whose lives are disrupted and displaced by ongoing societal changes. They are ordinary people whose lives have been cast adrift by China's social and economic changes, yet they have no choice but to adjust to the change and move on.

[58] See also, Koutsourakis (2019: 392-393).

stylisation of the cinematic image and temporality.[59] Furthermore, the ideas explored so far in this section lay the groundwork for the textual analysis of three selected Slow Cinema films, as I will discuss in Chapter Three. At this point, it is vital to expand the discussion on the modernist aesthetic to describe possible ways to apply the previously identified modernist tropes in the context of a Kenyan Slow Cinema film. I argue, for instance, that the cinematic versions of modernism identified by Kovács (2007: 17), which include German Expressionism, Pure cinema, and French Impressionism, are of particular relevance to this study as follows.

Firstly, I explore how the German expressionist techniques such as an emphasis on mise-en-scène, minimal narrative and editing, high angles and contrast lighting can create an image of slowness in *Men of the Hill*. Secondly, the notion that Pure cinema aesthetics accentuate an embodiment of reality rather than the highly stylised imagery of classical narrative cinema is essential in this study because realism is one of the critical characteristics in Slow Cinema as portrayed in *Men of the Hill*. Thirdly, the French impressionistic argument for the elevation of cinema's potential to represent the internal forms of human actions or the psychological condition and processes as a visual reality is also applicable to the narrative and aesthetic strategies employed in *Men of the Hill*. Significantly, I also explore Bazin's conception of modern cinema about his argument that ambiguous images, whose indeterminate narrative and temporal qualities can create space for contemplation and involvement by the spectator (see Thomson (2016: 50). I achieve this technique in *Men of the Hill* through long takes, a slow-acting style, and a focus on dead time, which may effectively contribute to contemplation and narrative engagement by the selected Kenyan film viewers.

Since Kovács (2007: 2) has also linked modernist cinema to auteurism, I have conceptualised *Men of the Hill* as an auteur-centred Kenyan Slow Cinema film. The film takes its inspiration from the artistic works of renowned Slow Cinema film auteurs discussed in Chapter Three. Furthermore, in regards to Koutsourakis's (2019: 40) evaluation, post-war cinematic modernism reflects on political and historical anxieties, including issues of individual disaffection and anguish, which serve as a common point of departure for the

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[59] Here, I do not discuss these strategies in great detail because in Chapter Five, I present an exegesis on the creative process of experimenting with slowness in Kenyan cinema.

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thematic concerns addressed in *Men of the Hill*. Additionally, postwar modernism's obsession with the mundane to underscore cynicism with modernity is a feature that is characterised in Slow Cinema, as I will demonstrate in Chapter Three and deployed in *Men of the Hill*. Finally, post-war modernist strategies, including a tendency towards minimalism, indeterminacy, and affectless acting as described by Koutsourakis (2019: 405), contribute to the narrative construction of *Men of the Hill* as a Kenyan Slow Cinema film. Now that I have located Slow Cinema in the modernist aesthetic, it is equally vital in the next section to substantiate the concepts of durational cinema and the transcendental style in film, and particularly, how they interrelate with Slow Cinema.

2.3.2 Durational cinema, transcendental style, and the aesthetic of slowness

The concept of Slow Cinema has invoked scholarly discussions, many of which have raised interesting theoretical issues about the intricate notion of cinematic time and the transcendental nature of the everyday in film. In this respect, it is crucial to address the largely debatable issue of the interrelations between durational cinema, transcendental style, and the aesthetic of slowness. Accordingly, I shall restrict myself in this section to a few selected scholarly works that have led to particularly significant insights on how Slow Cinema can be seen in the context of the existing characteristics of durational cinema and Paul Schrader's conception of the "transcendental style in film". First, I will highlight the features of durational cinema and how they coincide or differ with Slow Cinema. Secondly, I will demonstrate how Schrader's explanation of the link between Slow Cinema and transcendental style conveys a broader aesthetic of slowness and philosophical inquiry.

Issues of cinematic time often dominate discussion in contemporary debates about art cinema and within film studies in general.[60] For Lim (2016: 89), this is because time – to a film's pacing, is based on an individual's perception and experience and cannot, therefore, be viewed merely as an objective temporal measurement. Nevertheless, to a great extent, time has also been considered as an aesthetic-temporal device inextricably tied to Slow Cinema. It is not surprising then that the terms "durational cinema" and "Slow Cinema" are often used interchangeably to refer to a film favouring an intensified sense of temporality. However, as some scholars have suggested, there are fundamental similarities and

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[60] See for example, Doane, M (2002).

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differences between the two. Walsh (2016: 69), for instance, explains that it may not be helpful to lump together everything slow, everything durational and everything contemplative. In his argument, Walsh notes that duration is a "vital characteristic of the avant-garde film of the 1960s" but presents durational cinema as a phenomenon that "radically subtracts conventional dramatic interest and foregrounds time as a formal element of cinema" with emphasis on minimalism (Walsh 2016: 61).

Two of the most famous durational films, according to Walsh (2016: 64), include *Sleep* (Warhol 1963) and *Wavelength* (Snow 1966). For example, in *Sleep*, Warhol trained his camera on his sleeping lover John Giorno on several nighttime visits. Warhol then edited the different takes into a film that lasted more than five hours. Later, Warhol himself argued that his durational films were conceptual works predicated on their premises rather than the experience of seeing them (see Gopnik 2017).[61] Contrastingly, *Wavelength* is a 45-minute-long zoom film widely considered "a landmark of avant-garde cinema". It consists of little or no action because "Snow's intent for the film was to summarise his nervous system, religious inklings, and aesthetic ideas" (Potempski 2013: 7). Nonetheless, *Wavelength* chronicles four human events, including death, with Michael Snow seeking to foreground simplicity with his fixed frame, the flicker effect, loop printing, and rephotography off the screen. Given the film's durational strategy in which the viewer is asked to experience every minute of the time it takes to traverse the filmic space, Film theorist Adams Sitney (1979) has labelled this tendency "structural film". In Sitney's considered view, this tendency is a "working process".[62] Walsh (2016: 62), however, clarifies that durational films are not necessarily structural if *Screen Tests*[63] (Warhol 1964) and *Star Spangled to Death*[64] (Jacobs 2004) are to be

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[61] Writing for *The Brooklyn Rail*, film critic Blake Gopnik documents the second-by-second notes he took as he watched Andy Warhol's *Sleep*. For further reading see Gopnik (2017: 1): https://brooklynrail.org/2017/09/criticspage/Andy-Warhol-Sleep-1963. Accessed: 06/07/2020.
[62] I retrieved this information from *Wiki of the Arts* and paraphrased it for a better understanding of durational cinema as a concept. For more details, see Wiki of the Arts (2017: 1): https://arts.fandom.com/wiki/Wavelength_(1967_film)#cite_note-Zryd.2C_110-15. Accessed: 10/07/2020
For further reading on Michael Snow's cinema, see for example, Cornwell, R. (1980). Another important source is Zryd, M. (2007).
[63] *Screen Tests* is a silent short film that reveals portraits of hundreds of different individuals filmed between 1963 and 1966. Warhol created his own cache of superstars, who are interesting enough to carry a film on their own by just being themselves.
[64] *Star Spangled to death* is a six-hour experimental film consisting almost entirely of archive footage, depicting Jacob's view of the United States in film.

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considered. For Walsh, the radical conceptual simplicity in durational cinema should not be misdescribed or overstated (Walsh 2016: 64). Significantly, Luca (2017: 347) suggests that museums still play a crucial role in disseminating durational cinema, thus reinforcing their presence in contemporary art cinema. Finally, I have considered the historical and philosophical implication of durational cinema as a singularity of the avant-garde in the 1960s. I will now turn to discuss its relationship with Slow Cinema.

Walsh seeks to register that durational films are predominantly slow consistently, but radical exclusions to institute durational cinema are similar to, rather than identical to, Slow Cinema (Walsh 2016: 60). Consequently, Walsh (2016: 68) notes that historically, durational cinema preceded Slow Cinema, with such Slow Cinema film directors as Pedro Costa and Hou Hsiao-Hsien drawing inspiration from earlier durational films. To further illustrate this historical fact, Walsh (2016: 60) argues that durational cinema emerged from the attics and alternative screening spaces of the tightly knit New York avant-garde of the early 1960s. On the other hand, Slow Cinema is primarily associated with a looser group of international fiction feature-length film directors. These directors gained a reputation at global film festivals beginning in the 1990s. Meanwhile, Lim (2016: 90) duly stresses that by forging a "different relationship between the filmic image and the spectator" through extended duration and long takes, Slow Cinema promotes new modes of seeing beyond its temporal aesthetics. Taking this cue, Çağlayan (2018:9) sees the "extended duration of contemporary Slow Cinema as an amplified version of what European cinema has routinely deployed since the 1960s".

For Brown (2016: 113), durational cinema and slow cinema do not always correlate because duration is not a yardstick for comparing slow cinema to fast cinema. Lim (2014: 104) offers a clear example, asserting that *What Time is it There?* (Tsai Ming-liang 2001) with a total running time of 116 minutes is considered a Slow Cinema film, while *The Lord of the Rings: The Return of the King* (Jackson 2003), which is 201 minutes in length, cannot be considered a Slow Cinema film. Brown (2016: 113) then emphasises that for a film to be slow, it does not need to be long but it should be seen as rejecting the conventional tropes of mainstream cinema – both from Hollywood and world cinema. Similarly, Luca (2017: 337) argues that Slow Cinema films are not necessarily long and durational films are not necessarily slow. According to Mello (2016: 139), the idea is to avoid measuring slowness

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in terms of shot length and camera movements, thus shifting the focus from time towards space and stillness. Grønstad (2016: 279) supports the above views, insisting that Slow Cinema is a visualisation of presence rather than the mere framing of empty time and empty shots. As Koutsourakis (2019: 396) has already indicated, the apparent uneasiness about Slow Cinema is attributed to the fact that "it advances a different understanding of time politics", not as a chronological process but one that echoes past conflicts. But even if Slow Cinema develops new insight into chronological time and its politics, there is a much stronger sense of Slow Cinema films deploying contemplative takes, minimalist visuality, stillness, and silence. These techniques emphasise the films' durational quality as a requisite element of the film experience (Luca 2017: 336).

It is equally difficult to ignore the significant correlation between Slow Cinema and the transcendental style in film – a concept that American screenwriter and director Paul Schrader coined in his critically acclaimed book, "Transcendental Style in Film: Ozu, Bresson, Dreyer" (1972).[65] In this seminal text, Schrader argues that "the transcendental style articulates a spiritual state using austere camerawork, acting devoid of self-consciousness, and editing that avoids editorial comment" (Schrader 1972: 18). To illustrate his point of view, Schrader analyses the film styles of three renowned directors, namely Yasujirō Ozu (Japan), Robert Bresson (France), and Carl Dreyer (Denmark). He posits that these artists from divergent cultures used a common dramatic language in their films, which he calls "transcendental style" (see Schrader 2018: 25-33). In discussing Schrader's writings on the transcendental style, Boczkowska (2016: 227) states that the concept of transcendental aesthetics has made a significant contribution to the development of Slow Cinema. In effect, some authors (Boczkowska 2016: 221; Hodson 2019;[66] Nathan 2018: 16-17; Rangan 2019)[67] have opined that Slow Cinema can be theorised as a creative evolution

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[65] As a screenwriter, Schrader wrote or co-wrote screenplays for four Martin Scorsese films including *Taxi Driver* (1976), *Raging Bull* (1980), *The Last Temptation of Christ* (1988), and *Bringing out the Dead* (1999). He has directed 18 feature films of different genres such as crime drama, biographical drama, and dramatic thriller. Schrader is known to write and direct stories about characters who are lonely, isolated, and desperate as their world crumbles around them. It is worth noting here that Schrader's characters can be compared to the characters in most Slow Cinema films, for example, *Taste of Cherry* (Kiarostami 1997) and *Winter Sleep* (Ceylan 2014).

[66] Further reading see Hodson (2019: 1): https://www.sensesofcinema.com/2019/feature-articles/on-paul-schraders-rethinking-transcendental-style/

[67] Further reading see Rangan (2019: 1): https://www.firstpost.com/entertainment/pawel-pawlikowskis-ida-and-its-non-dramatic-drama-what-it-means-for-a-film-style-to-be-transcendental-7615861.html

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of Schrader's transcendental style. More explicitly, Boczkowska (2016: 227) has praised Schrader's transcendental style for furthering a more comprehensive academic discussion regarding Slow Cinema's tendency to "evoke the transcendental style and a contemplative register through the use of stylised editing patterns characteristic of the new wave if the 1960s". Schrader's emphasis on the differences between Slow Cinema and the transcendental style in film is of greater interest. He discusses these differences in greater detail in a new introduction of his seminal text: *Rethinking Transcendental Style* (2018: 1-34).[68] A thorough analysis of the transcendental style is beyond the scope of this study; hence my discussion will be limited to evaluating the relationship between Slow Cinema and transcendental aesthetics.

Before discussing this relationship, it is pertinent to highlight that Schrader himself is quick to note that transcendental style is not Slow Cinema. However, he implicitly agrees with the abovementioned authors that it is one of several precursors to Slow Cinema (Schrader 2018: 21). Fundamentally, Schrader invokes Deleuze's discussions of time-image in his attempt to fill a gap in his theorisation of transcendental style.[69] By his admission, Schrader had not initially considered Deleuze's philosophical inquiry of perception through time, which involves the spectators' reading of "movement in their minds of an action hastily cut short on the screen". For instance, as Schrader explains, "the movement-image cut maintains simple continuity – the man enters a room, the man exits a room" (Schrader 2018: 21). In contrast, in "the time-image cut, the man exits a room, but the camera lingers for some seconds on the closed door" (Schrader 2018: 21). Thus, for Schrader, the transcendental style evolved as a "time-image" because filmmakers in different traditions figured they could introduce slowness in their films to create a new reality to explore memory, contemplation, and some cases, stimulate transcendence (see Schrader 2018: 21; Hodson 2019). I will now briefly turn to Schrader's explanation of the significant correlation between Slow Cinema and the transcendental style. Crucially, while Slow Cinema can, in many ways, be said to capture reality in a similar way that the transcendental style does, Schrader argues that their aims are very different. First, he points to Slow Cinema's attitude toward time. In essence, Schrader observes that while time is intended to serve storytelling in film narrative,

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[68] See Schrader's (2018) new introduction – Rethinking Transcendental Style in *Transcendental Style in Film: Ozu, Bresson, Dreyer.* California: University of California Press, pp. 1-34.
[69] I will discuss Deleuze's conception of the time-image later in this chapter (see section 2.4.1).

Slow Cinema inverts this relationship in such a way that time itself becomes the story – or at least its principal element. Thus, slow Cinema is experiential rather than expositional because it examines how time affects images (Schrader 2018: 10).

On the other hand, Schrader (2018: 3) explains that "by delaying cuts, not moving the camera, rejecting music cues, avoiding shot coverage, and intensifying the mundane, transcendental style creates a sense of unease that the viewer must resolve". The filmmaker aids the viewer's desire for resolution by "using a Decisive Moment brought about by an unexpected image or act, which then results in a stasis, an acceptance of parallel reality – transcendence" (Schrader 2018: 3). It is plausible to argue here that almost all of the above descriptions would suit our understanding of what constitutes Slow Cinema in terms of narrative, minimalism, and indeterminacy. However, as Schrader has clarified, the act of waiting in transcendental style is intended to capture a decisive moment in the story that will ultimately lead to stillness, hence creating a sense of otherworldliness. In the end, Schrader justifies his claim by citing Ozu, Bresson, Dreyer, Mizoguchi, and De Sica as examples of filmmakers "who used film time to create an emotional, intellectual or spiritual effect" (Schrader 2018: 3).

Second, Schrader (2018: 21) reinforces the belief that Slow Cinema is not for all viewers because it employs alienating and distancing devices, and most of all, it is boring. In Schrader's own words, "there is simply no functional reason and no intellectual justification for holding on a shot ten times longer than the action is depicting. It is amateurish." Essentially, Schrader is implying here that films that employ the transcendental style have a different intention – one designed to escort the viewer to another level of consciousness, a whole other world in which the transcendental film director is a spirit guide (Schrader 2018: 22-25). To put this into context, Schrader describes the closing image of Andrei Tarkovsky's *Nostalghia* (1983). The film's protagonist, Andrei, fulfils Dominic's promise (a deranged mystic who kills himself) to carry a lit candle across the waters of a mineral pool. Andrei struggles against the wind and failing health as he goes back and forth until he completes his task by placing the flickering candle on a stone ledge before it dies off-camera. Schrader describes this moment as stasis – the endpoint of transcendental style. Better still, he calls

it a "Bressonian ending" in reference to the closing image of *Diary of a Country Priest* (Bresson 1951).[70]

Schrader identifies American-born French filmmaker Eugène Green as the most successful heir to Bresson's style. For example, In *La Sapienza* (2014), Green uses Bressonian techniques such as planimetric staging, flat line readings, offset cuts, and bursts of unexpected music to create a powerful secular effect (Schrader 2018: 22). Examples of films that employ the mechanics of transcendental style according to Schrader (2018: 21-22) include *Thérèse* (Cavalier 1986), *Mother and Son* (Sokurov 1997), and *Silent Light* (Reygadas 2007). *Lourdes* (Hausner 2009), *Hadewijch* (Dumont 2009), *Ida* (Pawlikowski 2013), and most recently, *Stations of the Cross* (Brüggemann 2014) are other examples of the transcendental style. These examples involve religious characters or themes, but as Schrader (2018: 22) further substantiates, the transcendental style is not necessarily tied to spiritual themes, even though that is the case more often than not (Schrader 2018: 22).

In conclusion, the above discussions denote two parallel approaches to understanding the aesthetics and functions of Slow Cinema. On the one hand, durational cinema focuses on the theoretical foundations of Slow Cinema in terms of how it foregrounds the temporal aesthetics and the radical conceptual simplicity of the image. Contrastingly, the transcendental style reveals the characteristics of the slow aesthetic consisting of austere camerawork, limited or inexistent coverage, emphasis on the mundane, and minimal or delayed edits. In the following chapters, I will consider the ideas articulated in the two approaches to illustrate how such styles can be helpful to understand what constitutes narrative, minimalism, and indeterminacy in Slow Cinema and to problematise these comparisons within the context of Kenyan cinema through *Men of the Hill*. However, my intention here is not to make a straightforward comparison, which risks overstating Slow Cinema's reliance on other styles, as well as interfering with their ontological foundations.

As I will demonstrate in the next chapter, the slow aesthetic remains consistent across the oeuvres of leading Slow Cinema film directors such as Apichatpong Weerasethakul and

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[70] The ailing Priest (the film's protagonist) asks for his rosary and holds it against his chest. After recovering some strength, he asks for absolution and even smiles. Few moments later he lays his hands on a former colleague and priest and says: "What does it matter? All is grace." He dies just then. See Matthew (2015: 1) at: https://www.classicartfilms.com/diary-of-a-country-priest-1951

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Béla Tarr, who demonstrate narrative, aesthetic, and technical innovations in contemporary Slow Cinema. *Men of the Hill* expands on some features of durational cinema and the transcendental style, and most significantly, emphasises the narrative and aesthetic strategies of contemporary Slow Cinema known for its philosophical and intellectually stimulating aspects that characterise the everyday reality. This reality disapproves Schrader's (2018: 21) earlier assertion that the Slow Cinema aesthetic lacks a practical reason and an intellectual justification in applying its strategies. Overall, this section contributes to the argument seeking to theorise Slow Cinema beyond its temporal aesthetics and toward its expositional and contemplative qualities.[71]

2.3.3 Slow Cinema as alternative cinema

This section provides important entry points for analysing Slow Cinema's increasingly significant role in addressing the modern world's social, political, and cultural realities as an alternative to the strategies employed in Contemporary Hollywood Cinema. In this respect, the first part briefly presents a framework for understanding alternative cinema. The second part then articulates the concepts of first, second, and third cinemas to situate Slow Cinema within cinema's rich and varied tradition. The third part expounds on Hollywood's principle of "intensified continuity", hence paving the way for a more detailed exploration of Slow Cinema's reaction to speed. Finally, the fourth and last part postulates Slow Cinema both as alternative cinema and as exploring the notion of hybridity in Kenyan cinema. As I demonstrated earlier in this chapter (see section 2.3.1), the avant-garde work of art is often associated with a social, political, and philosophical strategy. Of even greater significance, Kovács (2007: 27) argues that in American historiography, "avant-garde" is used as a general term for "alternative, commercial, experimental, underground, and non-narrative film practice". Kovács further explains that non-narrative fictional practice "is often personal and predicated on alternative production and distribution networks, and it is occasionally political, thus avant-garde" (Kovács 2007: 27). Elsaesser (2005: 464) makes an equally strong assertion in postulating that the question of an "alternative cinema" was on the agenda of European directors even before 1967 when French-Swiss film director Jean-Luc Godard implored filmmakers to make films politically rather than making political films.

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[71] See for example, Luca and Jorge (2016: 3) and Koutsourakis (2019: 388).

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Fundamentally, in Elsaesserian terms, Godard's notion was that of a "counter-cinema", thus suggesting a film-politics that would defy the commercial hegemony of Hollywood and its dominant distribution and exhibition networks not only in European countries but also in the Third World (Elsaesser 2005: 464). In this context, some filmmakers were eager to explore formal, experimental, and non-narrative traditions, which did not comply with the requirements of commercial cinema.

Consequently, alternative cinema is a cinema that rebels radically in form, content, and technique to counter Hollywood's excessive output. In Elsaesser's (2005: 464) view, "cheaper filmmaking equipment in post-war Europe" saw new national cinemas with an art cinema orientation. Elsaesser identifies Italian neo-realism,[72] the French New Wave,[73] and the New German Cinema,[74] for instance, as early examples of alternative cinema (Elsaesser 2005: 464). After substantiating the concept of alternative cinema, it is important first to recognise that the various cinematic traditions I have discussed in this section can be catalogued into three different groupings. Elsaesser (2005: 465) calls these groupings "communicating vessels", namely First Cinema, Second Cinema, and Third Cinema. Guneratne (2003: 10) posits that First cinema is automatically assumed to be a cinema of entertainment (Hollywood cinema), and Second cinema as one on intellect and interiority

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[72] According to Kartal (2013: 141), one obvious characteristic of Italian neorealism (1943-1952) was that films were shot on location instead of studios as opposed to the Hollywood films of the period. Neorealist films were characterised by stories set amongst the poor and working class, using non-professional actors. Examples of neorealist films include *Bicycle Thieves* (Vittorio De Sica 1948)*, Umberto D.* (Vittorio De Sica 1952), and *Rome, Open City* (Roberto Rossellini 1945). I will further discuss the concept of neorealism in section 2.3.1. For further reading see, Kartal (2013).

[73] The French New Wave (1958-1964) was conceptualised by a group of French film critics turned filmmakers as an act of rebellion against the rigid French films of the 1940s and 1950s. These filmmakers forged a new cinema that broke all the rules. François Truffaut, Jean-Luc Godard, Jacques Rivette, and Eric Rohmer are among the notable names associated with the movement. French New Wave films deal with the mundane, and are particularly inspired by other artistic and intellectual movements such as Italian neorealism. For further reading see Neupert (2002).

[74] The term used to refer to the films that were made in West Germany during the 1960s, 1970s, and early 1980s. This movement was influenced by the French New Wave and characterised by a generation of directors who were born during the Second World War. These directors' works were specifically based on political dissatisfaction expressed through an artisanal mode of production facilitated by collaborations and a high sense of experimentation. This combination of art and politics often commented on attempts to reconcile a violent past, marginalised groups, alienated youth, and the limits of a liberal democracy. Internationally, the New German Cinema was seen as the most promising development in German cinema since German Expressionism. Directors associated with this movement include Wim Wenders, Rainer W. Fassbinder, Werner Herzog, and Edgar Reitz to name a few. For more information, see: Flinn (2004).

(European art cinema). In contrast to the above, Third cinema associates itself with political radicalism (Third World cinema). In his formulation of the three categories, Chanan (1997) argued that First cinema is the model imposed by the American film industry and corresponds to an ideology that emphasises a particular relationship between film and spectator, where cinema is a pure spectacle. Chanan further observed that First cinema is made with a standardised duration for exhibition in large theatres to satisfy the commercial interests of the production companies (Chanan 1997: 373).

On the other hand, Chanan (1997: 374) considered Second cinema as an alternative type of cinema to First cinema because it represents the freedom of filmmakers to express themselves outside of the standardised duration, form and language of the regular commercial cinema. Second cinema is, therefore, often considered as nihilist and pessimist (Chanan 1997: 376). Lastly, Chanan (1997: 374) contended that Third cinema is both opposed to First cinema and the prevailing Second cinema notion of the film auteur. In short, "Third cinema is the expression of a new culture and changes in society" (Chanan 1997: 376). Adding to this explanation, Elsaesser (2005: 496) states that Third cinema emerged in the 1970s and was closely tied to the post-colonial nationalist liberation struggles. However, for Elsaesser (2005: 497), what these cinematic categories have in common is the apparent erasure of the traditional line between national and international and between art cinema and commercial cinema. This erasure, Elsaesser elucidates, is contrary to the confrontation between Europe and Hollywood between1945 and 1990. As a result, First, Second, and Third Cinemas are "more transnational in their styles, as well as having more of a crossover appeal" (Elsaesser 2005: 497). For example, Contemporary Hollywood Cinema (First Cinema) occasionally seeks to assimilate some tried and tested forms and devices of art and experimental cinema in its narrative and formal innovation. For instance, *Inception* (Nolan 2010) is an intellectual Hollywood film inspired by the formal and narrative experimentation of Second Cinema. Similarly, as Chanan (1997: 377) notes, Third Cinema, which in this context is illustrated notably in *Moolaadé* (Sembéne 2004), is "a mixture of African and Western elements and their critical approach to local culture".

It is also crucial to note here that according to Elsaesser (2005:496), "Third cinema has shed its political agenda and its traditional regional base. Instead, it has become 'world cinema' – a term modelled on world music or fusion food to indicate the hybridity of national

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and international characteristics". As per Elsaesser's definition, world cinema is an adaptation of Third cinema, which was "third" to Hollywood as "first" cinema, and European art cinema as "second" cinema (Elsaesser 2005: 496). This conception helps to explain that for Elsaesser, world cinema should no longer be viewed as Latin America's politicised cinema of the 1970s, India's (Bollywood) art avant-garde or West Africa's Francophone cinema. Instead, it can now refer to emergent film cultures worldwide "from Iran and Sri Lanka to Mozambique, Mexico, Alaska, South Africa and Burkina Faso" (Elsaesser 2005: 496). Therefore, there is a strong connection between Slow Cinema and Second cinema, the latter of which has been described as "alternative cinema" by Chanan (1997: 374) and Elsaesser (2005: 464), based on the fact that Second cinema emphasises the unusual ordering of the story and the quirky alterations of time and space.

An analysis of Slow Cinema also reveals strong parallels with Hollywood Cinema (or First cinema). In this sense, it must be emphasised that adhering to the tropes of Slow Cinema and, in particular, its inherent resistance to the culture of speed inevitably counters dominant Hollywood films. As Bordwell (2002: 16-28) remarked, Hollywood cinema now operates on the principle of ultrafast formal aesthetics of "intensified continuity based on rapid editing, close framings, and free-ranging camerawork". Kendall (2016: 113) explores cinematic acceleration in recent Hollywood films such as *Transformers* (Bay 2007-2014), *Bourne* (Liman, Greengrass, & Gilroy 2002–2012), and *Fast & Furious* (Cohen, Singleton, Lin, & Wan 2001-2015). By doing so, Kendall characterises intensified continuity (also "post continuity" or "accelerationist aesthetics") as a concept that refers to the "flamboyantly hyperkinetic, adrenaline-charged style" of filmmaking. Kendall further illustrates how intensified continuity favours the emotional and instinctive effect of "velocity through cinematographic techniques and editing" that accentuate speed and dynamism in ways viewed as negating narrative consistency and Spatio-temporal continuity (Kendall 2016: 114). Koepnick (2014: 153) convincingly describes the impact of using many shots on regular feature films, not to affirm narrative coherence but spectacle:

> …Today, they [shots] easily extend beyond the 1,000 mark, resulting in an acceleration of narrative speed amplified by the use of cuts in the middle of a movement, of cutaway tracking shots, of hectic rack zooms and jerky reframings, and unfocused whiplash pans. In mainstream filmmaking today, nervous editing and rickety camera moves impart a general sense

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of speed, energy, and arousal. Still, particularly in action cinema, they often do so at the calculated cost of legibility.

It concerns, according to Koepnick, that the average shot lengths of regular feature films have been condensed to the extent that it is no longer possible for the viewer to comprehend the prevailing narrative structure and flow. Grønstad (2016: 277) also contributes to this notion, suggesting that a shot [in fast cinema] with an average length of 1.8 seconds "has material existence, undeniably, but, at the same time, it is evacuated of presence". It is, therefore, plausible to contend that intensified continuity in Hollywood cinema may have triggered a reaction from Slow Cinema, as I will discuss in the following paragraphs.

Romney (2010: 43) maintains that Slow Cinema generates what he terms as "an intensified sense of temporality" – in response to Hollywood's intensified continuity. For his part, Lim (2016: 89) is particularly keen to establish that Slow Cinema has emerged worldwide to address the culture of speed in modern life and the treatment of duration in narrative films. Similarly, Grønstad (2016: 275) positions Slow Cinema as "the antithesis of a fast cinema aesthetic and a negation of the terms of commercial filmmaking". Grønstad also considers the aesthetic of slowness as inherently political because such an aesthetic cannot be adequately understood without reference to Hollywood cinema (Grønstad 2016: 275). Çağlayan (2016: 9) further articulates Slow Cinema's reaction to speed, noting that many filmmakers associated with the slow aesthetic intentionally resist mainstream film cultures. Other filmmakers like Tsai Ming-Liang (Taiwan) explicitly attempt to oppose the standardised aesthetics of intensified continuity by dramatising time as the central theme of his films. Most noticeably in Slow Cinema films, as Kunda (2018: 2) points out, the average shot length (ASL) is much longer. For example, in *Sátántangó* (Tarr 1994), the ASL is 151 seconds, in *Five: Dedicated to Ozu* (Kiarostami 2003) – 884 seconds, in *Café Lumiere* (Hsiao-Hsien 2003) – 66 seconds, and *Silent Light* (Reygadas 2007) –35 seconds. In Boczkowska's (2016: 230) view, this is a clear indication of Slow Cinema confronting the two-second ASL of many Hollywood films. Simultaneously, for Dwyer and Perkins (2018: 103), Slow Cinema thematises time as a political preoccupation against Hollywood cinema.

By considering the abovementioned concepts of "intensified continuity" and "intensified temporality", it becomes clear, according to Grønstad's perspective, that "the gap between art cinema and the mainstream has widened during the last decade". This widening gap is

embodied by the difference between "fast and slow", between a proclivity for fast cuts and a solid reliance on the long take (Grønstad 2016: 275). However, as Çağlayan (2018: 7) warns, "placing Slow Cinema in opposition to Hollywood or mainstream cinema risks a presumptive acceptance of the legitimacy of the slow aesthetic". Nonetheless, Çağlayan supports the continued use of "slowness" as a descriptor because it helps to preserve the Slow Cinema tendency as a symbol of sophistication in film and resistance to the culture of speed. Kendall (2016: 116) echoes Çağlayan's assertion, stating that debates about fast versus slow cinema "help us grasp the significance of speed as an increasingly significant facet of life in the twenty-first century". I will now postulate Slow Cinema both as alternative cinema and as a means to exploring the concept of hybridity in Kenyan cinema.

One of the fundamental phenomena of the past decade, as noted by Kunda (2018: 4), has been the increased visibility and recognition of Slow Cinema as an alternative cinema in response to the profoundly unsatisfying experience of Hollywood cinema's appeal to the demands of Western viewers. In light of this phenomenon, Kunda suggests that American films tend to mischaracterise audiences in Asia, South America or Africa to the point where they cannot recognise the regularity of their lives and their human experiences. Alternatively, Slow Cinema can encompass a different type of viewing altogether, designed according to a slow, elongated rhythm or pace, and often appealing to cultural nuances on a thematic or narrative level (Dwyer & Perkins 2018: 103-107). Additionally, as Koutsourakis (2019: 409) himself writes: "Slow Cinema films aspire to interrogate the world and re-establish an element of epistemological curiosity in the audience". The idea of Slow Cinema thereby focuses on a politics that acknowledges the presence of a fast cinema against which it positions itself as an alternative other (Nagib 2016: 26). I would argue that this reality enables Slow Cinema to constitute a new form of temporality that compels the viewer to contemplate life in its true sense. This section aimed to lay the basis for the contextualisation of Slow Cinema as an alternative style to the dominant Hollywood strategies widely used in Kenyan cinema.

Moreover, postulating Slow Cinema as an alternative cinema in the Kenyan context provides additional considerations about the notion of hybridity in both form and content.[75]

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[75] Later in Chapter Four, I discuss the concept of hybridity in more detail and particularly, how it can be used to situate Slow Cinema in Kenyan cinema.

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As I have posited throughout this thesis, Slow Cinema has not yet been situated in Kenyan cinema. Therefore, the need for discourse to shift from a focus on Europe, Latin America, and Asia to Africa provides rare insight that reflects the growing diversity of filmmaking.

Stam (2003: 38), for instance, takes very seriously the call for a constellation of cinematic forms, which embrace hybridity and polyglossia.[76] Such a move consequently erases the boundaries that restrict First, Second and Third Cinemas. Similarly, Mello (2016: 139) has proposed to consider Slow Cinema not as the alternative other of a more efficient narrative that symbolises Hollywood cinema but in connection with the hybridity of cinema and architecture. Finally, Elsaesser (2005: 496) considers the importance of discourse which seeks to redefine the term "world cinema" to indicate "blending and hybridity on national and international, culturally specific, and universal characteristics". As I will argue in Chapter Four, the transnational nature of Kenyan cinema allows for the hybridisation of different cinematic forms (including slow cinema) in light of the new possibilities opened up by digital transformation. The concept of hybridity will perhaps be most clearly visible in *Men of the Hill*. I demonstrate how Slow Cinema and Kenyan cinema can dialogue and interrelate with each other in form and content.[77] This section has located the aesthetics and functions of Slow Cinema in modernism, durational cinema, transcendental style, and alternative cinema. It is, therefore, necessary to examine the significance of Slow Cinema's narrative, minimalism, and indeterminacy in the next section.

2.4 Narration in Slow Cinema

Discourses on Slow Cinema have generated substantial debates concerning its narrative and formal strategies. Çağlayan (2014: ii), for example, examines Slow Cinema's distinguishing characteristics about narration, which, as he argues, entails a Slow Cinema film's minimalistic tendency, languid narrative pacing, and the apparent absence of causality. Çağlayan (2018: 6) would later suggest that Slow Cinema films deliberately avoid

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[76] Polyglossia was first used in the 1970s in the Academic journal "international Migration Review". In cinema, polyglossia refers to films that highlight the coexistence of multiple languages at the level of dialogue and narration (see Hambuch 2016: 49). In this study, I use the term to refer to the intermingling different cinematic languages in Kenyan cinema.

[77] See Chapters Four and Five for a detailed explanation of Slow Cinema both as an alternative cinema and as a means to explore the notion of hybridity in Kenyan cinema.

or reduce narrative progression favouring a contemplative mood. For his part, Koutsourakis (2019: 388) argues that Slow Cinema films tend to "allow aspects of material reality to enter the imaginary world" due to their resistance to narrative fluidity. In this context, I argue that it is necessary to discuss the concept of narration in Slow Cinema to offer a comprehensive account of how Slow Cinema films deploy essential principles of story and formal elements to construct their narrative representation.[78] In the beginning, I establish a framework for constructing the slow image by illustrating how early understandings of neorealism as first conceptualised by André Bazin and later advanced by Gilles Deleuze could be used to consider the link between a slow aesthetic and a neorealist tendency. Then, taking my cue from Bazin and Deleuze, I explain the theorisation of a narrative discourse of Slow Cinema. This activity contributes to an understanding of cinematic minimalism and the indeterminacy of plot. Lastly, I map out a framework for discussing the different concepts identified in this chapter, forming how Slow Cinema can ultimately be situated within Kenyan cinema. In this light, I conclude that neorealism temporalises the cinematic image of slowness as a critical element of the modernist aesthetic.

2.4.1 Constructing the slow image: Bazin, Deleuze, and neorealism

Recent studies in Slow Cinema have sought to suitably invoke Bazinian and Deleuzian thoughts to offer continuity to the modernist aesthetic. For example, Luca and Jorge (2016: 8) recognise Bazin as an essential theoretical catalyst for reflections on Slow Cinema. On the other hand, Lim (2016: 90) points to Deleuze's conception of "the movement-image and time-image". Lim argues Deleuze's concept is key to a rethinking of what might constitute a Slow Cinema narrative and the duration accorded to its representation. Still, a relatively small body of literature demonstrates how the conceptualisation of neorealism lends itself to the construction of the slow image. In this context, neorealism represents the narrative-formal expressiveness of Slow Cinema, as I will demonstrate in this section.[79] I also argue that the Deleuzian time-image is an extension of Bazin's notion of neorealism.[80]

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[78] The term narration here does not necessarily imply the presence of a narrator in the film but rather, the narrative nature of Slow Cinema, whether fiction or nonfiction. Therefore, the terms "narration" and "narrative" are used interchangeably throughout this section.

[79] I discuss the significance of using the term "narrative-formal expressiveness" later in Chapter Three (see section 3.4.4)

[80] See Luca & Jorge (2016: 8) who briefly highlight the influence of Bazinian realism on "Deleuze's conception of the time-image".

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Additionally, as Luca and Jorge (2016: 7) put it, "the strict adherence to realism and reality is a trademark of Slow Cinema films." It is outside the scope of this thesis to provide extensive readings of Bazin's and Deleuze's views on the cinematographic image and its relation to neorealism. However, these readings will be considered, particularly in Chapter Three, where I discuss the neorealist sound-image aspects in the films of Apichatpong Weerasethakul, Béla Tarr, and Oliver Hermanus. Equally, in Chapter Five, I draw upon the readings of Bazin and Deleuze to present an explanation of the creative process of making a Kenyan Slow Cinema film. Ideally, the lessons delineated in this section may still ascertain the most suitable framework for constructing the image of slowness. In the ensuing discussion, I consult secondary sources that offer extensive and in-depth analyses of the readings while locating additional information for the research.

Before addressing the scholarship, it is necessary to establish, per Lorenzo (2015: 182), that Bazin's and Deleuze's thoughts have contributed to neorealism and concretised it as a critical moment in "the history of European new waves and world art-house cinema". First, Elsaesser and Hagener (2010: 29) consider neorealism as an ideology that wanted to "reclaim and reappropriate the cinema to renew the faith in the medium's capability to show reality as it is before it presumed to change it". In this regard, Elsaesser and Hagener recognise neorealism's political influence on the modernist cinema movements going by the tag "new waves" – essentially shaping European cinema beyond the 1980s. Still, the "new waves" did not consistently observe the neorealist aesthetic principles. Secondly, Cardullo (2011: 19) insists that the Italian critic Antonio Pietrangeli coined the term "neorealism" in his analysis of Italian film director Luchino Visconti's *Ossessione* (Obsession). The style, Cardullo maintains, reached its culmination in the mid-to-late 1940s in such films as *Rome, Open City* (Rossellini 1945) and *Bicycle Thieves* (De Sica 1948). In Cardullo's perspective, these films reacted against the triviality that had long been associated with Italian cinema and against the prevailing socio-economic conditions in Italy.

While Cardullo agrees with Elsaesser's and Hagener's political characterisation of neorealism, he is keen to substantiate that "neorealism reacted ideologically to the control and censorship of the prewar cinema", in the sense that the aesthetic, intuitive, and imaginative responses of "neorealist directors coincided with the rise of realism in Italian literature" (Cardullo 2011: 19-20). Hence, Cardullo emphasises that Italian neorealism

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played a key role in liberating filmmaking from "the non-natural restrictions of the studio, and in a broad sense, from the Hollywood-originated studio system". Additionally, Cardullo considers neorealism as the expression of ethical philosophy and not simply as just another cinematic style (Cardullo 2011: 19). Consequently, Cardullo (2011: 19) concludes, the neorealist filmmakers "worked with minimal resources in real locations, using local people and professional actors", while improvising their scripts on location, whenever necessary, and powerfully conveying "the plight of ordinary people oppressed by political conditions beyond their control".

I will now examine Bazin's ontological foundations of neorealism to lay the groundwork for an eventual discussion of how the slow image can be constructed by applying neorealist principles. In his conception of neorealism, Bazin (2004: 27)[81] begins by challenging the aesthetic unity of the silent film, which he notes was divided into two opposing tendencies, namely plastics of the image and resources of montage.[82] Significantly, Bazin (2004: 24) associates "plastics of the image" with "directors who put their faith in the image and resources of the image with those who put their trust in reality". I should emphasise here that Bazin defines "image", broadly speaking, as "everything that the representation on the screen adds to the object there represented" (Bazin 2004: 24). The plastics of the image, in Bazinian terms, include the styles of the sets, the make-up, and performance. Lighting is naturally added to these styles, while shot framing results in composition (Bazin 2004: 24).

Contrastingly, Bazin (2004: 25) defines montage as "the construction of meaning not noticeably contained in the cinematic images themselves but derived entirely from their juxtaposition". Simply put, montage is the ordering of moving images in time. To expound his viewpoint, Bazin references the experiment of Soviet filmmaker Lev Kuleshov with the shot of Mozzhukhin.[83] The expression on Mozzhukhin's face seemed to alter its meaning according to the image that preceded it, whether it was the bowl of soup, the girl in the coffin,

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[81] For this section, I consulted Bazin's (1967) seminal work: *What is Cinema? Vol. 1* in the form of essays selected and translated by Hugh Gray (2004) with an original foreword by Jean Renoir and a new forward by Dudley Andrew (Berkeley: University of California Press).
[82] The silent era of cinema existed between the mid-1890s to the later 1920s.
[83] According to Riis (2018: 1), Ivan Mozzhukhin (1889-1939) was a Russian film actor widely recognised by film scholars such as Jean Mitry as one of the important actors of the silent screen. In this context, "Mozzhukhin is perhaps best remembered for a lost experiment carried out by Lev Kuleshov around 1920, showing how the editor can construct character emotions with shots of contextual objects". For further reading see: Riis, Johannes (2018: 16).

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or the woman on the divan. This seeming change of expression summed up seamlessly the properties of montage. Additionally, Bazin (2004: 24) argues that montage was reminiscent of "the prewar classics of the American screen". In American films, scenes were broken down to conceal the fact of the analysis, and consequently, drive the spectator's mind toward a natural acceptance of the director's perspectives justified by the shifting importance of dramatic interest. In conclusion, Bazin emphatically states that "it was montage that gave birth to film as an art, distinguishing it from animated photography, thus creating a language of cinema" (Bazin 2004: 24). This new cinematic language was particularly evident in Griffith's films, for example, in *Broken Blossoms* (1919).

However, as Bazin (2004: 26-27) notes, proponents of the plastics of the image such as Erich von Stroheim, F.W. Murnau, and Robert Flaherty expressed doubt in the notion of montage. Flaherty, for instance, in his silent documentary, *Nanook of the North* (1922), argued that "confronted with Nanook hunting the seal, what mattered was the relation between Nanook and the animal – the actual length of the waiting period and the length of the hunt denoting the very substance of the image". In this case, therefore, Flaherty required only one set-up. Bazin (2004: 24) regarded this approach as "much more moving than a montage by attraction". Similarly, in his films, Stroheim rejects photographic expressionism and montage tricks favouring reality that "lays itself bare like a suspect confessing under the relentless examination of the commissioner of police" (Bazin 2004: 27). Again, like Flaherty's scene, it would then be plausible to imagine that a film by Stroheim was made up of a long-take single shot. As a matter of emphasis, Bazin seeks to portray silent films that adhere to the plastics of the image and the montage tricks as "expressionist" or "symbolistic". This approach compares to the talking film's "analytic" and "dramatic" new form of storytelling that had reached a level of classical perfection by 1939. The said perfection was also due to technical advancement, particularly in the United States and France (Bazin 2004: 30-31). The aesthetic of the talking film between 1930 and 1940, chiefly involving American and French productions, was characterised by clearly defined rules capable of pleasing world audiences in terms of content, and well-defined styles of photography, editing, and complete synchronisation of image and sound (hence sound image) as far as formal elements are concerned (Bazin 2004: 29).

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Bazin (2004: 33) asserts that "the sound image would carry montage in the direction of realism, gradually disregarding both plastic expressionism and the symbolic relation between images". In Bazin's conception, the years 1940-1950 saw the emergence of the postwar cinema, which coincided with the growth and development of certain national schools, particularly the magnificent spectacle of the "Italian cinema and a native English cinema freed from the influence of Hollywood" (Bazin 2004: 33). This new blood argues Bazin, concerned itself with new themes, signalling a revolution on subject matter rather than style. A new subject matter would then demand a new form, which Bazin termed as "neorealism" because it depicted a kind of humanism or, "essentially, a form of self-effacement before reality" (Bazin 2004: 29). Bazin (2004: 97) himself writes in *What is Cinema? Volume 2* about neorealism:

> If the word neorealism has any meaning – whatever the differences that arise over its interpretation, above and beyond a minimal agreement – in the first place, it stands in opposition to the traditional dramatic systems and also to the various other known kinds of realism in literature and film with which we are familiar, through its claim that there is a certain 'wholeness' to reality. Neorealism is a description of reality conceived as a whole by a consciousness disposed to see things as a whole. Neorealism contrasts with the realist aesthetics that preceded it, particularly with naturalism and verism. Its realism is not so much concerned with the choice of subject as with a particular way of regarding things. Neorealism, by definition, rejects analysis, whether political, moral, psychological, logical, or social, of the characters and their actions. It looks at reality as a whole, not incomprehensible, certainly, but inseparably one.

Bazin is eager to characterise neorealism as an aesthetic that gives dramatic expression to the moment of reality and "significant expression to the world both concretely and its substance" (Bazin 2004: 29). The neorealist image is therefore freed from the Spatio-temporal conditions that control it. In contrast, Bazin (2004: 33) offers a compelling account of the best films made between 1930 and 1939. These films, Bazin (2004: 33) argues, followed the usual procedure of the story unfolding "in a series of set-ups totalling as a rule about 600" and the shot-reverse-shot technique, where "in a dialogue scene, the camera followed the order of the speech while alternating between the talking characters". Significantly, Bazin affirms that this fashion of editing was challenged by the shot in-depth introduced by Orson Welles in his first feature film *Citizen Kane* (1941). Welles's new style of filmmaking emphasised the depth of field, in the sense that whole scenes were covered in one take while the camera remained motionless (Bazin 2004: 33).

Hence, while Bazin openly acknowledges the contribution of montage to the progress of film language, he extols depth of field as an added value in directing and as a polemical breakthrough in the history of cinematic syntax. Bazin moves further to state that well-used depth of field is a more economical, simpler, and subtler way of getting the most out of a scene. Additionally, according to Bazin (2004: 33), "it brings the spectator into a closer relationship with the image, which he enjoys with reality". Therefore, per Bazin, it is reasonable to suggest that independent of the contents of the image, the structure of the depth of focus is more realistic (Bazin 2004: 35). To conclude this argument, Bazin states that the depth of focus "uncovered the secret of a film form that would permit one to say everything without chopping the world up into little fragments", thereby revealing "the concealed meanings in people and things without upsetting the unity natural to them" (Bazin 2004: 38).

Returning to neorealism, Bazin is keen to establish the link between the precepts of Italian cinema and the depth of focus used by Welles in *Citizen Kane*. For instance, Bazin maintains that in Roberto Rossellini's *Paisa* and Vittorio de Sica's *Bicycle Thieves*, Italian neorealism sought to distance itself from all forms of expressionism and the effects of montage. For example, in *Citizen Kane*, where Welles is ardent "to give back to the cinema a sense of the ambiguity of reality" (Bazin 2004: 37). Similarly, Italian neorealist Luchino Visconti gives just as rich a picture as Welles of his authorial art in *La Terra Trema* (1948). Visconti's film almost wholly comprises "one-shot sequences", thus concerning himself with the coverage of the real action in slow deep-focus panning shots (Bazin 2004: 37-38). As Elsaesser and Hagener (2010: 29) point out, Bazin believed that by identifying the proper camera position and allowing it to "register what is before it", cinema could "show the world as it was" without human intervention.

Moreover, Elsaesser and Hagener (2010: 30) observe that for Bazin, deep space and depth of field enable "different image planes to be played off against each other, or for an individual in the background to gain particular dramatic importance". The idea of Bazin's neorealism, as Elsaesser and Hagener further explicate, involves the smallest unit of filmic construction, or what Bazin himself calls the "fact", which is a given and pre-existing element that supersedes technique and technology. While a conventional film creates facts, a neorealist film subordinates itself to these facts – it possesses an ontological unity that film

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has to respect (Elsaesser & Hagener 2010: 30). In conclusion, and concerning Elsaesser's and Hagener's interpretations, it would be essential to draw attention to a scene in *Umberto D.* (De Sica 1952). A housemaid's morning routine is depicted in what could be referred today as real-time. The scene, assert Elsaesser and Hagener (2010: 31), realised Bazin's aspirations of neorealism in what could be expressed hyperbolically as the "perfect aesthetic illusion of reality, where there is no more actors, no more story, no more sets, and no more cinema". To further elaborate on the neorealist ideology, I will now consider Gilles Deleuze's conception of neorealism based on the fundamental precepts of Bazin's ontology.

Elsaesser and Hagener (2010: 33) acknowledge Deleuze's efforts in taking up some of Bazin's thoughts on the nature of cinema as a realist aesthetic without restricting them to the idea of photographic realism. Deleuze himself described his work as a "natural history of cinema", mainly drawing on the tenet of prominent auteurs as recognised by the *Cahiers du Cinéma* school and chiefly inspired by André Bazin (Deleuze cited in Elsaesser & Hagener 2010: 157). Lorenzo (2015: 186) similarly notes that for Deleuze, neorealism played a central role in "cinema's transition from the movement-image to the time-image". Deleuze characterised neorealism as a response to a crisis – he refers to it as "the crisis of the action-image" at the end of "Cinema 1: The Movement-Image" (Deleuze 1986: 206). Deleuze further articulates how this crisis that had shaken the action-image after WWII was precipitated by a combination of moral, social, economic, and political forces and others more internal to art, literature, and cinema.[84] Deleuze particularly identifies "the influence of the new modes of narrative with which literature had experimented and the crisis of Hollywood and its old genres" as other factors contributing to the shaking of the action-image (Deleuze 1986: 206). To that end, Deleuze accredits the Italians for their perceptive awareness of the new image, which had five apparent features: "the dispersive situation, the deliberately weak links, the voyage form, and the consciousness of clichés, and the condemnation of the plot" (Deleuze 1986: 211). It is imperative to note here, according to Deleuze (1986: 212), that American critics saw in the Italians "the inordinate pretension of a defeated country, an odious form of blackmail, and a way of making the conquerors

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[84] I will discuss the "action-image" in more detail later in this section.

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ashamed". [85] Yet, Deleuze maintains that this unique situation of the Italian society facilitated the enterprise of neorealism.

To describe the five features of the new image listed above, Deleuze first offers the example of Rossellini, who, in the aftermath of WWII, discovered a dispersive reality, particularly in *Rome, Open City* (1945) and in *Paisan* (1946). The films portray "a series of fragmentary, chopped up encounters, which call into question the *situation-action-modified situation* (SAS) form of the action-image" (Deleuze 1986: 212). Secondly, Deleuze describes how the postwar economic crisis inspired De Sica to break away from the action-situation-action form (ASA). In this sense, there was no longer a line of the universe that could link up the events of *Bicycle Thieves* (1946). For instance, the rain can constantly interrupt the voyage of the man and the child. In other words, Deleuze insists, the Italian rain "becomes the sign of idle periods and possible interruption" (Deleuze 1986: 212). Lastly, Deleuze cites Federico Fellini's *I Vitelloni* (1953), which he argues, attests not only to the triviality of events but also to the ambiguity of the links between them and of their non-adherence to those who experience them in this new form of the voyage. In the city which is being rebuilt (in the film), neorealism makes the notion of "any-space-whatever" to thrive, as opposed to the rigid spaces of the old realism (Deleuze 1986: 212).

Now, turning to "Cinema 2: The Time-Image", Deleuze (1989: 1) begins by acknowledging Bazin's conception of neorealism and specifically applauds him for putting forward "the essential requirement of formal aesthetic criteria against those who defined Italian neorealism by its social content". In Deleuze's assessment, Bazin's suggestions pointed to a new form of reality, said to be dispersive, ambiguous, wavering, collaborating, with intentionally weak connections and floating events. In this view, the reality was no longer represented or replicated but premeditated. Fundamentally, Deleuze notes, "neorealism invented a new type of image", which Bazin called "fact-image", thus demonstrating that "neorealism" was not limited to the content of its earliest examples. Instead, neorealism produced a "material additional reality" (Deleuze 1989: 1). Still, Deleuze seeks to advance

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[85] In regards to this quote, Deleuze is referring to the totalitarian rule (1922-1943) imposed by the Italian Fascists during the era of National Fascist Party government with Benito Mussolini at the helm as the Prime Minister of the Kingdom of Italy. Mussolini's rule was hell-bent on dismantling political and intellectual opposition in favour of economic modernisation, traditional social values and resumption of harmonious relations with the Roman Catholic Church. For further reading see, Grand, A. J. (2000).

the view that this other reality occurs at the mental rather than the material level. It is the thought process, as explained by Deleuze (1989: 1), that subordinates "the image to the demands of new signs which would take it beyond movement".

To illustrate his view, Deleuze (1989: 1) references Bazin's earlier example of *Umberto D.* (1952) in which "De Sica constructs the famous sequence of the young maid going into the kitchen in the morning, making a series of weary gestures, cleaning, driving the ants away from a water fountain, picking up the coffee grinder", and then lastly, her eyes staring at her pregnant woman's belly. For Deleuze (1989: 1), the depiction of this insignificant everyday situation is, in fact, "obedient to simple sensory-motor schemata". Ultimately, it brings about a "pure optical situation to which the young maid has no response". About *Umberto D.*, Deleuze seems to imply that, to some extent, the cinematic image does not necessarily concern itself "with capturing movement (the action-image) but with capturing time (the time-image)". Deleuze (1989: 2), therefore, posits that "what defines neorealism is this build-up of purely optical and sound situations, which are essentially dissimilar from the sensory-motor situations of the action-image in the old realism". Additionally, Deleuze (1989: 4) further references Visconti's *Obsession* (1943) to affirm his conception of neorealism:

> The situation is not extended directly into action: it is no longer sensory-motor, as in realism, but primarily optical and sound, invested by the senses, before the action takes shape in it and uses or confronts its elements. Everything remains real in this neorealism (whether it is film set or exteriors) but, between the reality of the setting and that of the action, it is no longer an established motor extension, but rather a dreamlike connection through the intermediary of the liberated sense of organs. It is as if the action floats in the situation, rather than bringing it to a conclusion or strengthening it. This argument is the source of Visconti's visionary aestheticism.

In *Obsession*, writes Deleuze (1989: 4), "objects and settings take on a separate, material reality that gives them importance". As a result, both the viewer and the protagonist invest their gaze in the settings and objects, where "they see and hear the things and the people", such that action erupts in preexisting daily life. This phenomenon became a constant theme in Visconti's work (Deleuze 1989: 4). This detailed explanation of neorealism's optical and sound situations also denotes what Deleuze himself describes as "a new breed of signs, namely *opsigns* and *sonsigns*" – with opsigns standing for optical images and sonsigns for

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sound images.[86] These new signs, Deleuze reveals, "refer to varied images such as everyday banality, subjective images, memories of childhood, sound and visual dreams or fantasies, where the character does not act without seeing himself acting" as in the style of Fellini (Deleuze 1989: 6). Specifically, and worth noting here, Deleuze (1989: 6) provides two kinds of opsigns, namely *constats* and *instats*. *Constats* give a vision with depth, tending towards abstraction (as with Bazin's description of the depth of field), while *instats* provide a close, flat-on vision provoking interest. Deleuze, for instance, cites Michelangelo Antonioni's method of bringing idle periods and empty spaces together through *constats*. In this state, Deleuze explains, "we run into a principle of indeterminability, where we no longer know what is imaginary or real, physical or mental". The solution, according to Deleuze, lies with neorealism, which "powerfully brings out all the reality created by the mental or the imaginary through speech and vision" (Deleuze 1989: 7).

Interestingly, while Deleuze (1989: 4) acclaims Italian filmmakers such as Visconti, Fellini, and Antonioni for their use of neorealism's optical and sound situations as described above, he suggests that Japanese film director and screenwriter Yasujirō Ozu was the inventor of *opsigns* and *sonsigns* (Deleuze 1989: 13). As Deleuze further suggests, Ozu's body of work "borrows a voyage form: train journey, taxi ride, bus trip, and a journey by bicycle or on foot". In more precise terms, Deleuze describes the object in Ozu's work as consisting of idle periods evident in "everyday banality taken as family life in the Japanese house" (Deleuze (1989: 13). Additionally, camera movements taking place less often, drawn-out tracking shots, fixed low camera "at an unchanging angle, and dissolves abandoned in favour of the simple cut, in what might appear to be a return to the primitive cinema" (Deleuze 1989: 13). Deleuze further demonstrates how Ozu varies the significance of the process to show the deficiency of plot, with the action-image subordinates itself to the pure visual image of the character's identity and the "sound image" of what he articulates. "In Ozu, everything is banal, even death and the dead" (Deleuze 1989: 13-14). In the end, Deleuze asserts that the mundane life depicted in a neorealist film replaces the action image with "pure optical and sound images (opsigns and sonsigns), directly connected to a time-image". As Deleuze (1989: 23) himself critically puts it:

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[86] See also Stamatopoulos (2009): https://offscreen.com/view/time_as_visualized

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> The image had to free itself from sensory-motor links; it had to stop being action-image to become pure optical, sound (and tactile) image. But the latter was not enough; it had to enter into relations with yet other forces so that it could itself escape from a world of clichés. It had to open up to consequential and direct revelations, those of the time-image, of the readable image and the thinking image.

The argument in the above explanation points to the time-image, thus termed optical and sound situations, forming a neorealist image, which has subordinated movement. Deleuze, therefore, suggests that time ceases to be a measurement of movement. Still, movement itself becomes the perspective of time, thereby leading to a temporalised cinematic image and, with it, pure contemplation. Before moving on to discuss how Bazin's and Deleuze's thoughts on neorealism are used to construct a slow image in the context of this research, it should be stressed, as Lorenzo (2015: 198) mentions, that despite the differences in tone and approach, both Bazin and Deleuze agree on many characteristics of neorealism. For instance, they agree that "neorealism can only occur after a drastic transformation of humanity in the modern world".

Bazin and Deleuze also consider neorealism "as the most important event in the history of cinema", even above the introduction of sound. According to Cardullo (2011: 27-28), another important observation concerns the influence of neorealism on contemporary world cinema. While neorealism was gradually phased out of Italian cinema in the early 1950s due to the improving economic conditions, the neorealist legacy continued across the world. It was most recently in Iranian cinema. For example, according to Cardullo (2011: 28), Abbas Kiarostami's Koker trilogy (1987-1994) presents "a documentary-style look at mountain life in northern Iran before and after the terrible earthquake of 1990". Hence, instead of neorealism disappearing, it has changed its form based on the filmmaker and the film while maintaining its deeply humanistic concerns. I will now demonstrate how neorealism transmits its precepts through Slow Cinema.

First, I started this section by claiming that Slow Cinema discourses have not often demonstrated how the slow image (in Slow Cinema) could be constructed in its narrative-formal expressiveness. Yet, it is clear that neorealism provides an opportunity for Slow Cinema to adopt neorealist precepts. It does so due to its emphasis on minimalism, improvising scripts on the set, and powerfully conveying the plight of ordinary people oppressed by political and socio-economic conditions beyond their control. As I will discuss

in Chapter Five, I experiment with the strategies mentioned above to construct a slow Kenyan image in *Men of the Hill*. Secondly, Bazin referenced Flaherty's silent documentary, which rejected photographic expressionism and montage tricks as he demonstrates.

Similarly, Slow Cinema is understood as a negation of the very substance of montage. A slow image is ideally constructed using only one set-up or a long-take single shot that accentuates the real extent of a specified and the corresponding action. Bazin also described this as the depth of field in reference to how it was famously used in *Citizen Kane* (Welles 1941). Like the neorealist image, the slow image is also freed from space and time conditions that control it, as the camera remains motionless. If well used in the context of Slow Cinema, depth of field is a more economical and more straightforward way of getting the most out of the scene, and most importantly, it enhances the relationship between the spectator and the slow image, similar to the one he encounters in reality. Here, the spectator is called upon to exercise the democracy of vision instead of following along smoothly with what the director chooses. Otherwise stated, a slow image constructed from a neorealist perspective allows everything to be expressed without "chopping the world up into little fragments" (Bazin 2004: 38), thereby exposing "the hidden meanings in people and objects without disrupting the harmony natural to them".

The third common characteristic of the slow image similar to neorealism is depicting the insignificant everyday situation as in De Sica's construction of the sequence involving the young maid going about her morning routine. It is worth reminding that a portrayal of the everyday banality is a feature of Slow Cinema films. Of even more significant consequence, the everyday life in neorealism, as suggested by Deleuze, denotes idle periods and empty spaces, which construct a slow image that creates a sense of indeterminacy, whether real or imagined, physical or mental. Ultimately, this indeterminacy brings about a pure optical and sound image situation connected to the time-image. As concerns the formal construction of the slow image, as with neorealism, camera movements are less frequent, tracking shots are drawn out, the fixed low camera remains at an unchangeable angle, and editing takes the form of a simple cut in what might be a return to "primitive cinema".

Similarly, as Deleuze has indicated, the narrative construction of the slow image shows the deficiency of plot in contrast with the visual image of the character's identity, and the sound image of what he articulates, including what exists around him. Again, analogous to

a neorealist film, a slow image discards analysis, whether political, ethical, rational, social, or psychological. Instead, it focuses on reality as a whole. In Bazinian terms of neorealism, the indeterminacy in which the spectator finds himself and the interpretation he invests in the film is constructed into the actual design of the slow image. Objects and people coexist with the length of the action. In the next section, I examine how Slow Cinema's narrative is constructed through minimalism and indeterminacy, including its distinctive role in shaping and contextualising the slow image discussed in this section.

2.4.2 Toward a narrative of slowness

In the preceding section, I have advocated for constructing a slow image predicated on the concept of neorealism. I have demonstrated a particular relationship between the neorealist tendency and Slow Cinema, evidenced by the narrative-formal expressiveness deployed in many Slow Cinema films. Looked at specifically from Deleuze's (1989: 14) perspective, it is clear that Slow Cinema considers the "pure optical and sound situations or, simply, the time-image", thus maintaining its deeply humanist concerns. Therefore, in this section, I argue that Bazin's and Deleuze's writings on neorealism are essential reference points for discussing Slow Cinema's narrative strategies. It is also clear that the time-image creates a slow image, understood as a realist object rather than a non-realist one. As I see it, the time-image can also construct a slow narrative. Doing so creates a 'haptic' experience that heightens the spectator's senses toward the film in an incredibly vivid manner.

Likewise, my readings of Bazin and Deleuze – specifically touching on the material quality of the image – highlight the relationship between the spectator and the Slow Cinema film in terms of the optical and sound images experienced on and off the screen. In this case, the Slow Cinema spectator is deterred from attaching importance to content or making sense of the formal elements used in the film. In this way, the spectator is invited to linger on the slow image, which can be repeated several times across the film, rather than engaging with the narrative itself. Moving forward, I want to stress that my discussion of slow narrative in this section should be understood as significantly informed by Bazin's and Deleuze's notions of neorealism in cinema. Hence, this section will first explore the concepts of narration in cinema and precisely compare classical narrative and art-cinema narrative. Second, a discussion of the strategies that constitute a slow narrative then, lastly, an understanding of how minimalism and indeterminacy are employed in the slow narrative.

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2.4.2.1 Narration in cinema: classical narrative versus art-cinema narrative

To investigate how the slow narrative acts in its sense of the "time-image", it is necessary first to understand the concept of cinematic narrative. David Bordwell's (1985) study on narration in fiction has changed how narrative in film is perceived. Significantly, Bordwell (1985: xi) argues that narration is "the activity of selecting, arranging, and ordering story material to achieve specific time-bound effects on a perceiver". Here, Bordwell's emphasis seems to be on the process of film narration rather than its product and effect on the perceiver. For Carroll (2009: 207), narrative is a mere telling of any event through some interval of time and a set number of motion picture shots. In this case, Carroll may not consider the elaborate process of narration but concurs with Bordwell on the significance of narrative time in appealing to the viewer. Like Carroll, Carmona (2017: 7) sees narration merely as the principle by which information is converted from the story onto the screen.

However, Carmona does well to assert that the purpose of film narration is to ensure that the spectator perceives and understands narrative content, thereby reinforcing Bordwell's view on how the perceiver makes sense of the narrative itself. Still, Carmona is keen to note that in some instances, film narration is used as a strategy to frustrate narrative comprehension to spur the spectator's intellectual curiosity on a particular subject (Carmona 2017: 9-10). Notably, Speidel (2007: 60) maintains that it must constitute a series of related events or what she calls a "cause-and-effect" relationship between one event and another event for a film to be a narrative. Cameron (2008: 3) would also contribute to this notion, insisting that narrative is labelled as the temporal arrangement of causally linked events. The above definitions are generally crucial to narration because Slow Cinema is often perceived as antagonistic to narrative development. This aspect, therefore, raises the question of how a slow narrative can be constructed and perceived by the spectator, as will be discussed later. Bordwell (1985: xiii) demonstrates that there are four primary modes of filmic narration. They include "classical narration, art-cinema narration, historical materialist narration, and parametric narration". Here, I will only deal with classical narration and art-cinema narration because they contribute fundamentally to the arguments laid out in this thesis. In section 2.3.3, I established that Slow Cinema (often classified under art-cinema) reveals strong parallels with fast cinema, which, as I argued, is considered as Classical Hollywood cinema. As such, I deem it important to draw general comparisons between

classical narratives and art-cinema narratives to understand how Slow Cinema can interact with the concept of narration in various ways.

In Bordwell's (1985: 157) formalist account of classical narration, the primary unifying principle is causality. First, Bordwell explains that any parallelism (the editing technique that favours the process of alternating between two or more scenes that happen concurrently in different locations) "is subordinated to the movement of cause and effect". Second, it means that the classical narration grants a twofold causal construction or two plotlines: one concerning "heterosexual romance (boy/girl, husband/wife)", while the other relating to another scope, "be it work, war, a mission or quest, as well as other personal dealings". Therefore, each plotline will comprise a goal, obstacles, and climax (Bordwell 1985: 157).

Third, Bordwell argues that classical narration will more generally position itself as an editorial intelligence by allocating time to specific scenes, trimming down others a little, "condensing others (the montage sequences), and simply cutting out events" that it deems insignificant (Bordwell 1985: 160). Third, in terms of narrational qualities, Bordwell maintains that the classical film tends to manipulate space by adjusting figures for restrained self-awareness, angling the bodies more or less frontally while evading to-camera gazes. In this way, Bordwell insists, no causally significant clues in a scene are left unresolved, attesting to the communicativeness of the classical narration. However, regarding those instances in which narration diminishes its knowledge of forthcoming events, it does not waver from disclosing its ability to reconsider views freely by cutting within a scene and crosscutting between various locations (Bordwell 1985: 160-161). Along with Bordwell, Cameron (2008: 3) seeks to trace back the origins of classical narration to Aristotle's demands in Ancient Greece, "for a narrative structure with a beginning, middle and end, comprising a unified plot and character focus".

In essence, Aristotle insisted that "only events relating to a central, unified plot should be included in the narrative" (Cameron 2008: 3). The Aristotelian paradigm, Cameron adds, still has currency today with popular screenwriting manuals (see McKee 1999; Field 1994) asserting that a successful story should consist of "dramatic conflict, a protagonist with clearly defined goals, and a narrative arc". These combined elements should be organised to fulfil Aristotle's demands. For Kiss and Willemsen (2017: 3), classical narration is a stable and recognisable mode of presentation that revolves around active and psychologically

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transparent protagonists, driven towards accomplishing a super-objective against seemingly insurmountable obstacles. These attributes are designed for the viewer to make sense of the subsequent events into a chronological chain with a clear cause and effect logic, eventually resulting in some kind of closure. Speidel (2007: 63) referred to the above principles of narration as "the operations of focalization", which she argues are crucial to the emotional investment most Hollywood films ask the viewers to make in protagonists' fate. Speidel then identifies some Hollywood films that capitalised on the notion of focalisation in the past decades, including *The Shawshank Redemption* (Darabont 1994), *The Sixth Sense* (Shyamalan 1999), *Fight Club* (Fincher 1999), and *Memento* (Nolan 2000). Ultimately, entertainment is the principal priority for classical narrations.

It is not surprising, then, that art-cinema narration is opposed to the classical narrative devices described above. As Kiss and Willemsen (2017: 3) explain, art cinema is a distinct tradition of filmmaking that operates outside the narrative and the formal, institutional and economic frameworks of the dominant and widespread classical mode of narration. Bordwell (1985: 205) goes further than Kiss and Willemsen; however, in characterising art-cinema narration as the interaction of objective and subjective realism that encourages less redundancy and motivation while delaying narrative exposition. In effect, Bordwell posits that characters lack distinct traits and motives in art-cinema narratives, focusing on psychological realism, "allowing the character to reveal the self to other characters and the viewers inadvertently" (Bordwell 1985: 205). In this way, art-cinema narration develops "mise-en-scène cues to enhance the character's mood: static postures, hidden glances, aimless walks, and emotion-filled landscape" (Bordwell 1985: 208). Therefore, while acknowledging the usual critical accounts that often characterise art-cinema narration as a reaction against classical narration, Speidel (2007: 61) detours to conceive art-cinema narration as a varied form with conventions of its own rather than simply negating what Hollywood does.

Nonetheless, Speidel (2007: 61) observes that "art films are not governed by the narrative strategy of cause and effect". Instead, the film's structure is quite fragmented, with individual story moments constantly interrupted by other moments in a confusing way. Of particular significance here, Speidel notes that characters in art-cinema narration are less active or even psychotic. The story progresses more slowly than in classical narration and particularly extends the duration of scenes that do not drive the plot forward. Additionally, Speidel

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observes other ways in which art-cinema manifests its narrative devices, including unresolved endings – suggesting that the film has stopped rather than ended, prioritising the question of form over content, emphasising the director's expression, and engaging in political and social commentary (Speidel 2007: 66-67). Concerning the spectatorial address of art-cinema narration, Taberham (2018: 26) posits that the viewer is called upon to make "bolder inferences to discern the story presented obliquely onscreen" or even abandon the idea of trying to understand the film in a conventional sense. This oblique presentation means that the viewer's comprehension of the narrative is frustrated, thus learning to let go of previous expectations cued by the classical mode of narration. In the end, argues Taberham (2018: 26), the art-cinema narration may expand the viewer's understandings and scope of engagement with the film. In Chapter Six, I attend to the Kenyan film viewers' responses on their narrative comprehension of *Men of the Hill* as a slow narrative.

What makes the preceding discussion particularly relevant to this study is the argument presented in Chapter One (section 1.1), where Çağlayan (2018: 3), for example, perceives "Slow Cinema as art cinema". The Slow Cinema narrative discussed in the following pages precisely draws on the strategies of art-cinema narration stated above. I argue that narration in Slow Cinema differs fundamentally from classical narration. Still, it should not be assumed that narrative is impeded in a Slow Cinema film in any way, shape or form. Instead, the slow narration invites a different type of narrative engagement that requires the spectators to be analytical and contemplative to resolve the narrative substance presented onscreen. Now that I have established the modes of narration, it is now time to demonstrate how the narrative in a Slow Cinema film is constructed under its visual style, plot structure and thematic concerns. Jaffe (2014: 3) was among the first scholars to attend to these components to understand how the slow narrative expresses itself. First, Jaffe considers visual style, where he observes that the camera in a Slow Cinema film often remains still, and when it moves, it does so quite slowly. Another aspect of visual style involves a curtailment of character or object movement in front of the camera and infrequent editing, which serves to preserve the Spatio-temporal qualities of the film.

Furthermore, Jaffe explains that a Slow Cinema film often spurns intricate and vibrant décor, lighting and colour. Overall, these formal elements contribute to the slow narrative. Second, the fragmented nature of the slow narrative makes the operations of the plot more

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complex because it rejects the classical formulaic approach to storytelling. Third, the slow narrative suggests that the film's protagonists tend to be flat with minimal or no emotional output. Third, with thematic concerns, Jaffe (2014: 9) claims that Slow Cinema films are known to address the negative aspects of existence (existential nihilism) characterised by stillness, emptiness and silence. These aspects speak directly to the political and social realities addressed by Slow Cinema. Taberham (2018: 48), for his part, appreciates the simplicity of Slow Cinema's narrative and its ability to relay information devoid of curiosity, expectations, and flashbacks or flash-forwards. Instead, Taberham argues that such a narrative constitutes a simple series of events following each other from the chief protagonist's perspective.

Luca and Jorge (2016: 9), too, demonstrate the elements of the contemporary Slow Cinema narrative. These elements comprise delinquent characters, elongated and dedramatised narrative structures, minimalist mise-en-scène, and the long take. However, Nagib (2016: 27) insists that relying on the long-take does not essentially provoke the experience of slowness by the spectator. Flanagan's (2012: 99) interest is the Slow Cinema film's sustained focus on meticulously composed images emptied of narrative information, thereby enhancing and aestheticising the substance of the cinematic event. Finally, citing the examples of Tsai Ming-liang, Apichatpong Weerasethakul, and Lisandro Alonso, Thomson (2016: 50) valorises the ability of these Slow Cinema filmmakers to fill the narrative void in their films with everyday practices such as washing, eating, or sleeping. In these periods of idleness, the slow narrative allows for contemplation, which triggers a (neorealist) time-image in Deleuzian terms.

In keeping with the notion of a slow image constructed with the neorealist perspective in mind, I want to maintain that my readings of Bazin and Deleuze have established various strategies used to develop a slow narration that I will focus on in subsequent chapters. For instance, as I have already suggested, I intend to experiment with slowness in Kenyan cinema by proposing a new mode of narration, concerning both narrative and visual style. To be more specific, *Men of the Hill* adopts narrative-formal conventions that contain Deleuze's optical and sound image situations to challenge narrative expressiveness and, perhaps, an alternative to the existing patterns of classical narration in Kenyan cinema. However, constructing a slow narrative is only one aspect of this study. The other is to

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consider how minimalism and indeterminacy are represented in a Slow Cinema film. This consideration will help explore how different modes of narrative expression can emerge in Kenyan cinema.

2.4.2.2 Minimalism and indeterminacy in Slow Cinema

The critical motivation for considering the concept of minimalism in Slow Cinema is rooted in McGrath's (2014: 51) study, which established that there has never been an organised discussion of minimalism in narrative cinema. McGrath contends that the term "minimalism" is often used liberally across various art forms to justify this claim. There has been no critical consensus on what constitutes cinematic minimalism. Consequently, minimalism, as a concept, invites a sense of flexibility in its usage. Similarly, I should point out here that no research work has considered cinematic minimalism in Kenyan cinema. The question then becomes how best to study minimalism in the context of Slow Cinema. Before I elaborate on McGrath's assertions, I want to briefly consider Kovács's thoughts on the historical perspective of minimalism. Kovács (2008: 140) situates minimalism in the films of Dreyer, Bresson, Ozu, and Antonioni during the 1950s. Kovács notes that "from 1959, stylistic austerity and reductionism gained traction, and as a result, minimalism became the strongest and clear tendency of modern cinema". Of significance to this study, Kovács identifies some contemporary Slow Cinema auteurs like Béla Tarr, Abbas Kiarostami and Jim Jarmusch as the chief proponents of modernist minimalism. In terms of its definition and applicability, minimalism refers to "a systematic reduction of expressive elements in a given form" (Kovács 2008:140) or "an approach to art that aims to be austerely, and often excessively, simple" (McGrath 2014: 6). I will now elaborate on McGrath's assertions to establish how minimalism is applied as an aesthetic device in Slow Cinema.

McGrath (2014: 7) first demonstrates how aesthetic and philosophical principles of artistic minimalism can be identified in the narrative works of contemporary minimalist filmmakers. He affirms, as I have indicated in section 2.4.1, that largely, the style of minimalist filmmakers relies on a type of realism understood through Bazin's realist model (McGrath 2014: 10). Specifically, McGrath (2014: 51) argues that the neorealist focus on banality in minimalist films entails both the de-dramatisation of narrative and the superficiality of narrative conventions. In this particular case, McGrath emphasises the use of nonprofessional actors as a non-expressive device that favours emotional minimalism. Likewise, he underscores

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the significance of locational shooting and the use of natural lighting as a tendency towards realism, as in the way technical and aesthetic intricacies are reduced or stripped away. McGrath also suggests that minimalist tendencies portray simple narrative premises, insignificant plots and unremarkable situations, which often feature repetition and everyday activities that gain thematic and poetic relevance over the film's duration (McGrath 2014: 51). Finally, the narrative climax in most minimalist films, as McGrath (2014: 54) implies, is mostly far more subdued. Kovács's position on minimalism in narrative cinema is more elaborate. Precisely by identifying three main trends within modernist minimalism, Kovács validates my study's focus on minimalism as a fundamental convention of Slow Cinema. Bresson's films epitomise the first trend, which Kovács calls "metonymic minimalism". Antonioni's films (1957-1966) represent the second type of minimalism referred to as "analytical minimalism". The third type is what Kovács terms as "expressive minimalism", with Ingmar Bergman as its principal representative in the films he made between 1961 and 1972 (Kovács 2008: 141). I offer only a summary of each trend as follows.

The Bresson style, in Kovács' (2008: 141) analysis, comprises three main components. One is Bresson's "extensive use of off-screen space; the second is his very economical narrative style, and the third is an unemotional acting style". It is principally because of Bresson's use of off-screen space that Kovács names "the Bresson-style of minimalism 'metonymic', that is, a substantial amount of narrative information is provided, especially by sound effects, from off-screen space that prolongs just beyond what is visible onscreen". In other words, the plot develops in invisible spaces but closely devoted to onscreen space. This style is especially evident in Bresson's film *Pickpocket* (1959). The analytical minimalism advanced by Antonioni, according to Kovács (2008: 149), features austere compositions characterised by "long takes and, in some cases, complicated and elaborate camera movements" as in *L'Avventura* (1960). Kovács calls Antonioni's analytical style "the most remarkable manifestation of minimalism" because of its tendency toward geometrical compositions and different dimensions of the form involving "the background and the characters on the one hand, and the plot and the viewer's time experience on the other" (Kovács 2008: 149). Kovács further explains that Antonioni, in particular, uses "landscapes as the background of his wandering characters".

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In this sense, Antonioni foregrounds "the dramatic tension between the characters and the environment, leading to a communication breakdown" (Kovács 2008: 149). The relationship between the characters and the environment is subsequently reduced to radical isolation or alienation. The third and final trend within modernist minimalism is based on Ingmar Bergman's style. Kovács (2008:161-162) refers to it as expressive minimalism because of Bergman's consistent use of close-ups and bare and confined landscapes, thus departing from the influence of Dreyer's modernism.[87] Bergman's minimalist style is more evident in his film; *Through a Glass Darkly* (Bergman 1961), which demonstrates an "extreme reduction of such elements as characters and landscape" (Kovács 2008: 162). Since the creative production of a Kenyan experimental Slow Cinema film is crucial to this research, I will specifically attempt to combine the minimalist styles of Bresson and Antonioni due to their emphases on the extensive use of off-screen space (as with Bresson's films) and landscapes as the background of wandering characters (as with Antonioni's film) among other related features of their styles.

In this study's context, I am keen to experiment with slowness and, therefore, not restricted to one specific style. Additionally, I will explore the application of these minimalist styles in Chapters Three and Five of this research. Whether there is a causal link in these three minimalist styles is indeed a matter worth investigating, but it also forms part of a different and more compound research venture beyond the scope of this study. The next part is concerned with the concept of indeterminacy and its applicability in Slow Cinema. One of the well-known strategies employed in many Slow Cinema films is to withhold narrative closure as is typical of the modernist aesthetic. The underlying assumption here is that this strategy can be found in all film genres, narrative forms, and cinematic styles, including Classical Hollywood cinema. However, I argue that what I may call "slow disclosure"[88] for that matter is critical for Slow Cinema. Kovács (2008: 77-78) attributes the notion of withholding narrative closure to an "open-ended structure, which has to do with unpredictability or uncertainty manifested in the story". This feature of uncertainty or narrative ambiguity, which I refer to as indeterminacy in this research, is key to

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[87] See section 2.3.1, where I have described modernism in detail while partly referring to Dreyer.

[88] I apply the concept of "slow disclosure" in my critical reflection of *Men of the Hill* in Chapter Five (Section 5.4). Here, I use the term to refer to disclosure that is happening at a deliberate, meditative manner. This is different from withholding closure, in which closure is effectively prevented.

understanding "slow disclosure" in a Slow Cinema film as I will explore in Chapter Five (section 5.4). Again, to the best of my knowledge, this current research is the first study to consider the concept of indeterminacy in narrative cinema within the national framework of Kenyan cinema and within a larger continental, African cinemas framework. That said, Kovács sees "narrative closure as the point where order is restored in the universe of the plot". Often the original order is disrupted by an indeterminate plot, which will be restored (Kovács 2008: 77). However, I suggest that the original disrupted order is hardly restored in a Slow Cinema narrative (see Chapter Five section 5.4). This absence of restored order is demonstrative of Slow Cinema's indeterminacy, where slow disclosure often incrementally chronicles plot and character trajectories away from such a conventional denouement.

Meanwhile, Bordwell reinforces the notion that he is interested in the new reality of art-cinema narration as "literary modernism", characterised by "unknowability and indeterminacy". Bordwell explains that "there is less play of cause and effect; everything is more symbolic", with importance attached to alienation and lack of communication (Bordwell 1985: 206). Indeterminacy in this context would mean that the Slow Cinema film is free from narrative causality. It challenges the viewer who may be inclined to the linearity and forthrightness of classical narrative. In other words, as Ford (2012: 186) notes, indeterminacy is experientially offered to the viewer.

Informed by Ford's (2012: 183-184) understanding of seemingly indeterminate elements that dominate and operate within modernist aesthetics, it is possible to conclude that the intensified temporality within long takes and the absurd effect of oblique cuts between them that occur in a Slow Cinema film have the ultimate impact of indeterminacy. Here, Ford precisely suggests that temporality is indeterminacy because time is what hinders narrative closure. Thus, Ford maintains, the viewer is lured into the narrative of temporal indeterminacy with the past no longer a reliable source of determination. Ford's argument is similar to Doane's (2002:163) suggestion of the image as the symbol of a particular moment. This moment's peculiarity becomes indeterminable precisely because the image does not speak its relation to time. It follows that Doane's characterisation of the linear, irreversible and mechanical temporality of the cinematic apparatus constitutes a significant source of indeterminacy in narrative. For Jaffe (2014:3), the plot and dialogue in Slow Cinema films often drift towards stillness and death and tend to be indeterminate and unresolved.

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Furthermore, Taberham (2018: 48) observes that events are rendered indeterminate in a Slow Cinema film because the film relies heavily on symbolism and allegory while the chief protagonist's motivation remains vague. I contend that indeterminacy substantially shapes the narrative of slowness as the film viewer experiences the world of the film directly, similar to the neorealist tendency conceived by Bazin and Deleuze.

I shall further elaborate on the concept of indeterminacy in Chapter Three, where I analyse three selected Slow Cinema films. Chapter Five also explores the applicability of indeterminacy in *Men of the Hill*. Finally, in Chapter Six, I examine the effects of indeterminacy on the Kenyan film viewer comprehending a narrative of slowness.

2.4.3 Conceptual framework diagram

The preceding sections in this chapter have considered several bodies of literature applicable to Slow Cinema. They include but are not limited to:

- Auteur theory;
- Slow Cinema as a modernist aesthetic;
- Durational cinema, transcendental style and slowness;
- Slow Cinema as alternative cinema;
- The slow image and its tendency towards Bazin's and Deleuze's neorealism; and
- Narrative, minimalism and indeterminacy in Slow Cinema.

Therefore, I draw on these bodies of literature to map out a conceptual framework for discussing the different concepts identified in this chapter, thereby formulating how Slow Cinema can ultimately be situated within Kenyan cinema. Figure 2.1 represents the conceptual framework for my study.
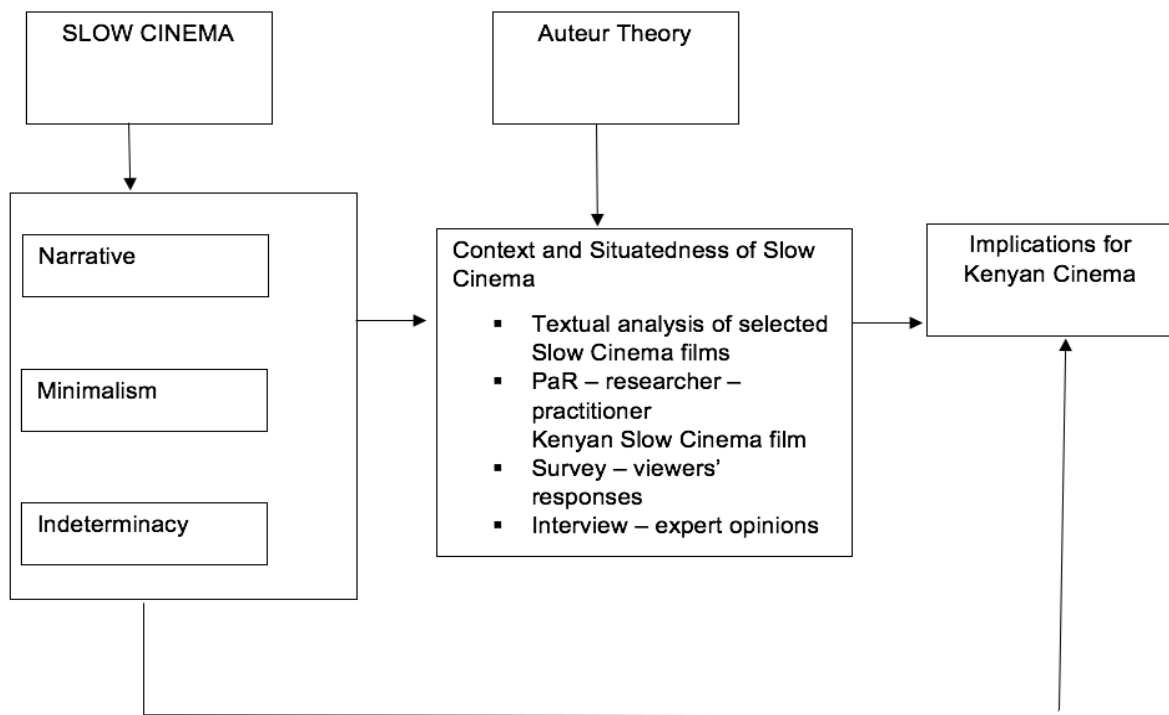
Figure 2.1: Conceptual framework diagram (Author 2020)

First, drawing on scholarship from auteur theory, I assert that auteurism can manifest and transmit itself through Slow Cinema in a way that can be understood within the Kenyan cinema context. This understanding is enabled by the research design adopted for the study, which translates into different methodologies, namely textual analysis, PaR, survey, and interview. The conventions of Slow Cinema, demonstrated by narrative, minimalism, and indeterminacy, then situate narrational strategies of slowness in Kenyan cinema. How the conventions of Slow Cinema are conceptualised in Kenyan cinema are derived from contemporary Slow Cinema films located in diverse historical and cultural backgrounds, as discussed in Chapter Three. Similarly, I argue that there is the interrelatedness of Slow Cinema concepts that, if applied meticulously, can lead to Kenyan cinema adopting alternative modes of narration in line with the country's appeal to transnational cinema. Through this interaction between the aesthetic of slowness and the film culture demonstrated within Kenyan cinema, the context and situatedness of Slow Cinema can be realised.

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2.5 Chapter Conclusion

This chapter explored styles and movements in the history and development of cinema that contribute to scholarship about Slow Cinema. The chapter provides a detailed, conceptually and theoretically informed framework for understanding Slow Cinema and, mainly, how it can be situated in the context of Kenyan cinema. It is clear that theorists, scholars and filmmakers have consistently sought to expand the frameworks for historicising, theorising, and investigating the Slow Cinema phenomenon in diverse, local, and intercultural contexts. Consequently, this has elevated the status of Slow Cinema within the larger framework of global cinema. The chapter has also established that Slow Cinema, as a genre, emerged from a combination of visual and narrative styles influenced by the history of cinema. Hence, drawing on the review of scholarship in this chapter, one cannot ascribe the growth and development of Slow Cinema to an isolated historical event.

In my conceptualisation of the theoretical framework that informs this study (section 2.2), I acknowledge that scholars (Çağlayan 2018: 222; Stone & Cooke 2016: 313; Dwyer & Perkins 2018: 105) are divided on the most appropriate approach to use in theorising Slow Cinema. This debate is in large part due to the ambiguous and elusive nature of Slow Cinema films. I have argued that since my research explicitly considers how the narrative and aesthetic conventions of slowness are transposed into Kenyan cinema, it would be crucial to demonstrate how the auteur theory can propagate the role of the film director. This demonstration is relevant to contextualising and situating Slow Cinema within the local, historical, and intercultural contexts of a national cinema framework. Ultimately, this study offers the possibility of shifting film authorship from director to audience using a Kenyan Slow Cinema film.

Section 2.3 explored how the aesthetics and functions of Slow Cinema can be located in the past and present tendencies of cinema's history. Although the last two decades have witnessed a growing interest in Slow Cinema, scholarship has determined that the aesthetic of slowness is a reactivation of past modernist tropes, which according to Kovács (2007: 17), include German Expressionism, Pure Cinema, and French Impressionism. The reactivation of past modernist tropes is essential for my study because modernist cinema is often associated with the auteur category, making it possible to conceptualise a Kenyan Slow Cinema film, which can take its inspiration from the art forms of past and present Slow

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Cinema auteurs. The section has further revealed that the aesthetics and functions of Slow Cinema can also be understood through two critical cinematic lenses: the durational and the transcendental. First, durational cinema underpins Slow Cinema's theoretical foundation regarding the temporal aesthetics and the radical conceptual simplicity of the image. Second, the transcendental style foregrounds the slow aesthetic consisting of austere camerawork, emphasis on the everyday, and delayed edits, to name a few. However, I have resisted any attempt to make a straight comparison between Slow Cinema and the two cinematic approaches to avoid the risk of overstating Slow Cinema's reliance on other styles or interfering with their ontological foundations.

In section 2.3.3, I highlighted Slow Cinema's strong parallels with Hollywood cinema. There has been an effort to advance the view that adhering to the conventions of Slow Cinema inevitably counters dominant Hollywood films, which emphasise the culture of speed. The crucial point that I have made in this regard is to perceive Slow Cinema as alternative cinema rather than an aesthetic that is fundamentally opposed to the strategies of Classical Hollywood cinema. My position is rooted in the potential of Kenyan cinema as a transnational cinema, which favours hybridity both in form and content. More significantly, Stam (2003: 38) has called for a constellation of cinematic forms, which embrace hybridity and polyglossia and functionally erase the boundaries that (at least traditionally) restrict First, Second, and Third Cinemas. The conceptual framework of this study has also demonstrated how the narration of Slow Cinema can be constructed. The first task was to establish a framework for constructing a slow image based on the early understandings of neorealism as first conceptualised by Bazin and later advanced by Deleuze. Taking my cue from the writings of Bazin and Deleuze, I have shown that a narrative of slowness can be constructed to contribute to an understanding of minimalism and indeterminacy in Slow Cinema (see section 2.4). I have posited that notions regarding neorealism can provide an opportunity for Slow Cinema to adopt neorealist precepts, which underscore the use of minimal resources, local people and improvisation on the set, for instance, to convey the plight of ordinary people faced with socio-economic uncertainties.

Similarly, Deleuze's writings on neorealism reveal the ontology of the time-image, which serves as an essential reference point for a discussion of Slow Cinema's narrative. In my analysis, the time-image enables one to conceive Slow Cinema as a varied form with its

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narrative conventions rather than simply negating the classical narration. As a result, the narrative of slowness invites the viewer to make analytical and contemplative efforts to resolve the narrative challenges presented onscreen. Finally, the conceptual framework diagram (Fig. 2.1) has made it possible to map out the conventions of Slow Cinema: narrative, minimalism, and indeterminacy, and to demonstrate their deployment to impact the film culture of Kenyan cinema. Despite a gradual increase in scholarship about Slow Cinema, there is still a need to expand Slow Cinema discourse, especially in Africa, to provide rare insights that reflect the growing diversity of the slow aesthetic.

Chapter Three further pursues, activates and applies the concepts discussed in this chapter by analysing three selected Slow Cinema films by culturally distinctive and acclaimed auteurs whose bodies of work are produced in, draw from, and evoke diverse socio-economic and artistic contexts.

CHAPTER THREE:

TEXTUAL ANALYSIS OF THREE SELECTED SLOW CINEMA FILMS

3.1 Chapter Introduction

In Chapter One, I outlined the development of the use of the term 'Slow Cinema' and the historical development of cinematic slowness over time. On that premise, I argued that, while the Slow Cinema movement is often associated with filmmakers from Europe, Asia, and Latin America, opportunities for its growth still exist, especially in Africa (see sections 1.1 and 1.2). I have laid out various methodological approaches used to situate the conventions of Slow Cinema, such as a de-dramatised narrative, minimalism, and indeterminacy of plot within the context of Kenyan cinema (see sections 1.3 and 1.4). In Chapter Two, I presented a theoretical and conceptual framework designed to understand the above conventions in great detail and measure their situatedness within Kenyan cinema.

This current chapter mainly supports and draws on the theoretical and conceptual framework discussed in Chapter Two by providing a textual analysis of three selected Slow Cinema films drawn from Thailand (Asia), Hungary (Europe), and South Africa (Africa).

This current chapter addresses the study's second objective, which seeks to demonstrate how Slow Cinema's narrative and aesthetic conventions have been deployed in the selected films of world-renowned auteurs in the Slow Cinema tradition. It explores how their experiences and practices can be situated within Kenyan cinema. Indeed, several scholars have discussed the discourse of situatedness in Slow Cinema. Lim (2014: 34) claims that Slow Cinema films originate from diverse backgrounds around the globe. Çağlayan (2018: 222) agrees, suggesting that "most Slow Cinema films are auteur-based productions with some filmmakers belonging to the category of auteurist transnationalism and transcending the boundaries of national productions through transnational collaborations, specifically with international film festivals".[89] These filmmakers (Ceylan, Kiarostami, Reygadas, Tarr, and Weerasethakul, among others) mainly develop themes of existentialism, spirituality,

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[89] For a discussion, see Çağlayan E. (2018). See also Klemens Czyzydlo's 2014 article on *Transnational Auteurism* and Higbee W., and Lim S. (2010).

alienation, emptiness, melancholia, and materiality in their films. Molina (2018: 2) also substantiates these themes in the Slow Cinema films I have identified as units of analysis in this chapter. The themes include boredom, restlessness, ontological explorations, stagnation and existential angst.

Drawing on Lim's question — "how can we qualify slowness in cinema, and what is the point of departure between a Slow Cinema film and the contemporary commercial films"? — I examine how the oeuvres of renowned Slow Cinema film directors – many of whom can be considered auteurs – are constructed narratively and aesthetically. I also interrogate how these directors express their styles through contemplative pace and minimalist and indeterminate tendencies in characterisation, mise-en-scène, plot, dialogue and visual language.[90] The Slow Cinema films in the present textual analysis provide a critical investigation into the conventions of Slow Cinema, including but not limited to:

- *Aesthetics*: provocative slowness (Ciment 2003), "a sense of duration, of temporality and life passing" (Dargis and Scott 2011: 3), landscape *tableaux* and "a dream-like, hermetic reality" (Romney 2016: 1),

- *Audiovisual language*: the long take, "wide angles, static frame, minimal coverage, offset edits, visual flatness, repeated compositions, non-acting — barely moving", colour and screen ratio, doubling, highly selective composed music — if any, heightened sound effects and use of distancing devices such as boredom (Schrader 2018: 11-20), and

- *Narrative*: the spectator's experience of the features that characterise plot structure (Flanagan 2012: 69), stressing the stillness of the present moment, with both the titular character and the spectator feeling "a sense of immobility, of existence as fixed or frozen in place", not to mention, indeterminate emotional expressions that are difficult to read and frustrating (Jaffe 2015), no or few events are unfolding during the "development of the plot, information often being withheld from spectators, and the film remains open to different interpretations and experiences" (Pezzotta 2017: 42).

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[90] I use the term "visual language" throughout this thesis to refer to the shot, the shot sequence, the scene and the dramatic sequence in a Slow Cinema film. See Hurbis-Cherrier (2018) for a detailed explanation of the visual language and aesthetics of cinema.

Lim's characterisation of the universal conventions of Slow Cinema films reflects the contemporary discourse in the Slow Cinema movement. Still, it would be difficult to determine why many of these films bear distinct characteristics, yet in some way, they resonate with each other across these diverse backgrounds in recent decades (Lim 2014: 40). Lim's claim that "it might be inviting to see a cinema of slowness as, in part, a form of Western consumption of postcolonial visuality, with its attendant politics of othering and exoticisation" (Lim 2014: 40), does make the present analysis of narrative discourse in Slow Cinema from a cross-cultural perspective crucial. The increase in cross-cultural interactions in cinema has been tendered through digitisation, which has become a handy tool for the steady growth of Slow Cinema in many parts of the world. Scholars such as Luca and Jorge (2016: 19) and Çağlayan (2018: 222) largely concur with Lim (2014: 5) that some Slow Cinema films would not have been a reality without digital technology.

Although principally analysed through the lenses of some standard narrative and aesthetic tropes of cinematic slowness, the scope of this chapter's analysis has been considerably broadened to factor in Slow Cinema's philosophical regard. As Carroll (2006: 1) argues, it is possible to philosophise through moving-image artworks and related interpretations. In discussing these notions, the present chapter will examine how the narrative and aesthetic conventions incorporated in the films of Apichatpong Weerasethakul (Thailand), Béla Tarr (Hungary), and Oliver Hermanus (South Africa) are traditionally associated with contemporary Slow Cinema. Additionally, how these narrative and aesthetic conventions invite various interpretations. Essentially, the films analysed here encourage the spectator to test the signification of Slow Cinema reflexively and philosophically. These films are labelled as slow based on a fixed set of categories informed by various scholarly works or my fixed personal interpretation as a researcher. However, it is important to stress at the outset that each of the three auteurs' association with the major themes discussed here is as individual as his signature approach to Slow Cinema. The following section discusses the analytical approach I have adopted for the textual analysis of the three selected Slow Cinema films to provide an appropriate methodology for situating the conventions of narrative, minimalism, and indeterminacy within Kenyan cinema.

3.2 Narrative Discourse Analysis

This section, in large part, expands my discussion of a slow narrative in Chapter Two (see section 2.4.2). I proceed to outline a broader framework for analysing the three selected Slow Cinema films. The goal of narrative discourse analysis in the present study is to lay the groundwork for Slow Cinema films to be placed within their sociocultural contexts and explore features that integrate and situate them. As a rapidly growing and advancing field, discourse analysis[91] has varied meanings to scholars in different areas. Schiffrin, Tannen, and Hamilton (2003: 1) have observed that given this disciplinary diversity, "discourse", particularly for linguists, has generally been defined as anything "beyond the sentence".

In contrast, for others, the study of discourse is the study of language use. For Lakoff (2003: 199), discourse analysis is "singularly interdisciplinary" with current research in the field emerging from numerous and divergent academic disciplines. Although discourse analysis has been particularly influential, at least in linguistics, it is used to generalise the underlying formal structure of filmic narratives and stories. Narrative is an essential aspect of this study. As (Johnstone 2008: 635-644) points out, narrative is generally associated with "the essence of humanness, long characterised as the tendency to make sense of the world through rationality or to tell stories". Johnstone further notes that scholars across disciplines have gained more interest in narrative study, making it more often interdisciplinary.

Narratologists have increasingly focused over the past twenty years on the "historicity and contextuality of modes of narrative presentation and its practical function across various media" (Meister 2014: 625). Genette (1980: 25) contends that the word *narrative* is often "used without paying attention to, even at times without detecting its ambiguity, and some of the difficulties of narratology are perhaps due to this confusion". In concurrence with analysts and theoreticians of narrative content, Genette defines *narrative* as the succession of events, actual or fictitious, that are the subjects of this discourse and their several relations of linking, opposition, and repetition. The highly cited definition of narratology by Ryan and Van Alphen (1993: 110) "as the set of general statements on narrative genres, the structure of the plot, and the systematics of narrating" (telling a story) does little to satisfy the thinking

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[91] See Tannen, Hamilton and Schiffrin (2015) for an expanded and thoroughly updated reflection of the latest research in discourse analysis, including new theoretical paradigms and discourse-analytic models.

and debate on the subject. In recent times, narratology has been described as a discipline (Fludernik & Margolin 2004: 149), a method (Kindt & Hans-Harald 2003: 211), or a theory (Prince 2003: 1). As such, "narratology's twofold nature as both theoretical and a pragmatic academic approach to narrative" has been acknowledged (Meister 2014: 623).

Slow Cinema is a movement that accentuates banal and motoric element experiences, which are considered minimalist and indeterminate. Yet, film is an art form of many narrative dimensions (see Chapter Two, section 2.4). Kuhn and Schmidt (2014: 384) expect nearly every film, excluding specific experimental films and documentaries, to comprise at least a few basic narrative structures applying to feature films. In his detailed account of the narrative discourse method, Genette (1980: 25-27) defined *narrative analysis* as "the study of a totality of actions and situations taken in themselves, without regard to the medium, linguistic or other, through which knowledge of that totality comes to us". Analysis of narrative discourse as Genette (1980: 27) saw it, emphasises relationships. First, "the relationship between discourse and the events that it narrates, and second, the relationship between the same discourse and the act that produces it". Chatman (1978: 43) centralised the point that the events in a story are turned into a plot by its discourse, and hence the conclusion that the plot is essentially "story-as-discoursed". This view, therefore, stresses that story events are rearranged through narrative discourse. Chatman's framework prompted Genette (1980: 27) to propose "using the word *narrative* for the signifier, statement, discourse or narrative text itself and the word *narrating* for the producing narrative action". Narrative, by extension, is "the whole of the actual or fictional situation in which that action takes place" (Genette 1980: 27). Lastly, Genette adds, the word "story" signifies narrative content, even if it seems to be low in dramatic intensity.

For the current study, the analysis of narrative discourse in Slow Cinema is a study of the relationships between narrative and minimalism and narrative and indeterminacy. I will consider the relationship between aesthetics and temporality and how they are extolled in a Slow Cinema film's narrative discourse. It is a challenge to take apart the totality of a Slow Cinema film experience and to interpret how that experience was assembled. This is reminiscent of film critic Christian Metz's affirmation that "a film is difficult to explain because it is easy to understand" (Metz 2015: 11). Diana Rose (2011: 248) agrees, stating that "audiovisual media are a complex amalgam of meanings, images, and techniques, shot

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framing, shot sequence and much more". She insists that it is imperative to consider this complexity when analysing its content and structure. For a Slow Cinema film, the level of narrative discourse, at least in Genette's (1980: 27) elucidation, "is the only one directly available to *textual analysis*". This strategy is, therefore, the prominent tool of examination at my disposal as I analyse the films of Slow Cinema auteurs presented in the sections that follow. Gillian Rose (2001: 3) rightly accepts that despite the vast amount of academic work currently being published on matters visual, there are curiously few guides to possible methods of interpretation and even fewer rationalisations of how to deploy those methods. Nonetheless, Rose (2001: 3) contrasts quantitative and qualitative methods, clearly preferring the latter as more appropriate for interpreting visual images due to their emphasis on meaning and significance. (The quantitative approach, Rose holds, can only be deployed with caution.)

In light of the above, I base my textual analysis of a Slow Cinema film on the narrative discourse approach through a range of analytical instruments used to interpret visual images. Closely associated with narrative discourse analysis is the contrast between *descriptive* and *prescriptive* theory and criticism. According to Monaco (2000: 389), the descriptive theorist is concerned only with what film is, while the prescriptive theorist tends to focus on what film should be. The descriptive theory is deductive: the theorist examines the entire range of film activity before drawing tentative conclusions about the real nature of the film. Prescriptive theory, in contrast, is inductive: that is, the theorist decides on a system of values first, then examines actual films against his system. In Monaco's view, theorists and critics who prescribe are naturally concerned about assessment; having solid systems of values, they lucidly evaluate real films against their requirements and judge them. According to Rose (2011: 252), conversation analysts or discourse theorists typically take the unit of analysis to be a line, sentence, or paragraph. Thus, the unit is speech-based. Mindful of the significance of non-verbal traits of audiovisual texts, Rose (2011: 252) explicitly theorises selecting the unit of analysis based on not only visuals but also, logically, because, in the vast majority of cases, these are comparatively simple to execute. Sergei Eisenstein's (1945: 145) essay *A Close-up View* (cited in Donald, Friedberg & Marcus

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1999:154) may also offer important insights into the analysis of a Slow Cinema film.[92] Eisenstein described the following:

- *Close-up theory*- 'breaks down' the film into its parts and determines the film into its components.

- *Medium-shot* film criticism, which emphasizes the human scale of the film (what most critics concern themselves with) and

- *Long-shot* film theory allocates film in its context while judging its political and social repercussions.

Another approach offered by Rose (2001: 3) is what she refers to as a *critical visual methodology*. Rose contemplates the visual in terms of the cultural implication, social practices and power relations in which it is entrenched. That means thinking about the power relations that construct, are enunciated through, and can be contested by, ways of seeing and imaging. Goldberg (2017: 2) advances the notion that interpretation of any film should be made through:

- *Meaning*, referring to themes or tropes of broad ideas and allusions such as alienation, power and control, as well as transcendence, to name a few,

- *Intent/message*, simply because the message is discernible, doesn't mean that the film is artless, or that there is not a contrary subtext, and,

- *Metaphor* and *Symbolism*, which only gain relevance if they are recurring in meaningful ways or linked with the larger meaning of the film.

The narrative discourse analysis approach can therefore be usefully deployed using the above techniques. It is also significant to note that the unit of analysis in this study is the

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[92] Eisenstein's essay, written in 1945, was designed to be "the fighting line of the newly re-born journal, *Iskusstvo Kino*". "How consciously, if at all, Eisenstein was recalling the writing in *Close Up* from the 1920s is unclear, but he was suggesting that *Iskusstvo Kino* adopt a certain style of writing as its editorial optic, writing that resembled the writing in *Close Up*" (Donald, Friedberg & Marcus 1999: 322).

Slow Cinema film itself and the *camera shot*. A new unit of analysis begins when a shot reframes to a different narrative element. The meaning of the 'unit of analysis' is therefore operationalised in the study to refer to the tropes and visual style deployed in a singular Slow Cinema film. Here, I am not just interested in what the film is (form). It is also about how it acts upon the spectator (function), thereby disintegrating the classic opposition between form and function.

Additionally, the interpretation of visual images in a Slow Cinema film should address questions of power and cultural meaning. As Rose (2001: 3) suggests, that approach has specific allusions for how the various techniques used to read a film are assessed. I will attend to a few Slow Cinema films to offer a sustained and detailed discussion of each raise's issues. The films selected as units of analysis in this chapter, namely, *Uncle Boonmee who can recall his past lives* (Weerasethakul 2010), *The Turin Horse* (Tarr 2011) and *Skoonheid* (Hermanus 2011), have visual and detailed textual evidence of Slow Cinema with specific reference to narrative minimalism and indeterminacy, and the consistency needed by the study concerning previous related research.

The films mentioned above have also demonstrated different levels of thematic and structural analyses in terms of the 'point' of the narrative, language and form, and visual analysis. This analysis has to do with the story of the production of the image, the image itself and how it can be read. The chapter presents a seemingly limited selection of films for interpretation. Still, there's nothing to prevent the analysis of narrative discourse discussed here from being applied to other films that subscribe to the tradition of Slow Cinema.

3.3 Narrativising Slowness, Vraisemblance and the Dream Vision in Apichatpong Weerasethakul's *Uncle Boonmee Who Can Recall His Past Lives* (2010)

At the time of writing, no published study has analysed how the concepts of *vraisemblance* and the dream vision have been narrativised in *Uncle Boonmee* as indicators of cinematic slowness. Thus, it is clear that my study makes an original contribution to the analysis of Slow Cinema films. Thai filmmaker Apichatpong Weerasethakul's cinematic oeuvre has been the subject of much debate among scholars and film critics worldwide. As Lovatt (2013: 63) writes, Weerasethakul was born in Bangkok in 1970, grew up in the town of Khon Kaen in Northeast Thailand and studied architecture at Khon Kaen University. He later completed

a Masters of Fine Arts at the School of Art Institute in Chicago, where he made his first short film in 1994. Weerasethakul returned to Bangkok and established the independent production company, *Kick the Machine* before making his first feature film, *Mysterious Object at Noon* (*Dogfar nai meu marn*, 2000). Since then, he has built a body of work ranging from feature films to video installations, thus attracting national and international attention. "He has been an active supporter of Thailand's independent film culture, co-directing the fifth Bangkok Experimental Film Festival in 2008" (Lovatt 2013: 63). His most critically acclaimed full-length feature film, *Uncle Boonmee Who Can Recall His Past Lives*[93], which is the subject of this analysis, won the coveted Palme d'Or at Cannes in 2010[94]. Some leading film critics and scholars agree that to watch the films of Apichatpong Weerasethakul is to enter a world where memory, reality, and dreams corrugate into one another. For example, James Quandt (2009: 14), one of the leading film critics and curators, who has written extensively about Weerasethakul's oeuvre, writes:

> …Weerasethakul's modus [is] to turn everyday objects and images into the ineffable and enigmatic inhabitants of a phantom zone where the hard, 'real' world of cars and bodies and buildings cedes dominion to a magical landscape of desire and reverie… Time becomes suspended, and the setting ebbs from actual into dreamscape… Uncontrived, intuitive mystery, a rare commodity in any art, abounds in Apichatpong's cinema. He can't seem to cast his eye on any object without making it strange... One surrenders, blissfully, to that strangeness.

Here, Quandt submits that Weerasethakul brings together influences and sources from an assortment of narrative techniques, appealing to the viewer's everyday self, thus enabling a contextual intersubjectivity. Lovatt (2013: 62) has valorised Weerasethakul's films and video work as presenting "a rich drapery of storytelling traditions: folklore, *likay* soap opera, folk theatre, adventure stories, horror movies, and science fiction – all of which have, and continue to play, a part in the formation of the Thai cultural fantasy".[95] This filmic folklore has prompted film publicist Matt Mazur (Pop Matters 2011) to call Weerasethakul's oeuvre "a filmic tone poem". In other words, Weerasethakul's corpus is at once independent,

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[93] From now on referred to as *Uncle Boonmee*
[94] His latest film, *Memoria*, premiered at Cannes in July 2021
[95] *Likay* seems to be an "important drama in central Thailand; a mixture of Thai traditional and classical arts". For further discussion see Seangtong, Chantachon and Wisutthiphaet (2013), Deekhuntod (2010:1-20), and Sompiboon (2012: 73-137).

experimental and unconventional in every sense. It is not obliged to the customary rules of filmmaking whatsoever, and that is a refreshing change of pace on the festival circuit where everything seems geared towards awards bagging. In his examination of Weerasethakul's *Uncle Boonmee*, Terry (2017: 15) revisits comments attributed to Paul Schrader, who observed that the Thai filmmaker successfully uses boredom as a tool in direct opposition to other filmmakers who use "kineticism" to move their story. [96] For Schrader, when filmmakers like Weerasethakul cause the spectator's mind to wait [hence slowness], it makes it more active; it participates more in the story's process. These techniques, Schrader concludes, could hypothetically work on any subject, but they seem to thrive when the subject is transcendental as they bring the spectator closer to the unknown. Here, Schrader's views are consistent with his interpretation of slowness as a device that sets apart the transcendental style about Slow Cinema's attitude towards time (see Chapter Two section 2.3.2).

3.3.1 An overview of Uncle Boonmee Who Can Recall His Past Lives

Described as a seductive oneiric film with plodding pacing (Feinstein 2011: 2), *Uncle Boonmee Who Can Recall His Past Lives* (*Lung Bu̠mī ralu̠k chāti* 2010) is a homage to Weerasethakul's "home, and to a certain kind of cinema that he grew up watching". It is a fragmented, tranquil recollection of reminiscences that ponders on the life and reincarnation of Boonmee (Thanapat Saisaymar), an old farmer "suffering from acute kidney failure. Boonmee has chosen to spend his final days surrounded by his loved ones" (Feinstein 2011: 2), Jen (Jenjira Pongpas) and Tong (Sakda Kaewbuadee), in the countryside. Startlingly, the ghost of his deceased wife, Huay (Natthakarn Aphaiwonk), appears to care for him, and his long-lost son, Boonsong (Geerasak Kulhong), returns home in a non-human form. Contemplating the reasons for his illness, Boonmee journeys through the jungle with his family to a mysterious hilltop cave – the birthplace of his first life. He confronts ghosts of his past as a husband, father, and soldier, as well as visions of alternate lives, both past and future. Additionally, the film is commingled with scenes of a roaming water buffalo that strays into the jungle, as well as the story of a princess of a departed era, who laments her lost youth and mates with a catfish – beings that might be understood as Boonmee's previous

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[96] Schrader, P. (2017 Live presentation): *Opening Frames: Cinema and Transcendence.*

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lives (Boehler 2014: 67). *Uncle Boonmee* is set in the context of Isan (the marginalised northeastern region of Thailand) with its distinct ethnography.

The film was the zenith of Weerasethakul's *Primitive* project, which also included a pair of short films dealing with similar themes of nostalgia, history, memory, and loss (PanPan 2017; Mazur 2011). *Uncle Boonmee* is one of Weerasethakul's thematically and visually richest films, weaving together the themes of spirituality, politics, the imaginary, and the deeply personal into a covert and moving account of facing mortality and confronting the sometimes-prickly truths of history. The film looks both back into the past and forward into the future and finds mortality across these temporal planes. Far from being an austere or dark work, the film is instead evocative, sensual and warm, running with the rhythms of daily life. It also inspects the supernatural and the shocking in both the real, violent history of the world and in the enchanted realms of fantasy, art and myth (Lee 2010: 1). Mohamed, Ishak, and Rahamad (2016: 1) posit that the film offers a fragmented narrative at a dreamy pace – a style that Weerasethakul seems at ease with, judging by his previous films *Mysterious Object at Noon* (*Dokfa nai meuman,* 2000) and *Tropical Malady* (*Sud Pralad*, 2004). *Uncle Boonmee* is an enigmatic film that "tells the story of ghost, monkey, ugly princess and talking catfish" as well-articulated by Weerasethakul (2010: 5) himself in the film's press book:

> Initially, the script was more explicit in explaining what the past lives were and which were not. But in the film, I decided to respect the audience's imagination. Of course, after watching it, you can tell that Uncle Boonmee could be a buffalo or a princess. But for me, he could be every living thing in the film, the bugs, the bees, the soldier, the catfish, and so on. He could even be his monkey ghost son and his ghost wife. In this way, the film reinforces a unique association between cinema and reincarnation. Cinema is man's way to create alternate universes, other lives.

Weerasethakul further insists that *Uncle Boonmee* is somewhat autobiographical because, once again, his father, who succumbed to kidney failure, slipped into the film. The process of making the film, he states, made him realise that he was incapable of being faithful to any original source (Boonmee book). [97] Besides altering the past lives,

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[97] Weerasethakul met an Abbot at a monastery near his house who told him the story of Boonmee, a man who could recall his past lives as a buffalo, a cow, and a body-less spirit roaming around the northeastern plains of Thailand. "The Abbot collected stories from villagers who shared their past lives with him and later published a little book with the title: *A Man Who Can Recall His Past Lives*" (Weerasethakul 2010: 3).

Weerasethakul pushed this Boonmee figure into the background. The film, Weerasethakul insists, "is not about Boonmee but his (Weerasethakul) take on the idea of reincarnation". Since Boonmee is an anonymous character, Weerasethakul "could not use professional actors who have many identities" (Weerasethakul 2010: 3). He cast people from all occupations with a roof welder playing Boonmee and a singer taking up Huay's character. Çağlayan (2018: xi) notes that working with non-professional actors is a well-documented practice in the Slow Cinema tradition. This practice echoes the frequently referenced technical association with a neorealist film style that emphasises "the use and overuse of long takes, depth of field, on-location shooting and non-professional actors". Weerasethakul's devotion and sincerity to promoting experimental and independent filmmaking in Thailand are evident as he, according to film critic Derek Smith (2017), continues to tap into parallel realities and past lives with tantalising minimalism that is all his own. Weerasethakul also lurches even further into the realm of tropical surrealism, primarily through *Uncle Boonmee*.

The above arguments lay out the overall rationale for analysing the narrative form and content of *Uncle Boonmee* to extrapolate significant themes and leading ideas with which Slow Cinema is concerned. In the following sections, I illustrate the significance of Weerasethakul's authorial influence by discussing the use of some narrative elements, including but not limited to (a) Slowness — how a Slow Cinema film can sustain a spectator's interest through its themes, plot structure, and aesthetics, (b) *Vraisemblance* — how the spectator can more readily accept a Slow Cinema film through its visual authenticity), and (c) Dream visions — how the frame narrative created by Boonmee's dreams allows an insight into the mind and feelings of the titular character for the film's spectator. Therefore, observing the relation among style, form and theme becomes a starting point in considering the slowness of *Uncle Boonmee*.

3.3.2 The slow narration of Uncle Boonmee

The present analysis seeks to demonstrate how *Uncle Boonmee* fits within the formal artistry of Slow Cinema, which according to Pezzotta (2017: 42), is inspired by the early de-dramatised European art-cinema.[98] In what follows, I will first narrativise slowness in *Uncle*

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[98] Weerasethakul's other aim in *Uncle Boonmee*, according to the film's *Press Book* was to pay tribute to early Thai cinema's acting style and experimental ventures that he grew up with, which he says,

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Boonmee and how it compels the spectator to confront the languid pacing constructed against the framework of cinematic temporality and contemplation. Second, I discuss how Weerasethakul shaped the diegetic worlds in *Uncle Boonmee* to create a fragmented plot imbued with minimalism and indeterminacy. Finally, I highlight how Weerasethakul created an audiovisual language to accentuate the stylistic cinematic components of slowness through shot types, repeated compositions, static framing, diegetic sound, music, sound effects, visual flatness and colour.

In narrativising *Uncle Boonmee*'s slowness, it is crucial to determine the average shot length (ASL) in the film (Tsivian 'no date').[99] Pezzotta (2017: 43) calls a shot a "long take if it is at least twenty-five seconds". At the same time, Schrader (2018: 11-12) suggests that thirty seconds would be adequate in any given cinema of slowness to create friction between time and narrative, between the narrative time requirements of an individual shot and the actual amount of time apportioned to the shot. In my analysis, I found the ASL of *Uncle Boonmee* to be 37-seconds, with the difference between the shortest and longest scenes standing at approximately fourteen minutes and fifty-two seconds. This ASL implies that Weerasethakul made an informed creative choice about time and the image or how much time the viewer would spend on a shot in meaning-making. The camera, landscapes, objects, and titular characters move or remain still within the frame through embodied structures of temporality and long-takes in *Uncle Boonmee*. These elements narrativise to the spectator the nonrepresentational concept of an extended duration in which the events of past, present, and future amalgamate. Figure 3.1 (Apichatpong Weerasethakul 2010) demonstrates the presence of otherness and supernaturalism in *Uncle Boonmee*.

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was de-dramatized akin to European art-cinema (Weerasethakul 2010). Çağlayan (2018: 190) also emphasizes that making personal films and adopting minimalism evoke influences of European art cinema and contemporary slow cinema respectively.

[99] See Yuri Tsivian's ('no date') *Cinematrics* (http://www.cinemetrics.lv/tsivian.php). To measure ASL, Tsivian suggests recording the length of the film (in meters, feet, or seconds), counting the number of shots and then dividing the latter into the former. However, Tsivian insists that a longer ASL does not necessarily suggest less action, intensity, drama, or tension. Accessed: 14/04/2019.

Figure 3.1: *Recollections of spiritual beings in* Uncle Boonmee *(Weerasethakul 2010)*

Uncle Boonmee's slowness is firstly punctuated by the characters' frequent rests and recollections. Secondly, the durational density creates a disparity between the spectator's perception of the film and the actual duration on the screen. For example, the most extended scene in *Uncle Boonmee* (approximately fourteen minutes, fifty-two seconds) captures the reliving of the past, as Boonmee, having dinner in the company of his close relatives, Jen and Tong, chances upon his late wife, Huay. She enters the story's universe as a luminous spirit to comfort him in his fear of death. Boonsong (Boonmee's long-lost son), lured by the monkey ghosts and now a ghostly figure and a shadow of his former self, follows suit. He curiously hints, "there are many beings outside right now. So, I had to come and see you father, spirits and hungry animals". Boonsong suggests that he had returned to offer his father an unprecedented intervention in his hour of need.

This sequence provides the spectator with an exciting proposition to interpret the long dialogue compared to the little action and movement in the scene. The unexpected and casual arrival of ghosts at dinner produces a charming effect in which the long sequence appears shorter, with time outwardly suspended. In this case, the suspension of time brings to bear the spectator's perception when cinematic duration is expanded. The spectator could be prompted to reorder the story's events or find parallels among shot types, composition, visual flatness and diegetic sound. As a result, the linear temporality in the sequence can be relieved by enduring experiences. In yet another example of narrativised slowness, the

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film moves at the peaceful, unenergetic pace of a lazy afternoon. Boonmee and Jen are walking about, eating chewy-like-bubblegum honey "that tastes like heaven" and chatting amiably against the backdrop of workers tending to his tamarind fruits. The sequence, lasting approximately eight minutes and thirty-three seconds, fragments the illusion of cinematic duration. In that sense, the moving image caricatures the spectator's everyday experience of time as Boonmee himself falls asleep under the honey shack after wondering if his illness was the karmic result of the many communists and bugs he had killed. This languid pace, according to (Terry 2017: 16-17), runs the risk of disaffecting the spectator that may be expecting a more conformist fast-paced flow with unswerving connotations of the image to meaning.

The contemplative nature of *Uncle Boonmee,* together with its thematic representation of transformation and hybridisation, as Terry (2017: 17), explains, might create a sensory environment that engages the audience in a manner that is atypical for a film but common for a film made in the Slow Cinema style. Rather than being emotional, this engagement is intellectual. It is intended to appeal to the spectator on a philosophical level to examine the intersection of conscientious spiritualism and materialistic modernism in Boonmee's world. In summary, it would seem that the narrativisation of slowness in *Uncle Boonmee* lays down a challenge for its audience to engage in what Heidegger calls "meditative thinking" to trigger and cultivate personal interpretive contemplation even further and perhaps allow the spectator to understand the cultural and spiritual tensions in postcolonial Thailand.[100]

A Slow Cinema film tends to be associated with a style of storytelling categorised by little or no narrative, long takes, slow camera movements (if any), and minimal action and character dialogue (see Chapter Two, section 2.4.2). However, the plot in *Uncle Boonmee* presents itself in a relatively straightforward manner, if also deceptively dense (Feinstein

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[100] According to German philosopher Martin Heidegger (1966: 46), there are "two kinds of thinking, each justified and needed in its own way: calculative thinking and meditative thinking". It is meditative thinking that Heidegger referred to when he wrote: "Most thought-provoking in our thought-provoking time is that we are still not thinking" (Heidegger, 1968: 6). He was more concerned that people in the modern world were too preoccupied with science and technology, which is largely limited to calculative thinking and yet, meditative thinking is more fundamental and rooted in our nature as human beings because it does not estrange us from reality, instead keeping individuals extremely focused on our existence. After all, man is a meditating being and ignoring meditative thinking means to damage our own nature as human beings (Heidegger 1966: 47).

2011). The narrative permits numerous interpretations, but Weerasethakul manages to create a Slow Cinema film that reverberates with themes of ageing, memory, loss, history and otherworldliness, to name a few. The multi-dimensional story universe of *Uncle Boonmee* constitutes shifting narrative instalments, lacking both fixed individualities and timelines, which prompt the spectator to question the power structures of the narrative itself. Grinberg (2015: 1) calls these shifting timelines *fractured narratives*. For Grinberg, fractured narratives take place concurrently, without interweaving or joining at the end, although there is a central and shared theme present in all of them. For instance, Uncle Boonmee's present life unfolds chronologically as sequences of his past lives are interposed among those of his current existence. Yet, there is ostensibly no clear rational connection or plot drivers, as evidenced by the opening scene, which shows a water buffalo breaking free from its bondage to a tree and straying off into the nearby forest.

The water buffalo may exemplify Uncle Boonmee's recollection of his past life, but the scene itself lacks a substantive effect on the plot. Additionally, the scene of the ageing princess also has no connection to Uncle Boonmee's present life except that it may be another one of his reincarnations. As Panpan (2017) points out in her analysis of *Uncle Boonmee*, the narrative structure shows past lives within the present, seemingly as a withholding device that negates the linearity of time for the audience conceptually. The narrative structure that Panpan alludes to, especially in terms of how the spectator interprets a Slow Cinema film, gains relevance in Molina's (2018: 1) account, that a slow narrative can create a more distinctive and engaging experience despite its tendency to be arguably tantamount to unexciting, challenging, and rarefied for most film spectators.[101] When it comes to the slow narrative in *Uncle Boonmee*, the dramatic structuring of the story places its primary focus on Boonmee himself, seeing as he is the titular character instead of the plot.

In this case, the consciousness, development, and exploration of Boonmee's nature are centralised, whereas the plot becomes secondary, making it a character film. *Uncle Boonmee*'s tempo lessens as time-dynamic action is consigned to time-static minimalism. Most of the scenes in the film remain intently uneventful. For example, Jen and Tong staring out the window meditatively and nostalgically as they ride in a truck or Boonmee and Jen

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[101] Refer to Chapter Two, section 2.4.2, where I present a conceptual definition of the slow narrative.

sipping bitter-sweet tea as they talk about the weather and illegal immigrants. The fleshing out of Boonmee's character occurs by way of the world Boonmee inhabits. Weerasethakul develops a world abuzz with the soundscape of honeybees, the ubiquitous chirping of crickets and the ominous thrum of wind, spirits, hungry animals, monkey ghosts and the ageing princess, all complementing or underscoring Boonmee's personality, if not his past lives. Therefore, Boonmee's internal conflict contributes to the latent action in the story, which subsequently heightens the plot's indeterminacy. In *Uncle Boonmee*, the slow narrative is often drifting in terms of the story's pacing and in terms of theme. The narrative speaks to the themes of transformation and hybridisation or spirituality and modernity.

However, this slow narrative may be contentious in terms of whether it builds momentum from the opening sequence of the water buffalo through to the dreamy sequence in the ethereal landscape leading to the cave. Huay's spirit guides Boonmee, Jen and Tong into the cave, then culminating in the final sequence of bi-presence, where two versions of the characters Tong, Jen and Roong simultaneously appear in the same room. This slow narrative depends on how Weerasethakul as a Slow Cinema auteur, wants his oeuvre to be read. Second, it relies on how the spectator interprets the film, be it mysterious, palpable, and reflective or thought-provoking. I argue that the narrative in *Uncle Boonmee* allows the spectator to experience a direct engagement with the film's protagonist. Weerasethakul's intention is arguably to place the spectators within the film's emotional context and enable them to immerse themselves in the mindset of Boonmee, who tends to drift into multiple temporalities. Such a frame of mind prompts the spectator to draw inferences and make sense of the slowness in the film – both on an explicit and symbolic level, which pushes normative boundaries in the aesthetics of a Slow Cinema film. Thus, the spectator becomes a cerebral observer and participant in the unfolding visual slowness.

I now examine the aesthetic cinematic features of *Uncle Boonmee* in terms of how they contribute to the film's storytelling cadence. The film syntax here includes the collaborative relationships between mise-en-scène, framing, composition, camera movement, shot types, sound, photography, editing, and manipulating space (symbolic use of negative space) and time. Likewise, Molina (2018: 3) posits that the aesthetics of a Slow Cinema film can connote emptiness, moving of time, sterility, spatial relations between characters and objects, and abstract themes or concepts that accompany slow rhythmic storytelling. Below, I

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demonstrate how Weerasethakul's audiovisual language fractures and complicates the slow narrative and how it makes *Uncle Boonmee* highly introspective and sphinxlike.

The syntax in *Uncle Boonmee* involves long takes filmed in static frames, and less frequently, movements of the camera and characters. These techniques contribute to expanding time, freezing it in a temporal ambience, and obscuring and letting the characters and spectators immerse themselves in space and time. In most scenes, Weerasethakul uses lighting, composition, and colour to valorise the setting, and therefore decisively inhibit the spectator from isolating the figure from the background. Weaving together the otherworldly and earthly, Weerasethakul establishes long sequences of silence and dialogue enhanced by elliptical editing. Mohamed et al. (2016: 2) maintain that the most immediate strategy for a Slow Cinema director is not to tell a straightforward plot but rather to allow the images to linger in the imagination, which can offer a kind of saturated realism of imageries that enflames a cogitating disposition in the spectator's soul. Weerasethakul, for instance, frames the ethereal landscapes in long shots that constitute what certain scholars (Pezzotta 2017: 44; Schrader 2018: 12) refer to as landscape *tableaux,* a regular feature of Slow Cinema. In presenting such tableaux, the camera offers an indeterminate perspective. Rather than explore specific information in the film, the camera puts the characters and the oneiric landscapes into question, calling on the spectator to engage the film's layered narrative.

Uncle Boonmee consists of many long-takes, which contribute to the film's slowness. First, the camera settles for a static frame and then includes characters and objects that do not move within the frame. Secondly, if there is any camera, character, or object movement, it is slow and minimal, making it noticeable to the spectator. Throughout the film, the camera is frequently stationary during dialogue, and this feature further emphasises the slowness of the long takes. The film thus functions within Hänsgen's (2011: 44) theorisation of "the aesthetics of still images", with stillness crafted using minimal movement both of camera and characters within the frame, long shots, long-takes, and depictions of landscapes fixed on the screen and repeated silence. Weerasethakul's visual style comprises characters lost in the painterly, broad, and overwhelming landscapes, with the camera, frames them more frequently in medium-long shots. On several occasions, the camera abandons its focus on the human subjects to sightsee the cosmos that environs them. For example, in a scene

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when Boonmee, Jen, and Tong are talking at the dinner table, the camera maintains enough distance to focus on the characters' surroundings, restricting the characters' outlines to an eighth of the screen. Correspondingly, when Huay leads Boonmee through an ethereal landscape, followed by Jen and Tong, the characters appear to be ambulating through a painting and can be separated from the backdrop only through their movement. In this case, Weerasethakul pertinently reminds the spectator that the landscape is consistent with the human form fused with its sceneries.

Uncle Boonmee is a densely textured film with a narrow colour range. Therefore, the landscapes chosen by the Thai director and his particular focus on texture and stylisation of lighting and colour to create a misty and dreamy temperament made the film look more painterly and accentuated the gloominess in Boonmee's world. The relatively strong stylisation in the film observed in the unreal colour of the landscape, where the water buffalo exists, the array of black and earthy yellow colours in Boonmee's funeral, and the full palette of jungle greens, pink and red for the ageing princess at the waterfall, recreate an engagement with the image. This recreation is similar to the precepts typically associated with painting. Additionally, stylisation encourages the spectator to muse and appreciate the surface of the image. In that connection, the still photography motif notably used by Weerasethakul as a stylisation device interrupts the narrative flow. It is also an effort to suspend time and hold on to the past in a way that questions temporal linearity in the film. By highlighting the presence of the photographic images of members of the Thai military and entering into dialogue with them through Boonmee, Weerasethakul draws attention to the self-reflexive potential of Slow Cinema in narrating remembrances of the past.

At the beginning of Boonmee's family reunion dinner, Weerasethakul uses the camera's distancing perspective, emphasising the "illusion of the three-dimensionality of the image, much like the chiaroscuro effect".[102] In the scene, both the camera's deep focus and chiaroscuro lighting give the illusion of subduing the present time of the image, in contrast with the inability of controlling Boonmee's fate. The camera gradually arrives at the dinner table. It makes the spectator aware of the space, time, and bond between Boonmee, Jen, and Tong, thus constituting an exploration of ideal family relations or representing a

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[102] "Italian for light and dark, *chiaroscuro* typically refers to bold contrasts between light and dark and the affect it has on the overall composition in a piece of art" (Brown 2002: 4-12).

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particular perfect world. Later, the camera reinforces the film's stoicism as the ghostly Huay is attending to a frail-looking Boonmee, who later recalls his past life as a nervous student incapable of pulling off a class presentation. In effect, the camera emphasises the two-dimensionality of the image, flattening it both superficially and symbolically. Boonmee and Huay are trapped within the two-dimensional space of the image as the severity of the otherworldly temporality comes to the fore.

As the jungle trek reaches its culmination, the camera abandons Huay, Jen, and Tong and dwells upon Boonmee, appearing behind him, ghostlike, more a fuzzy reflection of his inner thoughts. The camera tracking forward to follow Boonmee in a point-of-view (POV) shot hints that movement has finally lost its directionality, and it can no longer be described with certainty. For Pezzotta (2017: 48), tracking shots are rarely used in long takes and more so in Slow Cinema. Still, she advances the notion that tracking can be adopted to translate character's determination, and in this case, Boonmee's resolve to transmigrate to the afterlife. Therefore, Weerasethakul narrativises to the spectator that the expanded time cannot be relied upon as it goes forward and backwards – past, present, and future no longer exist in the film. The camera continues its preoccupation with the mystical by tentatively focusing on the monkey ghosts accompanying Boonmee to his final resting place. An eerie continuous soundtrack accompanies a long static frame of the landscape, which seems to expand the enigmatic moment of Boonmee's mortality or at least signify the immobility of death and the protagonist's successful foray into the cave of his birth.

Eventually, the camera uncovers the pale, sickly corporeal surface of Boonmee juxtaposed with Huay, representing the otherworldly and Jen, the earthly. As Huay conducts what is symbolic of the last rites in the cave shortly before Boonmee's death, the camera freezes and expands the present moment, creating a sense of alienation, dreamy reality, and life passing. The spectator is seemingly obliged to watch Boonmee melt into his stonewashed wall surrounding. As Boonmee's life ebbs into the otherworldly, a new kind of slowness takes effect – one that brings the spectator into the natural world in the subsequent static frame of the landscape, indicating a different temporality. Weerasethakul's manipulation of off-screen space dwells on the passive diegetic sounds of the landscape and the odd conversations of the characters in the film. In particular, the off-screen sounds are transformed to reflect the characters' mental states and amplify the spectator's sensory

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perception. Harrison (2017: 4) sees what is onscreen in a film as what the camera envisages for the viewer within its frame, while the off-screen entails actions, sounds and spaces that a viewer imagines or adds to a cinematic frame to fill out its meaning. The idea of off-screen sound in *Uncle Boonmee* is rendered, for example, when the wraithlike Huay manipulates the negative space at the dinner scene while speaking with Boonmee and Jen. Later, the camera lingers on Boonsong against the off-screen diegetic sounds and dialogues of his hosts. Then afterwards, the off-screen dialogue between Boonmee and Huay in the cave as the moon assumes the full onscreen view. The present analysis concludes that the manipulation of off-screen space in Slow Cinema, using diegetic sound and dialogue, invokes the spectator's emotional responses in a way that prompts an undistilled tryst with different temporalities and narrative provocations.

As regards the soundtrack, there is little more than one hour of dialogue in the entire film. Otherwise, the scenes in *Uncle Boonmee* are linked by a frail tempo fading in the soundscape of the cinematic jungle that Weerasethakul has created. The images are accompanied by the total absence of noise in some scenes. In others, silence is broken by the chirping of crickets and birds, the whistling of eerie creatures, and the hypnotic musical underscoring that escorts the ageing and lonely princess to the luminous waterfall. The intermediation and reordering of the soundscapes within "the lived space into the cinematic experience" that forms Weerasethakul's diegesis narrativises "a sense of character interiority and perception through the use of subjective sound" (Lovatt 2013: 63). Thanks to Weerasethakul's "primitive" film style and dense sound mix in *Uncle Boonmee*, the departed speak with the incarnate, and animals speak to humans. In my considered view, this interchange pointedly deepens the spectator's understanding of how a Slow Cinema film makes meaning in much more constructive terms. The following section highlights the importance of considering idiosyncratic modes of cinematic and spectator address when conceptualising Slow Cinema.

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3.3.3 The vraisemblablisation of Uncle Boonmee's narrative

The term *vraisemblance* was developed by the seventeenth-century French dramatic theorists in the dramatic literature of Classicism.[103] They defined it as the prescribed principle of respect for the norm or the existence of a relation of inference between the particular behaviour ascribed to a given character and a given, general axiom (Genette & Gorman 2001: 241). In other words, as Phillips (1978: 267) enlightens, it is the upholding "of the spectator's belief in the stage action" that the French dramatic theorists saw as an effective way of communicating a moral lesson to the audience. The spectator is, ideally, led to believe that he is a witness at an actual event. Norman (1989: 141-142), however, contends that *vraisemblance* can be a difficult concept to define if the concern with the plot's plausibility (*sjužet*) is considered. For Norman, this concern with conceivability is what the Aristotelian tradition calls the first kind of *vraisemblance*, dealing with what naturally happens instead of a second kind that deals with what happens rarely but not seldom enough to be implausible or improbable.

The distinction is important enough for Bruyn (1993: 82) to argue for the case of structuralist critics who have expressed rigorously the view that the process by which *strange texts* are naturalised or made to resemble familiar styles of order is called *vraisemblablisation* or naturalisation. This concept, according to the structuralists, transpires at various levels, the simplest being the text's adaptation to a conformist, reasonable notion of reality and the next, of *vraisemblance* as a genre consisting of a set of literary norms to which texts may be interrelated and under which they become intelligible and meaningful. The *vraisemblable* in this sense should be whatever tradition makes seemly or probable in a particular genre. There are as many versions of *vraisemblance* as there are genres (Culler 1975: 162).

Additionally, *vraisemblance* has been defined as the correspondence of a text to some cultural model, which is already accepted as natural and understood (Roth 1985: 180), or as the visual authenticity of a given piece of art that suspends the disbelief of the spectator.

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[103] *Vraisemblance* [vʀɛsãblãs] means the appearance of truth: 'plausibility', 'verisimilitude' or 'in all likelihood'. Consider the example by (Culler 1975:169) of *invraisemblable*, such as "She asked for her carriage and went to bed". This is *invraisemblable* because "it deviates from an accepted logic of human actions, but it can be naturalised by additions which would bring it within the pale of accepted cultural models, 'for she was extremely capricious', where labeling makes deviation intelligible".

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In that regard, it would be permissible to modify the facts for the art to be accepted by the reader (Orr 1981: 202) or as a delicate balance between the natural and the supernatural (Cuillé 2005: 175). Culler (1975: 164) places a premium on the general framework of *vraisemblance*, which he argues constitutes five levels. First, "the socially given text taken as the "real world", second, and almost indistinguishable from the first, a general cultural text entailing shared knowledge, which would be accepted by participants as part of the culture" and hence subject to alteration but which nonetheless serves as a kind of "nature". The third level holds that there are texts or conventions of a genre regarded as artificial *vraisemblance*. At the same time, the fourth one might be called the natural attitude to the artificial, where the text overtly cites and exposes *vraisemblance* of the third kind to bolster its authority. Finally, the fifth level of *vraisemblance* is more complex because it demands specific intertextualities. One work takes another as its source or point of departure and must be adjusted to it.

Figure 3.2 (Apichatpong Weerasethakul 2010) represents *vraisemblance* depicting the director's exaggeration of the notion of existentialism, which in the context of his film, suggests that sometimes the dead come back and even live with humans. In essence, there is no line between life and death.

Figure 3.2: *Huay (left), Boonmee's deceased wife, appears in the realm of preternatural, hence vraisemblance (Weerasethakul 2010)*

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I will now ground the *vraisemblablisation* of *Uncle Boonmee* through Weerasethakul's filmic vision and the cultural generalisations of Thailand, especially in light of Slow Cinema being chiefly associated with the suspended temporalities of the mundane. Essential to my argument is that the principle of *vraisemblance* can be of central concern in the architecture of the narrative of slowness and how Weerasethakul leads the spectators to believe that they are witnesses to the supernatural. Concerning the five levels of *vraisemblance*, I contend that the first level acts as a transition between the worldly and the otherworldly presented in *Uncle Boonmee*. Weerasethakul takes the spectator as a collaborator and a confidante, who shares his interests and knowledge of the exotic remoteness of the *Isan* culture in Thailand's northeast, and in particular, what makes the story of reincarnation much more real or believable, which is the cultural text, the second level of *vraisemblance*. Weerasethakul seeks to augment "a new layer of simulated memory in the spectator's experience", with the spectator's knowledge capital of transmigration, normalised communion with the dead, and karma as the stimuli (Weerasethakul 2010: 4). As such, the spectator recognises these beliefs as part of the Thai director's culture, hence shared knowledge, which impacts how the film is read. In Weerasethakul's own words cited in *Uncle Boonmee*'s press book (2010: 4):

> I believe in the transmigration of souls between humans, plants, animals, and ghosts. When these events are represented, in this case, through [a Slow Cinema film], they become shared memories of the crew, the cast, and the public.

About the third level of a genre's conventions, the narrative and clichés in which the story of *Uncle Boonmee* is told have been fully conventionalised or naturalised in such genres as horror, science fiction and fantasy. We take as natural that ghosts take part in our daily lives, even joining us at the dinner table sometimes and accepting the gifts that we send to them. In that respect, *Uncle Boonmee* fulfils the conventions of its genre and addresses the main issues faced in the marginalised regions of Thailand while indicating the universality of its concerns. Therefore, it is crucial to submit that *Uncle Boonmee* has not ideally been presented to the spectator as an allegory. It has been conventionalised and naturalised as the *vraisemblable*. The fourth type of *vraisemblance* is evident in *Uncle Boonmee* through the author's omniscient point of view. Weerasethakul is in control and narrates to the spectators whatever is pertinent to the story and their understanding. For instance, he explains Boonmee's character and the events surrounding him as the narrative progresses.

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The information he reveals later in the story about Boonmee, concerning his past lives and dreams for the future, does not contradict what the spectator has already received.

Lastly, the fifth level of *vraisemblance* of intertextualities exists in *Uncle Boonmee* in the form of allusions. *Vraisemblance,* in this way, reveals the ideological and philosophical norms of Thailand and the cultural codes. *Vraisemblablisation,* therefore*,* stresses the importance of cultural models as sources of coherence and meaning in *Uncle Boonmee*. Culler (1975: 165) terms this as *cultural vraisemblance*, where a range of cultural stereotypes or accepted knowledge, which a work of art may use, are recognised as generalisations by the culture itself. In this case, the spectator of *Uncle Boonmee* is aware of these generalisations or cultural categories presented in the film, which may oversimplify the narrative but at least make the universe of the story initially lucid and consequently play a key role in its naturalisation process. Weerasethakul (2010: 4) asserts that he is more concerned with "the destruction and extinction of cultures and species". He recalls the history of nationalism in Thailand, characterised by military coups and its attendant clash of ideologies. He also decries establishing a state agency that acts as a moral policeman to ban what it deems to be inappropriate activities and to destroy their contents. The story of *Uncle Boonmee* is related to Weerasethakul's resistance to this mockery of art in Thailand.

As a result of *vraisemblance*, the characters in a Slow Cinema film act and react as the spectator might be expected to respond if they were placed in the same situations. This observation is the root of Orr's (1981: 206) claim that narrative is estranged when the characters' reactions or sense of the world are different from the assumed audience. Through *vraisemblablisation*, Weerasethakul centralises the view that Boonmee's reality does not exist outside of the film. Therefore, the spectator is obliged to be curious about the character's present and past lives, get emotionally involved in his fate, and the significance and appropriateness of his actions. This *vraisemblance* creates a work remarkably different in technique, aim, and tone compared to mainstream films. Weerasethakul intended to use distinct possibilities of the filmic language to create in the spectator. Several devices of slowness, the illusions of Uncle Boonmee's characters undergoing something profoundly personal and spiritual, can become part of the shared knowledge of *vraisemblance*. The different types of *vraisemblance* discussed here put *Uncle Boonmee*'s narration as a Slow Cinema film at the intersection of coherence and reflexivity, making it *vraisemblable* to the

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spectator. Attending to the thematic concerns of *Uncle Boonmee* exposes another distinct mode of address increasingly associated with Slow Cinema's narrative expressiveness and how it seeks to move and affect the spectator, as discussed in the section that follows.

3.3.4 Uncle Boonmee as a slow dream vision

The typical dream vision was a popular literary form of the later Middle Ages, with Chaucer's[104] the *Book of the Duchess*, Langland's *Piers Plowman*, and the Gawain Poet's *Pearl* being the most outstanding examples by English writers in the later fourteenth century. The dream vision takes advantage of medieval dream psychology's tolerance of the notion that "some dreams could communicate wisdom to the dreamer. The source of the dream might be God, the devil or natural causes" (Russell 1988: 5). The phenomenon of dream visions is relevant to narratology in the context of Purgał's (2010: 45) interpretation of the dream vision as the purview of the spirit, and a meeting place with the supernatural, the enigmatic, and the otherworldly, because for the writer, fantasy itself originates on a dream. Russel (1988: 6) acknowledges that the dream vision's popularity was not limited to England, and Chaucer's dream visions convey their indebtedness to the work of French writers. Wellesley (2018: 1) highlights that the genre faded out in the Renaissance. Still, she aims explicitly to insist that the dream vision was a rich and varied form put to multiple uses with a wide range of sources, from the Bible to Boethius, allowing authors to enter peculiar realms, which bent the rules of time and space. The flexibility of the rules, which govern the world of dreams, meant that the form could be used for mystical experience, religious and philosophical explorations, advisory literature, consolation, courtly comedy, or social critique.[105]

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[104] Russell (1988:3-10) further postulates that as a poet and author, Geoffrey Chaucer has been styled the "Father of English literature", especially because his literary works were fundamental to the dream vision impression. He wrote four dream visions during a period from around 1368 to 1388: the *Book of the Duchess*, *the House of Fame*, *the parliament of Fowls*, and *the Legend of Good Women*. All of them are ostensibly concerned with matters of courtly love, though in different ways and to differing degrees.

[105] Boethius (c. 480-524/525) an Italian senator, consul, and magister officiorum was one of the most influential early medieval philosophers. His most famous work, *The Consolation of Philosophy*, is traditionally viewed as the last great work of the Classical era and had a major influence on medieval philosophy but it also profoundly influenced early Renaissance thought in Europe. For more information on Boethius see Fox S. (1999).

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Russell (1988: 5-6) exposed the notion of the dream vision as having "its origin in the interstices of two parallel taxonomies in medieval thought, taxonomies of real and literary dreams". He notes that Chaucer's dream visions, for example, sometimes have earthly settings (the *Book of the Duchess, the Parlement of Foules*; also, *Piers Plowman*); and occasionally otherworldly (the *House of Fame*). They sometimes feature preternatural animals like the talking birds of the *House of Fame* and the *Parlement of Foules*. The animals are either realistic details, illustrative or symbolic, like the puppy and the hart in the *Book of the Duchess*. Likewise, Russel challenged conventional thinking about events reported in dream visions, declaring that such events could have been gratuitous, haphazard representations of memories and thoughts that have given imaginary life in the figment of the dreamer's imagination. Undisputed, though, "the dreamer is frequently depicted as depressed, troubled, and alienated from the comforts of society". He may be suffering from love indolence or be in lamentation, or he may be distressed from a graver, more inescapable torment or dejection (Russel 1988: 116).

This portrayal is similar to the central figure in Slow Cinema. The dream vision, as I illustrate in my examination of *Uncle Boonmee,* can be situated within a Slow Cinema film because it can provide a mode of expression for religious mysticism or indecipherable spirituality as a motif in the narrative (Purgał 2010: 40); explore the psychological experience of the individual (John 2016: 4), and create a complex aesthetic that conveys messages about real-world issues about society, removed enough to minimize chances of adverse consequences (Boyle 2012: 193). Since the dream vision is characterised by Spatio-temporal discontinuities that are very much like cuts in a film, it can enable the slow narrative to leap from one place or situation freely, or one position in a place or situation, to another (Curry 1974: 83); and finally, by its very nature, the dream vision can place a Slow Cinema film "clearly in the realm of imaginative mental activities with physical, mundane causes" (Russell 1988: 57).

Taking on a broader perspective of the dream vision's narrative structure, (Russell 1988: 5) explains that "a dream vision is the first-person account of a dream". Russell adds that "the *dream report* is usually heralded by a *prologue* introducing the dreamer as a character and often followed by an *epilogue* describing the dreamer's reawakening and recording the dream report in verse" (Russell 1988: 5). Though typically short and oblique, the prologue is

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by far the most methodised and prescribed part of the dream vision. Wellesley (2018) remarks that dream visions are usually narrative and generally written in verse. She further outlines two essential features of a dream vision, characterised by a narrator falling asleep, known as the *frame narrative*. Very often, the narrator navigates this unfamiliar realm with the help of a trustworthy guide.

Along with establishing the frame narrative, (Russel 1988: 5) accepts Wellesley's proposition, adding that the purpose of the prologue seems to be to introduce the personality of the dreamer-character. It is here that the spectator often learns that the dreamer was distressed or concerned about some unspecified problem or anxiety, such that he found it hard to get to sleep "on that fateful night". Russell (1988: 5) describes structures of understanding that privilege the dream vision following the introductory frame narrative, where the *dream report* begins. The dream is usually a record of a discussion or less formal conversation with one or more characters, sometimes real, sometimes symbolic. Usually, there are several conversers and various discussion topics with the protagonist as the singular figure of authority. Russell (1988: 5) further argues that, for the most part, "there seems to be no particular narrative shape to the story, which is the heart of the dream vision". In such cases, unnatural light, motifs described by others, a personified figure of authority or talking animals are common but not statutory. Of particular interest in Russell's supposition is the dream report's immense contribution to the story. "At its conclusion, there is often a brief framing epilogue describing the reawakening of the dreamer and occasionally offering explanatory comments on the dream report" (Russel 1988: 5). For Russell, the upshot is that, in any case, the concluding frame gives the narrative a technical or formal closure that the dream report frequently lacks (Russell 1988: 6).

While Russell (1988: 6) describes "the form of the dream vision as a lengthy dream report framed by a brief prologue and epilogue", Purgał (2010: 39) and Wellesley (2018: 1) distinguish distinct stages of a dream vision in much more graphic terms. First, Purgał and Wellesley argue that the dreamer, almost always a male, falls asleep amid some life crisis or emotional impasse. Second, he finds himself in a picturesque natural place, often an enclosed garden filled with beautiful plants and animals. Third, he encounters a guide figure who instructs and leads him to one or more allegorical visions (vision embedded within other visions). The fourth stage of a dream vision entails the dreamer interrogating the guide figure

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about the significance of the visions. Still, this does not produce satisfactory results. At the same time, in the fifth stage, something within the dream causes the dreamer to awaken before the full significance of the dream can be illuminated. However, the audience is left with a few critical choices, which are likely to stimulate debate about important cultural values in contention or undergoing change. While the dream vision may arguably not be a feature unique to Slow Cinema, I emphasise that *Uncle Boonmee*, by and of itself a Slow Cinema film, comprises dreams and recollections of otherworldly creatures (not only humans) and enthralling landscapes, akin to dream visions in Chaucer's medieval era. Figure 3.3 (Apichatpong Weerasethakul 2010) illustrates the dream vision, a narrative motif in *Uncle Boonmee*, characterised by Spatio-temporal discontinuities akin to cuts in a film and placing the dream marvel in the realm of imaginative mental activities.

Figure 3.3: *The spectator is plunged directly into the dream visions of Boonmee and other characters in the film (Weerasethakul 2010)*

I now examine Weerasethakul's dream vision narrative and, in particular, his suppositions about dreaming that provide valuable source material for Slow Cinema in the context of enigmatic spiritualism and the psychological experience of the spectator. I demonstrate how Weerasethakul, as a dream-auteur, exploited contemporary hesitations about dreams to create a mystical work of art revolving around the character-dreamer-narrative. Also, how he uses the form of a dream vision to call the experiences of the earthly into question, rather than simply a stylistic device. The sense of otherness and supernaturalism in *Uncle*

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Boonmee quite naturally resembles dream-work in its imaginary and visionary dimension, with its structure characterising a dream vision. The presence of some of the motifs that Weerasethakul has used in *Uncle Boonmee* makes this claim plausible. In adopting the problematic discourse about reincarnation, limitations of the human body, and the esoteric knowledge contingency, Weerasethakul enabled the dream vision form. For the spectator, looking at *Uncle Boonmee* as a dream vision reveals important information about the characters and events in the film. Like dream visions, the film draws on the subliminal, allowing an insight into the mind and feelings of the characters, and offering a narrative that can be a psychological mirror and gateway to the inner self of the spectator, who has a share in a kind of collective dream with the titular character.

About generic style, it would be significant to note that a filmmaker's choice of a genre is a self-conscious one, and the resulting film is, at least in that filmmaker's mind, a fantasy, horror, drama or a dream vision. Russell (1988: 2) makes this presupposition perspicuous when he affirms that "to be a dream vision, a work of art [poem, play, novel or film] must contain specific motifs and be the product of the artist's intention to follow a tradition or imitate a generic model". Furthermore, he holds that this intricate and "rigorous set of requirements is necessary in this case because the dream vision in late medieval English literature is more than a conventional frame or authenticating device". Applying Russel's terms to the opening sequence of *Uncle Boonmee*'s dream vision, the film opens with a prologue of Boonmee, which states:

> Facing the jungle, the hills, and vales, my past lives as an animal and other
> beings rise before me (Weerasethakul 2010).

As manifest in the prologue, the dream vision begins by asserting its expressiveness, though it soon reveals the practical inexpressibility or indeterminacy of the plot. The dream report follows the prologue with its enigmatic but hypnotic images of the oneiric landscape, the restless water buffalo, and a monkey ghost. The fact that the image of the water buffalo occurs straight away into the film's dream report is significant in that it demonstrates the oppressiveness and imminence of the natural world, making escapism much less challenging to attain. The dream report by itself entails tauntingly enigmatic images for spectators who are not privy to Boonmee's unnamed distress; the image demands a reaction of what Russell (1988: 118) calls "hushed, respectful ignorance." For example, the

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eerie image of the red-eyed monkey ghost bellows its meaningfulness but remains silent on its meaning. Weerasethakul presents the image to demonstrate that the ritual drama of the film is, so far, beyond the reach of the spectator. Solely, the dream vision could be a valuable device for evading authorial influence. The director requires the spectators to decide whether they have any claim to broader revelations in *Uncle Boonmee*.

Boonmee's dream report may be challenging to categorise, as it is a part of the present reality experienced spiritually in another dimension, which directly influences his waking life. Nevertheless, all Boonmee's dreams, visions, and premonitions are fragmented scrapings of his past life. In presenting *Uncle Boonmee* as a dream vision, Weerasethakul earnestly exploits experimental realism by merging his memories with Boonmee's. In an interview with Howard Feinstein (2011), Weerasethakul recounts that the series of still photos in the film evoking the political situation in Thailand was, in fact, his actual dreams.[106] Fundamentally, Weerasethakul is the dreamer-auteur, and *Uncle Boonmee* is his *dream report*. Weerasethakul (2011: 2) indicates:

> I wanted to use my memory. I dreamt about this picture while I was making the installation. So, I wrote the script while I was making the installation and also recycled it in the feature film. It is about recycling, the reincarnation of the script, and my memory of this teenager with whom I worked in the region.

Moreover, in a *CinemaScope* review, Weerasethakul acknowledged his intention to work with a version of the time-image construct in *Uncle Boonmee*, where he wanted to suggest the idea of time disruption that the film is not dealing with one reality.[107] He further declares in the film's press kit (Weerasethakul 2010: 6) that he "loves his movies to operate like a stream of consciousness, drifting from one remembrance to another". Weerasethakul thinks it is vital "to accentuate this drifting when the root of the film is about reincarnation and wandering spirits". For example, the ageing princess' dream vision is juxtaposed sharply with the real world, which causes her such distress. This dreamlike sequence comes off as a myth or folk tale, delicately embedded into the film, perhaps as a recollection of one of Boonmee's past lives. When the princess finally has intercourse with the catfish, the whole

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[106] See Feinstein (2011: 1): https://filmmakermagazine.com/19141-past-tense/#.YQ1daNQzbIU Accessed: 2019 /05/05.
[107] Peranson and Kong (2010: 1). http://cinema-scope.com/spotlight/spotlight-ghost-in-the-machine-apichatpong-weerasethakuls-letter-to-cinema/ Accessed: 2019/05/06.

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sequence adopts an unreal, ghostly, and erotic dream vision. Boonmee himself is a different kind of dreamer because his spatial relation to his dream worlds is subjective. He enters the dream-vision as an agent and not just a spectator. In other words, the space of his dream world is not merely visual – it can be fallen through. Our relationship as spectators to space in Boonmee's dream visions and his relationship to it is the same. We are in Boonmee's dream just as he is. The director intends to make Boonmee's dream visions the spectator's dream visions. Weerasethakul makes the space of his film world vivid and two-dimensional, even authentically present to the spectator to inhabit it. In the closing sequence involving Jen and Tong, for example, Weerasethakul hints that the scene gently challenges the movie's time and reference points, hoping that in the end, the audiences are the ones who are transported (Weerasethakul 2010: 6). According to Curry (1974: 86), the tendency to see dreams on the model of two-dimensional images goes deep in the spectator, which is expressed in the individual's experience as a sense of psychic bi-presence. Boonmee is both in his dream and not in his dream at the same time. One feels that the dream is in his head but that it is also not in his head.

Boonmee seems to prefer death to the torment of living with kidney disease and to an extent in the reality of his dreams, which have nothing to do with blissful daydreams. Dream visions help Boonmee to come to terms with himself and with the other. The power of dream visions is thus the medium of learning and experiencing another reality for the spectators and solving the crucial existential crisis that poses a threat to Boonmee's life. The dream vision provides the realm and instrument of probing into the nature of life and death and allowing maintenance of the equilibrium, as the world order. Weerasethakul embeds his dream vision within other visions in *Uncle Boonmee*, multiplying the trustworthy guide figures (Huay, Boonsong, and Monkey ghosts) in the process. He also develops the personalities of both Boonmee as the dreamer and Huay as the trustworthy guide figure until they approach the kind of roundness that gives off the illusion of realness. The guide figures in the film are subtly layered, transforming their paired identities from dead wife to caring wife and mother for Huay, and lost son to monkey ghost, to caring son for Boonsong, and thus plunging the film towards the central ambiguities of human existence. Weerasethakul's dreamer undergoes dreams within dreams; for example, when he falls asleep in the cave, he witnesses the future within his dream and even clarifies its meaning, depicting the film's immense density and layering. In the dream, Boonmee envisions soldiers apprehending and

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leashing the monkey ghosts, with youthful citizens seemingly rioting and throwing rocks. Boonmee tells Jen and Huay:

> Last night I dreamt of the future. I arrived there in a sort of time machine. An authority capable of making anybody disappear ruled the future city. When the authorities found "past people," they shone a light on them. The light projected images from their past onto a screen until they arrived in the future. Once these images appeared, these "past people" disappeared. I was afraid of being captured by the authorities because I had many friends in the future. I ran away. But wherever I ran, they still found me. They asked me if I knew this road or that road. I told them I didn't know. And then I disappeared (Weerasethakul 2010).

In this instance, the dream sequence blurs temporal realities by telling the memory of a past dream set in the future. The images recall the military presence and communist revolution during the postwar era in Thailand, calling to mind more recent political contexts, such as the Bangkok street riots of 2010, when political strife led to mass protests and violence meted by the country's armed forces. Indeed, the dream vision offers the kind of contemplation associated with Slow Cinema. The spectators are invited to treat the dream report in the present case of *Uncle Boonmee* as an important, even otherworldly message only intentionally placed on an indeterminate and minimalist plane. The dream vision can also be a self-consciously metaphorical and cursorily naturalistic narrative device situated within the Slow Cinema tradition. "The dreamer is always a character in his dream narrative" (Wellesley 2018: 1) – as the case may be with Weerasethakul embedding his dream vision within Boonmee's character. In all of these, "the only constant seems to be the complex central figure of the dreamer-narrator-character, unlike most absent, infallible, disengaged medieval narrators" (Wellesley 2018: 1).

In summary, *Uncle Boonmee*'s mode of address exposes Slow Cinema as experiential, where narrative, minimalism, and indeterminacy are primary to the embodied experience of the spectator. In other words, the film brings to the fore how a Slow Cinema film can address the spectator without making overt meaning its guiding code. By addressing the narrativisation of slowness, vraisemblance, and the dream vision in Weerasethakul's film, this close reading has demonstrated how Slow Cinema addresses its audience and how it is touching in its effect because of its narrative development. Yet, it would be incorrect to suggest that *Uncle Boonmee* is the most compelling exploration of slowness in narrative, minimalism, and indeterminacy simply because of its narration. Unlike Weerasethakul, Béla

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Tarr, whose film I examine below, does not necessarily employ a coherent narrative. Instead, he balances narrative, minimalism, and indeterminacy seamlessly, so much so that the film's slow mode of address, its syntax, and its thematic concern permeate the spectator's cinematic experience in distinct ways different from Weerasethakul's coherence. Each auteur is known for a particular film style, and each has a storied past regarding different themes in varied forms. A textual analysis of *The Turin Horse* (2010) therefore means considering how Tarr has expressed the philosophical notion of existential nihilism visually, through bleak imagery rather than through narrative development within the framework of Slow Cinema.

3.4 Stylising Friedrich Nietzsche's Existential Nihilism through Cinematic Slowness: Béla Tarr and *The Turin Horse* (2011)

The present study is the first to investigate how Nietzsche's nihilism has been stylised through slowness in Béla Tarr's *The Turin Horse*. The structure of this analysis follows a linear approach. Firstly, I sketch the starting point for Friedrich Nietzsche's nihilism while incorporating the views of prominent and contemporary existential philosophers. Secondly, I briefly examine existential thinking in cinema while listing examples of modern Slow Cinema directors who have argued for the absurd in their artistic work following the premise of Nietzsche's existential nihilism. Lastly, I discuss how nihilism lends itself to Tarr's film *The Turin Horse*, both in slow narrative and in form, whilst questioning the ideals of human existence and exploring the themes of anguish, alienation, nothingness, absurdity, apocalypse, and transcendence.

3.4.1 Revisiting Nietzsche's Nihilism

Nihilism was one of Nietzsche's primary metaphysical concerns.[108] Yet, he never himself produced a well-documented account of nihilism, with much of the subject's material found in his notebooks remaining largely unpublished.[109] Martin Heidegger became preoccupied with Nietzsche's writings on nihilism, which he adeptly recuperated and presented in his 1940 lectures at the University of Freiburg and then published in the 1961 Neske edition of

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[108] Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche (1844-1900) was a modern German philosopher, cultural critic, composer, poet, philologist, and Latin Greek scholar. He is recognized for inventing a unique philosophy based on compulsive self-consciousness and constant self-revision. See Safranski and Frisch (2003).

[109] Detailed analysis and criticism of nihilism can be found in *Nietzsche* by Martin Heidegger (Volumes Three and Four) Farrell Krell D.F. ed. (1991).

Heidegger's *Nietzsche* (Heidegger & Krell 1991: ix). For Heidegger, Nietzsche's philosophy represented the embodiment of modern nihilism and the consummation of Western Metaphysics. In keeping with the meaning of "nihilism", it is widely agreed upon that the term first gained currency in the pre-revolutionary France, "yet very little has been said to clarify the background of this first, more or less generalised usage" as stated by Tuusvuori (2000: 546). However, White (1987: 30) suggests that the history of how the term "nihilism" has been used is of negligible importance both for Nietzsche and for philosophy.

About the above assertions, Crosby (1988) affirms that as its name implies (from Latin *nihil*, 'nothing'), nihilism is a philosophy of negation, rejection, or denial of some or all aspects of thought or life. Nihilism can be traced in theological, political and literary writings of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries in Europe. Crosby claims that during this period, the term was sometimes used to refer to atheism and its alleged inability to provide support for knowledge and morality or impart purpose to human life. Although Crosby quite amply describes the notion of nihilism, Nietzsche himself avows the definition of nihilism, describing it as a phenomenon where *the uppermost values devaluate themselves*. Heidegger then brings the concept of Nietzsche's nihilism to the fore, suggesting that the term refers to the process of the devaluation of the highest values. However, he is keen to clarify that the decline of these values hitherto was not one historical occurrence among many others but was instead the actual event of Western history, sustained and guided by metaphysics (Heidegger & Krell 1991: 203-204). There would seem to be an urgent need to reassess some definitions that have become part of nihilism. Still, my intention in the sections that follow is to evaluate several interpretations of Nietzsche's nihilism that provide a coalescing thread connecting the main themes in Béla Tarr's, *The Turin Horse* as a Slow Cinema film.

In the endeavour to contextualise adaptations of the term "nihilism", Tuusvuori (2000: 578) warns that Nietzsche's place in the history of nihilism ought to be outlined. His work presents a unique watershed in the conceptual history of nihilism. In particular reference to its usage, Veit (2018: 211-213) concedes that nihilism is often seen as a derogative term for a destructive, 'life-denying and perhaps most depressive philosophy drove existentialists to write about the right response to a meaningless universe devoid of purpose. Veit, though stresses that even though Nietzsche is often given as an example for a nihilist, most of his

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work is directed against the destructive consequences of nihilism – once God has been replaced by science or more accurately where science left a hole after getting rid of God. Even more so, for Woolfolk (1990: 105), nihilism is often associated with two closely related but opposing theoretical approaches. The first approach identifies nihilism with the denial of either Christian faith or Platonic reason and in effect with the negation of visions of a transcendent reality. The second, more recent approach is more prevalent. It links the understanding of nihilism to Nietzsche, who, through his writings on the subject, is widely considered the first and leading theorist to turn the idea of nihilism decisively against both Platonic reason and Christian faith. Apart from Heidegger's lectures, Nietzsche's nihilism can be identified in the works of many other theorists such as (Camus 1942, Goudsblom 1980; Sartre 1946). Whether Nietzsche's writings involve "negative nihilism" or "positive nihilism" is beyond the scope of this analysis because arguments for and against Nietzsche's nihilism are complex and varied. Still, as Heidegger and Krell (1991: 201) put it, the bare name of nihilism says little because it fluctuates in ambiguity.

As such, the explication of nihilism in this context relies on the writings of philosophers in the empiricist tradition (who ascribe to existential nihilism) to map out various Nietzschean manifestations in *The Turin Horse* as relates to Slow Cinema. Crosby (1988) does well to elaborate multiple forms of nihilism, summarised first as epistemological nihilism, which in his assessment refutes the possibility of extenuating or criticising claims to knowledge. Secondly, holding that cosmic nihilism tends to regard nature as either wholly incomprehensible and unambiguously, unsympathetic to fundamental human concerns or identifiable only in the sense of being compliant to scientific description and explanation. Thirdly, Crosby asserts that moral nihilism discards any prospect of modifying or criticising moral judgments. In contrast, political nihilism calls for the widespread destruction of prevailing political establishments, along with their supporting stances and collective structures. Lastly, in Crosby's critical philosophical approach, existential nihilism disaffirms the meaning of human life, judging it to be incorrigibly purposeless, useless, and absurd. Existential nihilism is thus the focus of this analysis because existential nihilists promote the idea that human existence has no purpose, value, or justification, similar to Béla Tarr's theorisation of *The Turin Horse*. Like Crosby, Veit (2018: 211) views existential nihilism as the denial of meaning and purpose – stemming at least from the fact that though life is without value and the universe bereft of purpose, man still longs for meaning, significance,

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and purpose. In this sense, there is no reason to exist, and yet we persist in doing so. In this respect, central to Crosby's claim is the notion that the human situation is absurd. According to advocates of existential nihilism, chief among them the prominent German philosopher Arthur Schopenhauer (1788-1860), a life that ends in annihilating death cannot be said to have meaning (Schopenhauer 2000: 69). There is too much suffering, or the constant threat of suffering, in human life for it to be meaningful. Schopenhauer's summation of existential nihilism lays the groundwork for analysing existential nihilism in *The Turin Horse* as a Slow Cinema film.

3.4.2 Existential Nihilism in Slow Cinema

Despite the negative connotations associated with existential nihilism, Veit (2018: 214) avers that this kind of philosophy is a concept taken as a widespread view in the modern world and from which existential philosophy takes off. Veit's assertion is tentatively sufficient for this analysis to appreciate the diagnostic dimension of the role of art in the body of Nietzsche's philosophical work. Ulfers and Cohen (2007: 2) demonstrate that virtually all Nietzschean scholars have laid out Nietzsche's views on art. The first view is associated with Nietzsche's "The Birth of Tragedy from the Spirit of Music" and rooted in his analysis of Greek tragedy.[110] The tragedy gave Nietzsche his conception of the difference between the Apollinian and Dionysian forms of artistic imagination. He characterised these art forms (Apollinian and Dionysian) as two differing interpretations of the world. In Nietzsche's conception, art carries the capability and responsibility of transmitting the total weight of the philosopher's ontological vision – a tragic insight into a world of becoming. Steven (2017: 107) asks the fundamental question, "Why should cinematic narrative be so frequently preoccupied with Nietzsche, to begin with?" The answer is more complex than simply the making of moving images with a touch of philosophy. It may indeed reside in Steven's justification of cinema itself being the favoured medium for developing a suitably Nietzschean aesthetic.

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[110] "The Birth of Tragedy from the Spirit of Music" ("*Die Geburt der Tragödie aus dem Geiste der Musik*") is "a speculative rather than exegetical book by Friedrich Nietzsche first published in 1872. It examines the origins and development of poetry, specifically Greek tragedy". It contains Nietzsche's arguments on what he termed the fusion of Apollonian and Dionysian elements. See Nietzsche (1886/1992).

McHarg (2014) recognises an existential film as one that deals with a world and a life that is devoid of any preordained meaning, rules, or justice, and thus resulting in a confusing struggle to find personal meaning in an absurd world that presents no trace of it on its own. Consequently, contextualised adaptations of nihilism have emerged in cinematic usage involving some Slow Cinema directors either for narrative purposes or to advance particular ideologies in hopes that the spectator will get the message. According to the Harvard Film Archive (2006), some auteurs associated with Slow Cinema, including but not limited to Truffaut, Bergman, and Antonioni, have investigated the idea of existentialism articulated by French philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre in his 1943 discourse *Being and Nothingness*. Sartre maintains that man has nothing except he has first comprehended that he must count no one but himself. In other words, man is isolated and forsaken on earth amid his inestimable accountabilities, without assistance, with no other ambition than the one he sets himself. With no other purpose than the one, he forges for himself on this earth. Examples of Slow Cinema films that were inspired or expanded by existentialism and adapted their ideas for the screen include *The End* (MacLaine 1953) *Pickpocket* (Bresson 1959), *The Flower Thief* (Rice 1960), *The Condemned of Altona* (De Sica 1962) and *Crime and Punishment* (Sternberg 1935). These examples highlight the possibility and validity of a special place for nihilism within contemporary Slow Cinema. I argue that Slow Cinema is most directly associated with the social world, as mainly seen within the frameworks of existential philosophy.

3.4.3 Béla Tarr as an Artist-Philosopher

Speaking of probably the best candidate for the ultimate inspiration, Béla Tarr does well to observe Nietzsche's existential nihilism in *The Turin Horse*'s prologue narrated as a voice-over on a black screen:

> In Turin on January 3 1889, Friedrich Nietzsche steps out of the door of number six via Carlo Alberto, perhaps to take a stroll, possibly to go by the post office to collect his mail. Not far from him, or indeed very far removed from him, a cabman is having trouble with his stubborn horse. Despite all his urging, the horse refuses to move, at which point the cabman — Giuseppe Carlo Ettore, loses his patience and takes his whip to it. Nietzsche comes up to the throng and puts an end to the brutal scene of the cabman, who is foaming with rage by this time. The solidly built and full-moustached Nietzsche suddenly jumps up to the cab and throws his arms around the horse neck, sobbing. His neighbour takes him home,

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where he lies still and silent for two days on a divan until he mutters the obligatory last words: "Mutter, ich bin dummm" (Mother, I'm a fool) and lives for another ten years, gentle and demented, in the care of his mother and sisters. Of the horse, we know nothing (Béla Tarr 2011).

Nietzsche reinforced the idea of art as a preferred perspective of thinking, affirming that art is closest to the nature of things (Mahr 1994: 942). In this regard, Tarr tackles the philosophical problem of existence by drawing immediate inspiration from Nietzsche's work, which identifies him as an Artist-Philosopher. *The Turin Horse* is an affirmatively Nietzschean film whose gale anti-narrative takes Nietzsche's philosophy on existential nihilism as a narrative premise stylised into a unique visual style. Tarr (2011: 1) elucidates that his film is not about Nietzsche himself but a follow-up to what happened to the horse after the incident with Nietzsche. It is the spirit of the adventure that lies over the film like a shadow. The film stylises most of the themes that characterise existentialist thinking: the tension between man and the cosmos, contingency of human life, a fascination with liminal experiences of anxiety, emptiness or nothingness, absurdity, anguish and loneliness. *The Turin Horse* (A Torinói ló) follows the lives of a cabman, his daughter, and their horse in an atmosphere of poverty and a violent windstorm prefiguring the end of the world. The dying of the horse is the foundation of this tragic tale. The film won the Silver Bear award and FIPRESCI[111] Prize at the Berlin Film Festival in 2011. It was also the official selection at the New York Film Festival, the Toronto International Film Festival, and the Telluride Film Festival.

According to *The Cinema Guild* (2011), Béla Tarr was born in 1955 and grew up in Budapest, Hungary. He began making amateur documentaries at the age of 16 and shot his 1977 feature debut *Family Nest* at the age of 22, made with non-professional actors in a stark, realist style. His work made a dramatic shift with his 1982 video adaptation of *Macbeth,* comprising of only two shots. In subsequent films, Tarr developed a durational aesthetic revolving around extended shot lengths, most famously the 1994 seven-hour film, *Sátántangó*. The film was heavily influential in both the film and art worlds and of which Susan Sontag (quoted in Lee 2012: 1) said, "I'd be glad to see it every year for the rest of

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[111] Fédération Internationale de la Presse Cinématographique (The International Federation of Film Critics) for more information see: Rubashevska (2011): https://fipresci.org/awards/2011/ Accessed 03/04/2019.

my life."[112] Across the entire body of his work, Tarr has established himself as one of the most defining filmmakers of his time and a great innovator in the contemporary Slow Cinema tradition. Gus Van Sant (quoted in Sanz 2011: 6), another Slow Cinema auteur, says of Tarr's films:[113]

> Béla's works are organic and contemplative in their intentions rather than shortened and contemporary. They find themselves contemplating life in a way that is almost impossible watching an ordinary modern film. They get so much closer to the natural rhythms of life that it is like seeing the birth of a new cinema. He is one of the few genuinely visionary filmmakers.

Tarr's other existential films include *Damnation* (1988)*, Werckmeister Harmonies* (2001) and *The Man from London* (2007), which was nominated for the Palme d'Or in Cannes. In his commentary on *The Turin Horse*, Tarr (2011: 1) underscores that the film, which is "his bleakest of bleak films" and his proclaimed (possibly tentative) "swan song to cinema", is timeless because he did not feel the urge to set it in the present. He further suggests that he always wanted to show ordinary people in his films that everybody has dignity and a right to a happy existence. However, this is not always guaranteed in the world. If the Hungarian director prefers to show his audience the "world at its bleakest and most desperate, he seems to have gone to the extreme" with *The Turin Horse*. There is no glimmer of hope in the film, with Tarr himself commenting, as the Czech-born French writer Milan Kundera does, on "the unbearable lightness of being" that his film is about "unbearable heaviness of human existence". This remark signifies a stylisation of existential nihilism at its best. *The Turin Horse* appears to be more than a film because it was inspired by an episode that marked the end of Nietzsche's philosophical journey and, by design, the end of Béla Tarr's thirty-four years of filmmaking. Speaking to European Parliament's Lux Audience Award (2011: 1), the film's French co-producer Marie-Pierre Macia reiterated the film's magnificence, whose "metaphorical dimension symbolises the end of a world and the end of a cinema":

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[112] Susan Sontag (1933-2004) was an American writer, filmmaker, philosopher, teacher, and political activist. Her essays are characterised by a serious philosophical approach to various aspects and personalities of modern culture. In addition to criticism and fiction she wrote screenplays and edited selected writings of Roland Barthes and Antonin Artaud. See Britannica (2019: 1). www.britannica.com/biography/Susan-Sontag Accessed: 09/08/2021.

[113] See Sanz (2011: 1): https://www.pacopoch.cat/theturinhorse/pdf/TheTurinHorse_EN.pdf

> It's Béla Tarr's last film and perhaps the most radical of his works, which are always experiences, journeys. Whether the film is fifteen minutes longer or shorter is of no importance to those entering Béla's hypnotic world. We're very proud to have seen this adventure through to the end.

Thus, for Tarr, *The Turin Horse* is a philosophical inquiry for understanding what it means to be human, which to Crowell (2017: 5), is a norm tied to a unique, Post-Cartesian concept of the self as practical, embodied, and being-in-the-world.[114] Today, Béla Tarr is celebrated as the leading proponent of Slow Cinema and a distinctive voice within European film culture. According to Çağlayan (2018: 39), Tarr has personified an abstruse auteur persona, while for Rancière (2016: 247), "Tarr is not interested in narrative development but in situations and movements".

3.4.4 Existential nihilism and the slow narrative-formal expressiveness of stylised choices in The Turin Horse

I will now discuss how Nietzsche's nihilism lends itself to the work of Béla Tarr through the stylised choices made in both narrative and form, whilst exploring recurring themes of human existence such as anguish, alienation, nothingness, absurdity, apocalypse, and transcendence. I briefly explain the stylised choices deployed in the film, and then I examine various Nietzschean manifestations in the film's narrative and formal expressiveness.

3.4.4.1 Stylised choices in The Turin Horse

The Turin Horse is a 146-minute, 35mm slow-paced and repetitive film comprising of thirty long takes. The film is replete with seamless framing of the austere black-and-white photography, minimalist score and dialogue covering the everyday activities of human existence. Furthermore, its stylised lighting, composition, editing, and significant themes of existentialism such as emptiness, anguish, and alienation make for a characteristic Slow Cinema film. With an ASL of four minutes, seven seconds, the film recounts six days in the lives of two peasants, Ohlsdorfer (Janos Derzsi) and his daughter (Erika Bok). These characters are no less than Nietzsche's poor whipped horse. Ohlsdorfer and Derzsi have been slaves to their unalleviated, ponderous labour their whole lives. An inter-title announcing, for example, "The Second Day" and "The Third Day", breaks the film into

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[114] A system of thinking relating to René Descartes (1596-1650), particularly his philosophy on human existence with regards to logical analysis and its mechanistic interpretation of physical nature. See also Stolorow (2011).

several different chapters with most of the chores recurrent each day. The order of banal cyclical duties performed by Ohlsdorfer's daughter entails drawing water from the well, helping her father dress up every morning, cooking, tending to their sick horse, washing and mending clothes. Ohlsdorfer's routine involves riding the horse into town, sleeping, tending to the horse cart, and splitting firewood. These moments are consistent with neorealism and the slow narrative strategies used in Slow Cinema (see Chapter Two, section 2.4).

The characters in *The Turin Horse* go about their daily routine in the arduous boredom of real-time, uninterrupted by shots that last as long as eight minutes. Their single meal of the day consists of one massive boiled potato per person, peeled with bare fingers and gobbled in its enduring steam. As the punishing gale outside continues to whip up harsh dust storms, the chores become a laborious undertaking for the titular characters and the spectator alike. In essence, Tarr's materialisation of existential nihilism through the characters legitimises the spectator to enter that space from his or her own socially embedded, imagined set of relations with the film's universe. Figure 3.4 (Béla Tarr 2011) captures an aspect of the quotidian routines that Ohlsdorfer and his daughter are devoted to repeatedly across the six days documented in the narrative.

Figure 3.4: *Characters in The Turin Horse depicted to epitomise the banality of human existence (Tarr 2011)*

The economy of stylised choices endemic to *The Turin Horse* operates in a kind of scarcity mode. It emphasises seamless camera movements, aperture framings, lighting,

soundtrack, minimal dialogue, set design, performance, and factors external to the film itself, such as preceding narrative information provided by the narrator through a voice-over. All these elements contribute to the meaning of the story the film tells. Accordingly, McBride (2013: 16) declares that camera movement, lighting or editing choices carry specific meaning to the film, which amounts to stylisation. In other words, all camera movements, shots, edits, and lighting are stylised because meaning abounds throughout the film in its relationship with the viewer. The symbolic significance of stylised choices he insists is to withhold or reveal certain narrative moments in the film or heighten the meaning of human existence in Tarr's case. However, it would be necessary to note that, as is the case with all stylised techniques and devices, the implication of these choices is always contingent on the context within which they are used. Next, I unpack how existential nihilism manifests itself through Tarr's stylised choices.

3.4.4.2 Narrative-formal expressiveness: camera movement, sound and editing

Tarr's influence on the planning of camera movement in *The Turin Horse* is remarkable. Yet, in auteurist studies, authorial claims concerning camera movement tend to underestimate or misconstrue the mode of production. For example, the Classical Hollywood Cinema (the 1920s-1960s) tended to regard camera movements as slow and feminine, whereas cuts were masculine, rigid, and tough (Nielsen 2007: 193). In that context, Nielsen explains, if one wanted to move the camera, it had to be motivated because the classical film could not waste valuable screen time on simply transporting a character from one point in space to another. Tarr (2011: 2), however, makes it clear that nothing in his film is accidental because he knows the entire film from the beginning to the end and keeps strict control over the camera work. As Slow Cinema is concerned, mobile long-take staging, as is evident in *The Turin Horse*, could be a philosophical form of expression for the artist to communicate ideas, emotions, and inner thoughts and a way of differentiating one's film on the art cinema market. For Tarr, the versatile and perspicacious mobility of the camera stylises existential nihilism and emphasises his inventiveness of narrative and formal expression. He combines static and mobile long takes, thereby exhibiting the camera's fluid repositioning abilities, including the tendency to follow a shot to its conclusion while maintaining the one-off frame that often opens and closes each moving shot. Nielsen (2007: 201) calls this modality "the smoothness of contemporary film syntax".

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The film's opening sequence features perfect, smooth, and fluid camera movements of the famished workhorse dragging its cab and cabman (Ohlsdorfer) down a dirt road battered by the windstorm and flanked by dead vegetation. The push-in and push-out camera patterning accompanied by lateral movements are not merely for aesthetics but confer an invitation to look closer at the horse and the cabman. Such an invitation to scrutiny sets the entire contemplative narrative of existentialism (anguish, alienation, nothingness, absurdity, apocalypse and transcendence) in motion and increases a sense of neorealism in the film. The camera's proximity to the horse additionally conveys that this is fundamentally its story. It only pulls back enough to establish the spatial layout of the scene's long take and create a compositional gap for the horse to fill. The subsequent camera's push in on the horse adds a sense of spatial depth to the shot that the cut-in would not. Tarr manages to focus the spectator's attention on the horse by having a perfect synchronisation of camera movement and the principal action of the characters at hand. The synchronous follow shot encompasses two-shots, low and eye-level angles and slow reframing movements to maintain the spectator's focus on the horse as it trudges on. Nielsen (2007: 40) proves that synchronous follow shots preserve the Spatio-temporal continuity of pro-filmic reality. It is also imperative to note that Tarr's camera is subservient to the moving action of the characters. Yet, it is not so subservient that it lags or impedes access to the horse and the cabman. These camera movements, therefore, serve to evoke cinematic meanings throughout the film.

In *The Turin Horse*, the camera does not forcefully direct the viewer's attention. Instead, it seems to surge through the spaces trying to take in an expansive view of Ohlsdorfer's homestead as it possibly can. Through its seemingly extravagant movement, the camera facilitates what Bazin (1971: 37) refers to as a 'democracy of vision', which as Nielsen (2007: 41) corroborates, is its refusal to direct the attention of the viewer forcefully. This concept benefits the film's insistence on authenticity, as demonstrated by Ohlsdorfer's daughter. The spectator uninhibitedly observes her going about her daily chores without any reservation or complaint as she confronts reality and faces up to the hard truth of the life of poverty she leads. In existential philosophy, Mallah (2016: 6), writes: "the degree to which one is true to their life despite external pressures points to authenticity." Mallah further notes that this realisation of responsibility, individuality and freedom is an integral part of developing an authentic life. The camera's perpetual follow shot of Ohlsdorfer's daughter, mainly as she

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walks from the house to the well and back carrying a bucket of water, creates a fascinating and natural unity between exterior and interior scenes characterised by the same quality of light and little touch. As a result, the camera's movement effaces the boundaries of the frame. It opens up the story's universe to allow the spectator to experience a simulacrum of reality and understand this experience to be shaped by existentialism. As the spectator looks further into the frame, they begin to interrogate the motives of the most frivolous actions of the characters in *The Turin Horse*, and by doing so, are obligated to confront their existence. Figure 3.5 (Béla Tarr 2011) illustrates the camera's continuous follow shot of the characters.

Figure 3.5: *The camera's single frame manipulated to accommodate the movement of the characters in a follow shot (Tarr 2011).*

Tarr (2011: 2) reveals that he tends to forfeit messaging in his films because the camera is an observer that captures the atmosphere of a moment and reacts to life. Laszlo Krasznahorkai, Tarr's regular collaborator, only wrote a prose text for *The Turin Horse*, which was not made into a script. Tarr was only responsible for shaping the dramaturgical structure, which guided him emotionally to find the right images. He proclaims that he prefers not to give the spectators a message but rather to show them his portrayal of the world, which is a mirror of life. Therefore, this representation justifies why he is inclined to work a lot with non-actors who do not act but do what reality demands. Tarr's film syntax in *The Turin Horse* bears the heavy burden of transmitting subtle narrative information on existentialism from an objective point of view. The interplay of the multiplane staging of the

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mise-en-scène and lateral camera movements insist upon Tarr extending his frame laterally and in depth to show the viewer the anguish of human existence. Similarly, the application of tracking shots as a matter of stylistic choice and parallel to the arduous tasks of the characters' world essentially supplies the spectator's psychological experience of the absurdity of human life.

Characters in Tarr's world also have an extended duration to contemplate their lives. The temporal structure built into the film transfers to the receptive spectator a temporal frame of mind rarefied in mainstream cinema. Tarr (2011: 4) expresses his dissatisfaction with mainstream cinema because it follows the same pattern of what he calls "action, cut, action cut", which primarily serves story and plot. This dissatisfaction illuminates Tarr's switch away from the narrative because the story is not only about human actions. He further implies that there are many important aspects of real life that filmmakers find boring, and yet when stylised in film, they can bring the spectator closer to life than to the film itself. Therefore, this explanation frees him from the tyranny of film narrative and invokes the performative cinema of slowness "as a way of understanding the world" (Tarr 2011: 4). For example, the separate stylisation of Ohlsdorfer and his daughter at the centre of the frame while gazing out of the window contemplatively on different occasions presents two images that appear as a pair of parallel signifiers. These images contribute meaning to each other, whether of anguish or isolation (see Fig 3.6).

In the context of Slow Cinema, the two separate images present what Pethő (2014: 51) calls a *tableau vivant* (French for "living picture") or the staging of wordless characters posed for a kind of painterly contemplation by the spectator.[115] Nothingness and alienation and the questioning of human existence, in this case, seem to be inherent in Tarr's stylisation of wide-angled long-takes complemented by slow push-in camera movements, wherein the absence of action, the contemplative side of the audience's mind is engaged. Figure 3.6 (Béla Tarr 2011) depicts an aesthetic of contemplation and its relationship to Tarr's overall slow narrative structure.

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[115] This painterly depiction of characters in *The Turin Horse* is similar to *Uncle Boonmee*, when Huay leads Boonmee through an ethereal landscape, followed by Jen and Tong. The characters appear to be ambulating through a painting and can be separated from the backdrop only through their movement (see section 3.2.2).

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Figure 3.6: *Use of long, static shots filmed in wide-angle and deep focus to depict contemplation in* The Turin Horse *(Tarr 2011).*

The camera also seems to participate in various forms of alienation. For example, when it momentarily detaches itself from the primary agents of the story either for narratively or generically motivated purposes, mainly to build suspense or tension. One particular instance involves Ohlsdorfer's daughter walking towards the well in a straight motion. Still, on this occasion, the camera chooses to delay its movement in a way that foreshadows the life-threatening reality of nothingness. The camera rewards this suspense when moments later, it provides directional decisiveness by transporting the viewer to the well, circles it counterclockwise to reveal its emptiness before picking up Ohlsdorfer and tracking back with him helplessly (refer to Figure 3.5).

Another type of director-specific camera movement that defines the existential theme of the alienated self, the disaffection of the self both from the world and itself, is stylised in the ill-advised journey of Ohlsdorfer and his daughter accompanied by their horse make towards the end of the film. The camera maintains a distance from the characters as they walk across the frame. It is more preoccupied with the flying debris blown by the gale as if clouding its view of the characters was part of the strategy. In that sense, it restricts and obstructs the spectator's access to the characters' present journey. As the camera continues to zoom out slowly, it renders the right to left horizontal movement of Ohlsdorfer, his daughter pulling the handcart and the horse. The camera's distancing technique is rewarded moments later as

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the characters return, having failed to overcome the horrible weather conditions on their path. The static long take image of Ohlsdorfer, his daughter and the horse making the painstaking journey back home heightens the sense of alienation and nothingness in the film. It symbolizes what Mallah (2016: 6) refers to as "an act of facing up to the full consequences of the non-existence and being left on one's own" and I might add, without help or any guidance from transcendence.

The certain stylisation of existential nihilism in *The Turin Horse* is marked by the arrival of Bernhard (Mihály Kormos) at Ohlsdorfer's house. Tarr (2011) substantiates that Bernhard is a Nietzschean character, although he admits that he differs from Nietzsche, whose assertion was that 'God is dead'. Bernard, on his part, delivers a long, sad rant about human corruption and the well-deserved destruction of humanity for destroying the world, and it is also God's fault. Tarr's notion of nihilism, consistent with Bernhard's perceptive insistence, is that "both humanity and a higher force" (represented by the gale blowing throughout the film) are responsible for the world's destruction. Although this formulation suggests existential nihilism, Slocombe (2003: 171) presents the argument that a Nietzschean perspective might tentatively consider the view that the postmodern apocalypse is fabricated and not preordained by any transcendental idea. It is purely by the capacity of humankind to have created the means for its destruction that will, because the means exist, come to be realised. Bernard's concern that everything is debased preempts not only the filmic diegetic but also Tarr's existential anxiety in the sense that when he made his first film, he started from his social sensibility and just wanted to change the world. He later understood that problems were more complicated, and through *The Turin Horse*, he visualises a world that is quite heavy with uncertainty because the end is nigh (Tarr 2011).

This visualisation, therefore, suggests that there may be truth beneath the surface of the film's artificial structure. Bernhard's lengthy rant unfolds without a shot/reverse shot sequence between him and his host. It only involves a master shot coverage of the three characters in the scene. The camera's increasing observation and interest in Bernhard accompanied by a certain detachment are stylised to express to the spectator a sense of Bernhard's privileged superiority as the only source of information on the imminent apocalyptic ending but also reinforces his sense of escape or alienation. Bernhard's rant serves as a closure or poignant commentary inviting the viewer's contemplation on

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existential nihilism in general. Figure 3.7 (Béla Tarr 2011) shows various images that are an embodiment of Nietzsche's existential nihilism. In the film, Ohlsdorfer's daughter reads aloud a verse that echoes Bernhard's anti-sermon.

Figure 3.7: *"Everything is debased" – Ohlsdorfer's daughter reads a verse that echoes Bernhard's anti-sermon in* The Turin Horse *(Tarr 2011).*

There are other recurring tropes in the representation of the apocalypse in *The Turin Horse*. After the failed trip, Ohlsdorfer's daughter sits behind the window in a cloud of despair and contemplation as debris and dust continue to restrict the spectator's access to the character's emotions. The slow push-in of the camera visualizes the extent of human suffering and the looming apocalypse, as the image increasingly becomes a reflection of transcendent reality. The character exercises her reflective freedom by disengaging from life's harsh reality and questioning her significance in the face of nihilism. Ohlsdorfer's daughter had earlier received a book from the Gypsies, perhaps as restitution for the stolen water. Tarr (2011: 1) calls this book an anti-bible, calling for an apocalyptic ending to existence. In the book that "Ohlsdorfer's daughter reads, there are some references to Nietzsche", although Krasznahorkai originally wrote the text. Tarr (2011: 1) argues that the idea of "an anti-bible is about how priests close churches because people are sinning", and therefore the churches must be closed and torn down. As Ohlsdorfer's daughter continues to read the book, the film ostensibly appears to be folding in on itself or reflecting upon the apocalyptic eventuality in the absence of transcendence. The character reading an anti-bible may also be a further indication that transcendent reality could provide a context of meaning

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within which life exists. The physical universe alone cannot provide a context of meaning. The relationship between the cosmos and transcendent reality to make sense proves that Tarr treats nihilism and existence as having blurred boundaries.

The concept of absurdity contains, at the very least, the idea that life is meaningless. In this sense, argues Mallah (2016: 4), existential philosophers believe that since life is absurd, humans need to make sense of it and give it meaning. Tarr uses focalised camera movement to represent a character's point of view (POV), which characterises the strong sense of absurdity in the film. For instance, the camera consistently and equitably synchronises its movement between Ohlsdorfer and his daughter in a POV shot as they repeatedly go about their daily chores. Tarr (2011) points out that *The Turin Horse* is fundamentally about the heaviness of human existence. It is challenging for one to lead a life that is branded by monotony. The repetition of the same routine makes it possible to show that something is wrong with the world of the characters and hence absurdity. Another form of absurdity through camera movement involves forfeiting conversation instead of following unspeaking characters.

At the same time, the actions, sounds, or aspects of the set design around them carry significance. As much as it enriches the communicativeness of the shot, it advances the existential notion that to exist as a human is inexplicable and wholly absurd. From the spectator's perspective, Ohlsdorfer and his daughter have been thrown into the present filmic time and place, for no reason, without necessary connection, only contingently. So, their lives are an absurd contingent fact. The camera similarly follows the subsequent moving action in isolated instances of parallel tracking shots as it defines the physical disposition of the set that the characters occupy. The camera serves both character and space, thus providing a dynamic compositional pull within the frame. This technique invites the spectator into the absurdity of the film's narrativisation (see Figure 3.8).

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Figure 3.8: *The camera provides a compositional pull within the frame thus serving both character and space (Tarr 2011).*

In a film centred on existential nihilism, the distinction between natural and synthesised acoustic music contextualised within Slow Cinema becomes charged with meaning. The bleak, scrubby and depressing bottom-end stringed music endemic in the film is picture-perfect for a Slow Cinema film that obstinately probes into the anguish and absurdity of the human condition. In this respect, both the diegetic and non-diegetic soundtracks in *The Turin Horse* are minimalist masterpieces of horror, transcendence, and nothingness beyond the unknown state of existence. Equally important is the dominance of music and diegetic sound over dialogue in the film – simply assembled on a dreary three-note, almost structureless melody flanked by a background organ rising in and out of the mix like an elegy stylised to match the weather-beaten filmic landscape. Tarr stylises an impoverished non-diegetic score mixed into the heightened unyielding diegetic sound of the raging gale. The score reflects the destitute situation of Ohlsdorfer, his daughter and the dying horse. This stylisation permeates the spectator's consciousness, laying bare any preconceived notion as to the meaning (or lack thereof) of life. It would also be valuable to consider that the repetitive rhythmic coordination of music and mise-en-scène in *The Turin Horse* gives the camera movement another dimension of visualisation. These elements mesh in a natural and harmonious unity that stylises the themes of anguish, alienation, nothingness and absurdity of human existence.

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Slow Cinema is often associated with minimalism, and mainly the narrative efficient mobile long takes edited in the camera (see Chapter Two, section 2.4.3). Like his contemporaries in the Slow Cinema movement, such as Miklós Jancsó (Hungary) and Theo Angelopoulos (Greece), Tarr commits himself predominantly to mobile long-take filmmaking in *The Turin Horse*. Still*,* his propensity for this style corresponds with authentic attention to the resources of editing demonstrated in the several kinds of intra-sequence cuts he applies. Nielsen (2007: 198) claims that covering scenes in a continuous shot can assume editorial control over the final shape of the film. However, this may depend on the genre. The amount of control the producer has, the tastes and preferences of filmmakers, niche markets, financial backing, and the front office exercise over a production can also determine the editorial control of a film. Tarr (2011: 2) acknowledges that editing does not play a huge role in his film. He tends to have his editor on the set throughout filming to keep track of the production and minimise editing in post-production. For narrative efficiency, Tarr edits the film in the camera by organising the movement of the camera and actors so that the shot is structured into a string of narratively significant stops or moments of transitional rest, to which Bacher (1978: 304) gave the title of "narrative-expressive long-take staging". Bacher submitted that narrative-expressive camera movement facilitates more choices in editing, and scenes that adopt this technique tend to 'pull the audience in' and have them more intimately involved with the dramatic action. Nielsen (2007: 40) supports this idea noting that the refusal to edit lets the viewer in on the "real narrative subtext of the scene" in the film even though the expressive power of the cut can still terminate the mobile long take.

Tarr applies Bacher's stylistic parameters to achieve narrative efficiency in long follow-shots of the characters in his film. However, there are instances where the continuous follow-shots are also broken down into expressive stops to create a setting for the spectator's contemplation. This contemplation is conveyed in various follow shots where every time Ohlsdorfer's daughter, for example, stops to undertake a specific activity. The camera frames the resultant action in a compositional stop or finds a moment of transitional rest before picking up the character again. In the more confined spaces of *The Turin Horse*, expressive long-take staging relies on many camera movements with brief stationary set-ups from one compositional stop to another.[116] This staging enhances the authenticity of the

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[116] In an interview published on LUX Prize (**https://luxprize.eu**: 14-07-2011), Tarr again emphasises the significance of space when he mentions that a location must have a face because it is one of the

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characters' repetitive routine and stylises the state of nothingness and absurdity in human existence. The bleak closing sequence in *The Turin Horse* captures Ohlsdorfer and his daughter sitting quietly in sheer sadness and resignation to their fate. The end of the world has been stylised to appear very silent and weak. The spectator is reminded of the anguish of everyday existence that Ohlsdorfer and his daughter have escaped only to face up to the fact of death. Tarr's (2011) preoccupation is about the apocalypse, which he posits is a huge event in the film. He states:

> The end of the world comes as I see it coming in real life – slowly and quietly. Death is always the most terrible scene, and when you watch someone dying – an animal or a human – it's always awful, and the most horrible thing is that it looks like nothing happened.

Here, Tarr advances the notion that nothingness is a form of death, which is the final chapter of man's total nonexistence. The camera's expressive depiction of the Horse's demise and the pair's threatening finitude is an unsettling realisation for the spectator that perhaps it is needless to fight against the apocalypse. In conclusion, I argue that my reading of *The Turin Horse* enables exploring a philosophical approach to Slow Cinema. As I have demonstrated, this approach transcends the stylistic commands of mainstream cinema in a way that brings a greater degree of realism and truth as much in the represented world of the film as the lived world. Still, in considering the modes of address in *Uncle Boonmee* and *The Turin* Horse, the spectator is particularly unable to maintain a conclusive reading of the films because the significances of their narratives have been destabilised by minimalism and indeterminacy. Whereas *Uncle Boonmee* and *The Turin Horse* fit deftly into lucid modes of Slow Cinema, Oliver Hermanus's *Skoonheid* (2011) discussed in the next section of this textual analysis is hardly bound by current exemplars that ensure an intensive characterisation of slowness. However, as a distant reader, I am more interested in the film's various modes of address and how it exhibits significant thematic, formal, and stylistic elements that associate it closely with Slow Cinema, particularly in the context of African Cinemas. I thus argue that there remains in the African continent a growing interest in films that demonstrate the complex artistry of slowness in terms of subject matter, visual style, themes, and spectatorship.

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main characters. He found a little valley in Hungary and a lonely tree. He built Ohlsdorfer's house, the well, and the stable out of stone and wood.

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3.5 Slow Beauty: Narrative, Aesthetics, and Thematisation in Oliver Hermanus's *Skoonheid* (2011)

3.5.1 Introduction to Skoonheid

Recent developments in world cinema have led to a renewed interest in Slow Cinema, particularly in Europe, Asia and Latin America, as stated by Jaffe (2014: 9). Still, a review of existing literature in the discipline does not seem to identify Africa as a familiar terrain for Slow Cinema films – at least if its definition is taken in a strict sense. This observation heightens the need for this analysis to critically examine the conception of Slow Cinema in the continent from a broader perspective. I argue that South African director Oliver Hermanus's slow-burning thriller *Skoonheid* (Beauty, in Afrikaans) emphasises a slow narrative style and diverse forms of slow aesthetics. The film's ontological themes (often associated with Slow Cinema) contemplate the decadence of humanity as far as the "beauty" that nature has to offer is concerned and humanity's internal strife tied to its purpose and link to the universe. I have divided this analysis into four parts. The first part gives a brief overview of *Skoonheid*, including the director's oeuvre, while the second part evaluates the narrative tropes in the film. The third part seeks to validate the aesthetic features of slowness represented in the film. Then finally, the fourth part thematises alienation, incommunicability, self-loathing existence, eroticism, and queerness, embodied in *Skoonheid* as a slow film.

3.5.2 Background

Skoonheid is an inquiry-based narrative that chronicles the journey of François van Heerden (Deon Lotz), a married, closeted, and successful Afrikaner man in his mid-forties, facing an existential crisis of his own.[117] He becomes enthralled by the beauty of Christian (Charlie Keegan), who happens to be a friend's collegiate son – and with this encounter comes a violent incident that threatens to tear apart François's clean, controlled life. As Hermanus (2011) points out, *Skoonheid* was inspired by an advert he saw in a Cape Town newspaper, "looking for white, married Afrikaner men to participate in a twice-weekly all-male orgy".

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[117] I use the term "inquiry-based" to suggest a Slow Cinema narrative that asks the spectator to engage with the substance of the story in an active way, possibly – as in the case of *Skoonheid* – in the active engagement with plot.

Thus, the film's premise is premised on the lead character (François) confronting the ugly truth of his life and trying to suppress it, albeit unsuccessfully. The film has been critically acclaimed for presenting an undisguised portrait of the turmoil that troubles the middle-aged male ego and addressing the contemporary Afrikaner condition in South Africa (Revolvy 2011).[118]

Oliver Hermanus was born in Cape Town in 1983. His other films include *Shirley Adams* (2009), *The Endless River* (2015), and *Moffie* (2019). Hermanus's oeuvre takes its inspiration from a certain strain of austere Latin American cinema championed by renowned Mexican Slow Cinema auteur Carlos Reygadas (Marshall 2011: 1).[119] Reygadas's memorable films include *Silent Light* (2007) and *Japón* (2002). Hermanus also spoke highly of Béla Tarr's seven-hour film *Sátántangó* (1994) and *The Turin Horse* (2011). In a column published by *Channel 24* on August 19, 2011, Hermanus made a strong claim in defence of Slow Cinema, stating, "Just because it's slow, doesn't mean it's boring". This statement was Hermanus' response to the criticism levelled against Béla Tarr's *The Turin Horse* by two *New York Times* film critics expressing their disdain for its slowness. Hermanus (2011: 1) also attempts to draw comparisons with his work on *Skoonheid*, which he notes was "sliced and diced by a local film critic as slow, boring and pretentious". Hermanus uses the analogy of the wine country to stress his point:

> [When tasting wine] do you not sip slowly, you know, soaking up the flavours, investigating the after-tastes, discovering the blend of ingredients? So why then, when you go to the movies, is it always about binge-watching? And more importantly, when did our connoisseur film critics become the pimps of fast and furious flicks?

Hermanus' point is that Slow Cinema films can equally sustain a spectator's attention through a contemplative and thought-provoking form of spectatorship. He further claims that even if the film does not make sense or "the silences are symptoms of an [ill-advised] director who forgot to edit the film", the spectator needs to relax and remember that "just because the film is slow does not mean it is boring". This view seems to express a more general urge

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[118] *Skoonheid* was announced the winner of the Queer Palme d'Or at Cannes Film Festival (2011) and Best South African Feature Film at Durban International Film Festival (2011).

[119] The *Harvard Film Archive* (2006) has described Reygadas's cinematic oeuvre as "nothing less than the reinvention of the art film, rejecting the formula driven conventions of contemporary "independent" filmmaking to create a body of work that fully unleashes the subversive power of the cinema".

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in the Slow Cinema debate to devise how Slow Cinema films can stand out in uniquely cinematic ways. Central to Hermanus's article is the belief that the revolution [in favour of Slow Cinema] will take some time, but it is surely underway. Hermanus's article drew reactions from some of his online readers, who were either for or against Slow Cinema as sampled below:[120]

> Well, Mr Hermanus… there is a place for "Slow Cinema" in our midst. The only thing is if you don't know how to use it… my guess would be NOT to use it when making a film (jakeskoopman 2011).
>
> …There's 'slow', which can be elegant and beautiful to watch – something [Terrence] Malick excels at – and then there's 'agonizingly slow', which is what *Skoonheid* felt like to me (Alexis75 2011).
>
> …Keep at it Oliver, you have a great future. The slowness made the violence that much more intense, but some scenes were drawn out a bit too much. I liken your movie to "The piano teacher" (Darkwing 2011).

Suppose, like Hermanus's aforementioned views, slowness is understood as particular distinctive cinematic technique and design that aids recurring interest in the contemplative nature of cinema. In that case, the readers' reactions are significant, considering the all-important relationship between the spectator and the film as envisaged in this study (see Chapter 6).

3.5.3 The slow narrative in Skoonheid

Despite its artistic expression of slowness, *Skoonheid* is not an elaborate exercise in Slow Cinema because it occasionally functions within the purview of the visual-narrative style of mainstream film, especially during the most intense story events. In that regard, it cannot be examined as a close counterpart to Weerasethakul's *Uncle Boonmee* or Tarr's *The Turin Horse,* for example. However, it is possible to situate the narrative-formal expressiveness of *Skoonheid* in Slow Cinema because there are minimalist and indeterminate tendencies invested in the storyline. Moreover, most scenes, as with Slow Cinema, speak in imagery rather than words and are supported by stillness or low-key diegetic sound. *The Witness* (2011) provides a critical account of this effect, describing the film as "directionless and drawn-out, going nowhere and saying nothing". Hermanus still finds a way to testify some

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[120] See Hermanus (2011: 1): https://www.news24.com/channel/columnists/oliver-hermanus/slow-and-boring-for-dummies-20110819

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of the most urgent stories in contemporary society through the film's slow narrative pace and attention to the mystery and indeterminacy of human experience. He constructs a long-winded and slow-moving attritional account of François's struggles to understand his existence amid the agony of sexual repression, traditionalism, and an indeterminate self. To that end, the subtle workings of the film's slowness derive primarily from the exhibition of its unspectacular narrative. In reality, Hermanus attributes his comment on *Skoonheid* to the still present double standards of conservatism, racist ideologies and the queer underground of contemporary South Africa with specific reference to Cape Town (Hermanus 2012: 5).[121]

My interpretation of *Skoonheid*'s narrative mode and aesthetics agrees with Schoonover's views on cinematic slowness "as an otherness to be recognised and mined for its profundity, beauty, or meditative qualities" (Schoonover 2012: 74). Under such circumstances, *Skoonheid*'s slow narrative often fuels internal conflicts that arise from François's sexual repression building up incrementally – rather than suddenly. François's sexual violence against Christian, for example, is driven inward into a psychological drama that remains difficult to narrate and from that perspective; such a slow-paced and open-ended narrative pattern typically eludes tidy closure, hence indeterminacy.

Hermanus's film often abandons the plot. Instead, it places a lot of weight on the chief protagonist and sparsely interspersed action throughout the story. This narrative device produces experiences of absurdity and indeterminacy, thus encouraging in viewers a contemplative mode of spectatorship. François's lack of emotional, or at least expressive range, foregrounds problems of disconnectedness with the plot, often gravitating towards stillness and silence, tending, in any case, to be minimalist, indeterminate, and unresolved. For example, the film's opening scene (wedding reception) puts on the spectator the demand to comprehend the narrative in creative ways. The film announces its general sense of interiority and François's suppressed emotions and internal monologue, to which the spectator has no access. Jaffe (2014) posits that a lack or suppression of emotion, or simply emotional minimalism, is an important characteristic of Slow Cinema films. Another significant constituent of the film's expressive minimalism is depicted in François's movement from one place to another and how he spends time with his wife and peers or

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[121] See *Skoonheid* Press Book (Hermanus 2012): **Error! Hyperlink reference not valid.**

acquaintances. The narrative remains slow, confined and restrained and does not reveal his thoughts and feelings as much as his psychological torment is clear to the spectator. Essentially, scenes depicting François sitting thoughtfully in his car, driving around in silence or just engaging in voyeuristic tendencies stress acknowledging sexual imprisonment while disclosing, for the spectator, an intuitive dimension of narrative meaning. Yet it is worth noting that modernist Slow Cinema auteur Michelangelo Antonioni (in Tomasulo & McKahan 2009: 14) once implicitly conceived his film *L'eclisse* (1962) as "a story of imprisoned sentiments, where the characters are all trapped – literally and figuratively – in their respective psychological situations". I consider Hermanus's film in similar terms because of François's interiority and slow toxic drift into a world of unreciprocated queer intimacy.

In a narrative about male desire and its downfall, static shots, long-takes, a slow tracking camera movement, and intense close-ups serve to eroticise a voyeuristic narrative in *Skoonheid*. François appears to take a voyeuristic delight in the intrigues of same-sex male intimacy. Still, it is also possible to conclude that his voyeurism is an intrusion that acts as a burden for himself. As Hermanus (2012: 5) puts it – and thereby avoids reducing François's obsession to a mere voyeuristic activity for pleasure's sake – "François's habit of watching people, or of being a voyeur, is a way of guarding his true thoughts and intentions". In that vein, Christian's "beautiful individuality" seems to undermine François's carefully constructed and more traditional Afrikaner male identity.

The visual aspects of François's voyeuristic experience are effectively shared with the spectator from the film's opening image, where Hermanus creates a voyeuristic narrative with the camera taking on François's point of view through its slow prowling in the room and predatory focus adjustment zooming in on Christian. In this way, the spectator becomes part of François's inactivity, frustrations and boredom while trying to make sense of his world amid the gaps in the narrative prompted by elliptical editing. Thus, the spectator is an active participant in the story's construction by filling in the narrative text instead of the film narrating the story to the spectator, which most fast-paced films do. The film's watchful lensing also portrays François as the bystander rather than a participant. The indeterminacy created by such voyeurism allows the narrative to drift into contemplative moments that manifest in the character's internal conversations. Figure 3.9 (Oliver Hermanus 2011) shows François's voyeurism.

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Figure 3.9: *Depictions of François as the voyeur in* Skoonheid *(Hermanus 2011).*

In conclusion, *Skoonheid*'s narrative is slow-paced, restrained, voyeuristic and, for the most part, lacking dramatic urgency. Its emotional and visual minimalism is thematically expressive as a symptom of emptiness and alienation in revealing François's existential paralysis patterns. As Hermanus (2012: 5) knowingly remarks on his film's neorealism, he permits the spectator "to witness moments and sequences as François would and be wholly attached to him while having an equal chance to interpret moments and gestures as he does". On Hermanus's account, therefore, the film's contemplative method consists of bringing the spectator to a psychological version of the protagonist. No doubt, the visual techniques that reside in Hermanus's oeuvre and which he presents his audience with are deemed necessary for the spectator to slowly interpret the film rather than too quickly and wait for the film to catch up. The upshot of this, for Hermanus, is that *Skoonheid*'s slow narrative poses a challenge to spectators. Hermanus's contribution to narrative slowness may go unnoticed in the broader context of Slow Cinema. Still, it may offer insight into the overarching research question posed in this study with particular reference to *Men of the Hill* as a Kenyan Slow Cinema film.

3.5.4 Slow aesthetics in Skoonheid

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In this section I seek to locate a broader visual outlook in Hermanus's film, pertinent to the narrative-thematic reading of his film. The particular contemplative appeal in *Skoonheid* draws attention to slow aesthetics amplified by recent appraisals at work within the Slow Cinema movement. Jaffe (2014: 3), for example, examines the aesthetic features of slowness, firstly in terms of camera movement, where the camera often remains remarkably still in Slow Cinema films. When it moves, as it does assiduously in Tarr's *The Turin Horse*, the movement is noticeably slow, not to mention the physical motion in front of the camera. Secondly, he argues that editing or cutting in Slow Cinema films tends to be intermittent, which he sees as an inhibition to Spatio-temporal leaps and disruptions. Thirdly, Jaffe finds that long takes predominate in a Slow Cinema film, and long shots frequently prevail over close-ups. Lastly, and consistent with the abovementioned aesthetic features, which he stresses may distance and irritate the viewer, Jaffe describes the austere mise-en-scène in Slow Cinema films in the sense that they eschew intricate and vibrant décor, colour and lighting. Çağlayan (2014: 1), like Jaffe, detects a mannered use of the long take and minimalist aesthetics while upholding an unwavering emphasis on dead time, which tends to foster a mode of narration that initially appears enigmatic, genuinely inconceivable, and impenetrable.

Thus claimed, a Slow Cinema film suggests a different type of emotional and intellectual engagement from its audiences. *Skoonheid* embraces slow aesthetics to varying degrees for its visual style and hence exceeds Slow Cinema norms in that regard, but does well to frame human subjectivity through what Hermanus (2011: 1) calls "the character's elective affinities" and the existential wanderings present throughout the film. For the most part, Hermanus avoids drawing attention to his authority as director. He allows the film instead to take on a life of its own as a self-reflective cinema with slow-moving camera movements, lingering shots, and long-takes suggesting boredom and unproductivity, restiveness, and the plodding movement of time. Other forms of slow aesthetics in *Skoonheid* are represented through ellipsis in the narration and musical intermissions. I show how slow aesthetics has been arrayed in Hermanus's film regarding cinematography and editing in the paragraphs that follow.

Skoonheid's slow aesthetic features encapsulated into the film's somewhat bland yet functionally ironic title, "Beauty" can be located mainly through cinematography, and

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particularly the colour palette, which wavers between two excesses depending on the imagery. It is pulsating and lavish to show the beauty of nature and objects as in the Cape Town scenes, for example, where the happenings of daily life and splendour of the vast surroundings have been expressed in bright light. On the other hand, it can also be subdued or filtered to show the ugly side of nature. For example, François and his male sex partners congregate in a small, dark and secluded farmhouse in Bloemfontein to have sex. Likewise, in the first image, which is approximately three minutes and nine seconds, and one perhaps more typical of a Slow Cinema film, the shot starts on a wide frame to capture a milieu accentuated with warm lighting, colourful costumes and vibrant décor. A tight shot of François's face has him feeling Christian's mysterious attraction, with the camera gradually zooming into Christian to find him irresistible as if reminding the viewer not to blame François for loving what is lovely. The opening scene's leisurely changing images and the rhythm created in the shift from shot to shot complement the slowness advanced by the dialogue and tone of the plot. Afterwards, the film relies on long shots and medium shots in which the surroundings appear to be more imposing and riveting than François and other human characters.

The shot-reverse-shot technique is not a mainstay of Slow Cinema, but Hermanus appropriately and consistently adopts it in dialogue scenes between François and other characters. For example, in the second scene, when François shows little interest in his wife's bedtime talk, the camera is much more dispassionate as it ventures into the conventional shot-reverse-shot sequence punctuated by a master shot. Intriguingly, the close-ups of each character in the scene are framed in separation, emphasising the distance between François and his wife. Further, even when close-ups of François's face occur, the result is impervious, as he is seemingly programmed to hide or deny rather than reveal emotion. Later, when François visits his doctor, Hermanus reorders the screen direction of both characters within the frame to disorient the spectator to assume that François and the doctor are not looking at each other, signifying that they are communicating at cross-purposes. This shot sequence has perhaps been used to underscore the queerness of François's "malaise", which the doctor is obviously unable to diagnose, and therefore, with a hint of hilarity, advises him to count from one to ten in hopes of treating his irritability. This aesthetic bolsters the sense of indeterminacy in the character's life as known to the viewer.

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It helps constitute a value prospect that encourages interest in the interpretation of slowness in *Skoonheid*.

As far as shot duration is concerned, Hermanus alternates between long-takes and short-takes to allow for more variation in the film's narrative pacing. For example, action scenes involving the characters' queerness rely on shorter takes to express sexual urgency. In contrast, reflective scenes, mainly those focusing on François's contemplative moments, unfold in longer takes at a more languid pace. Based on the overlapping functions of long-takes and short-takes, the viewer can distinguish meditative qualities in Skoonheid, interpreted aesthetically as a particular contemplative effect, channelled through the two durational devices. As such, the ASL in *Skoonheid* is shorter than a typical cinema of slowness like *The Turin Horse* or *Uncle Boonmee*. The relative shortness of most of the shots does not, however, prevent *Skoonheid* from being static or even fulfilling the requirements of slowness. Otherwise, it is arguable that the film's long-takes are sporadic and contribute moderately to the sense of slowness and to the film's ability to sustain the viewer's thoughtfulness.

Editing also contributes to the aesthetic quality of a film. However, in *Skoonheid,* it involves, as stated, a combination of long and short takes to enhance its visual appeal, establish motifs and parallels, develop themes and ideas, and emphasise character development. *Skoonheid*'s editing may be frugal in some cases and intensified in others, but it undoubtedly bears witness to emptiness, alienation, and a sense of existential paralysis besetting the main character. Even in a scene that relies primarily on a long-take and slow pacing, Hermanus includes a cut, which often suggests a sudden change in mood or character dynamic. Such is the case when François goes to Cape Town to spy on Christian. While Christian tries to spend quality time with his love interest at the beach, the editing of the scene, which is primarily hinged on the long take, emphasises how François's seething jealousy contaminates the intimate mood. At this point, the scene cuts to a close-up of François, and this abrupt change draws attention to the sudden shift in the emotional weight of the scene to show how Christian's heterosexual object choice has devastated François. In a medium close-up long take, François stares intensely at Christian and his love interest. This long take not only contributes to the scene's slow pace but also complements François's wicked scheme to separate the lovers. To sum up, Hermanus's attention to slow

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aesthetics is clearly, an interpreted stylistic device because he largely bases this effect on the narrative-formal expressiveness that repeatedly punctuates human drama and distress, and thereby putting the film's meditative qualities on display.

3.5.5 Thematising slowness in Skoonheid

Thematising slowness in Slow Cinema film is possible because Çağlayan (2014: 27) and Jaffe (2014: 680) theorise that Slow Cinema is shaped around specific themes and emotions. These scholars assign the kind of value to the thematisation of slowness centred on the vacuity of purpose, passion, community, and "a pessimistic vision of the world". The emptiness of meaning leads to depression, boredom, anxiety, alienation, desperation, spiritual exhaustion, and monotony. Other themes within the broader context of Slow Cinema that Çağlayan and Jaffe highlight include those that explore and meditate on what it means to be human by focusing on improbable relationships and spiritual narratives centred on the notions of guilt and redemption. Due to its stylised slowness, *Skoonheid*'s thematic concerns – notwithstanding its queer theory – are not readily available upon immediate viewing as the narrative can often be abstrusely disjointed or vaguely conveyed.

The spectator is inevitably asked to search for coherence and meaning by closing the existing gaps amid its sparse storytelling. Hence, Hermanus's narrativisation of such themes as alienation (Jaffe 2014), incommunicability (Filimon 2014), [self-loathing] existence (Çağlayan 2018), eroticism (Antonioni 1969), and queerness (Schoonover 2012) makes a strong case for this analysis to consider *Skoonheid* as a Slow Cinema film. In exploring how Hermanus's film connects closely to the thematic traditions of Slow Cinema, this text turns to the working of narrative and symbolic structures pointing beyond a particular interpretive stance. It is also helpful to further distinguish the relevant thematisations in *Skoonheid* based on their profundity and intended effect on the viewer. The text that follows is organised around the abovementioned themes.

3.5.5.1 Alienation and incommunicability

Hermanus conjures dominant sensations of human alienation, disconnectedness, and various instances of emptiness, clearly accentuated through a sensual interplay between close-ups and long shots involving François and the world around him. The protagonist seems to waver between being an outsider and an insider (particularly amongst his peers)

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in a world that is increasingly empty and vividly antagonistic. For instance, François's presence in the gay nightclub emphasises his distance from the gay community around him and the type of relationship he has with them, an outsider observing gay people in their most intimate moments. In François's case, he is part of this gay world but not in totality because he is conscious of his existential distress and a sense of alienation. This sense of conflicted reality, claims Hermanus (2012: 5), becomes the centre of François's downfall. Therefore, the director made this element of François's psyche central to his intentions – socially and politically – through a watchful, distinctive, and richly layered cinematic oeuvre.

Additionally, François's desire for Christian "becomes both a physical and existential odyssey in understanding his place in post-apartheid South Africa", where he later realises that he is displaced and disconnected (Hermanus 2011: 1). Hermanus continues to reason that the reality for François is that he spent his whole life classed, and as such, he was forced to construct these separate rooms in and of himself because he assumes that he must. François's worsened, corroded, and disjointed connections with the material and emotional realities in the film are, for example, lucidly depicted in scenes that are not fully fleshed out, when he seems to regularly drift into oblivion through the extended duration of driving around in his car. Figure 3.10 (Oliver Hermanus 2011) shows various isolating framing devices – a recurring motif in *Skoonheid*.

Figure 3.10: *Alienation in* Skoonheid*: use of diminishing long shots (Hermanus 2011).*

The philosophical relevance of Hermanus's *Skoonheid* in this context goes hand in hand with Carl Jung's view on the "solitary modern man". Jung argues that the modern man is so of necessity and at all times, progressing towards a fuller consciousness of the present, which consequently alienates him further from his original engagement with the mass of men (Jung 1933: 197). In that respect, François displays the contemporary tragedy of the individual. This tragedy is part of his construction and Hermanus's dispassionate view of François's unfortunate psychological and sexual predicaments. François finally cleans the swimming pool, with no slight or indirect comportment on the whole. In subduing the filth that has plagued the swimming pool for a long time, François poses a transformational relevance to his ends and purposes. He must now consult his original affinities and govern all his plans by that. He is obligated to subject himself to the eternal laws of beauty and order – so must man in his social interactions, wrote Sherman (1885: 314), look not simply to his lusts and longings, however permissible in and of themselves. Sherman insists that such a "solitary modern man" must abide by the collective laws of nature, must do no violence to the spirit of the times, but, conversely, come into an inviolable harmony with it.

Incommunicability presents itself through François's inability to interact with his peers in a meaningful way and share his inner struggles, especially with those who love and care for him. This incommunicability is evidenced by the unsuccessful attempts by François's wife, Elena van Heerden (Michelle Scott), to communicate with him on separate occasions. François seems to be nestled in his precious fantasy world, unable to fulfil his duties as a husband and father. For Francois, distance and proximity are constantly at odds as he is often keen to keep conversations with his wife, his daughter, and his peers fragmented, random and to a minimum. Figure 3.10 (Oliver Hermanus 2011) sees François disconnected from his wife and daughter, and with this action comes a profound sense of incommunicability.

Figure 3.11: *Representations of strained familial relations in* Skoonheid *(Hermanus 2011)*

Interestingly, François's incommunicability is momentarily reversed by a twist of fate that finally brings him face to face with the object of his desire in a late-night diner. Thus, I associate François's character with the view that alienation and incommunicability are potent forces that can move an individual towards the negative impulses of self-possession, susceptibility, and aggressiveness. Still, for the viewer, that can also result in the positive results of interiority and contemplation.

3.5.5.2 Self-loathing existence

Skoonheid is often read as a representation of South African queer realities (see Andrews 2018).[122] Beyond queer readings of the film, I view it as a complex study of a solitary modern man's slow journey into the core of his self-loathing existence, where beauty is unlikely to survive. Hermanus (2012: 4) arrives at a comparable conclusion. He describes *Skoonheid* as a story that explores "one man's disdain for himself and his hatred leading to self-destruction", and the spectator is only a witness to his violence, fears, anger, and jealousy. François, for instance, jealously watches Christian's unimpeded interaction with all kinds of people, no matter their colour, gender or sexual orientation. Christian being comfortable in his skin inspires envy and resentment within François, who is still on the path to self-

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[122] Andrews G. (2018). *The Boundaries of desire and intimacy in post-apartheid South African queer film: Oliver Hermanus's Skoonheid*. Image & Text: A Journal for Design (Vol. 31 Number 1, pp. 30-47). Accessed 11/03/2019 https://journals.co.za> journal

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discovery and trying to establish genuine connections with himself. However, the cruel and unbending world around him does not provide absolute answers. As Francois's self-loathing grows, so too does his resentment, ultimately giving way to foreseeable violence. Firstly, the film's depiction of sex-related crime emphasises François's existential crisis far more than the violent act. Then secondly, it implies that the authority figures in post-apartheid South Africa represent an oppressive system that encourages ruthless self-interest. Hermanus (2012: 5) accurately describes the existential tension between Christian and François:

> Christian, the object of Francois' affection, is a man born with physical form and beauty that gives him power in the world. It provides him currency to manipulate and take from the world what he wants. Francois is, in turns, disarmed and disgusted by Christian's power. He wants to be him with him, own him, 'have him', yet the ease with which Christian floats through life, the charm of his form enrages Francois to the core.

François's repressed intense yearning for Christian bore every thought and act of his, and coupled with self-loathing, it becomes his existence throughout the film – life is nothing without Christian, and he wishes that fate would grant his desire. François's existential crisis is congruent with the examination of psychoanalyst Erik Erikson. He noted: "the patient of early psychoanalysis suffered most under sexual inhibitions which prevented him from attaining his identity" (Erikson 1963: 279). Yet, since Christian represents love, while his wife represents a stable marriage acceptable to society, François remains inflexibly firm in his purpose to be with Christian. This physical emptiness may instigate, for instance, existential pensiveness that precedes and follows François's life or about the metaphysical void found at the root of his consciousness.

3.5.5.3 Eroticism and queerness

François's erotic life is an important part of Hermanus's filmic universe, who also wanted to make a film that transcended mere representation of sexuality. In the world of François and his ironically homophobic male sex partners, sexuality is a mere superficial sensation and exercise of power. This sensation is reminiscent of Antonioni's portrayal of the "sexual crisis" of modern humanity, which he called 'Sick Eros' or disease of love (*malattia dei sentimenti*),

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where "the men are voracious, and the women are bored" (Antonioni 1969a: 40).[123] In other words, modernism has distorted human values, even those related to sexuality. Like Antonioni, Hermanus is interested in the sociopolitical determinants of the failures of contemporary erotic behaviour. His representation of eroticism affirms that contemporary society represses, commodifies, and perverts natural Eros, thereby creating violent men and burned-out women. In a sense, François's sexual desperation hardly seems benign, and the odd conversation with his physician is only symbolic of his 'Sick Eros', which must be repressed for now. I contend that François's obsessive exploration of sexuality is an extension of Antonioni's sense of a 'Sick Eros' that blemishes modern life. Figure 3.12 (Oliver Hermanus) highlights François's failed attempt to dissociate his homosexual nature in a world that visages only what it deems as normal and irreproachable expressions of sexual desire and activity – much the same way that gay men feel restricted and oppressed.

Figure 3.12: *Portrayals of longing and desire in* Skoonheid *(Hermanus 2011).*

The only outlet for François's unrequited Eros is his queer dalliance with a small group of older, married men. These men's sexualities are still closeted and they remain bound to a

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[123] Antonioni's films, *L'Avventura* (1960), *La Notte* (1961), and *L'eclisse* (1962) are important references to Slow Cinema in that they signaled a deeper sense of absence, loss, and vacuity in human life and as cited in Jaffe (2014: 69), Antonioni's films are about "the death of the human soul".

conservative, patriarchal version of Afrikaner masculinity.[124] On the political potential of Slow Cinema, there have been attempts to closely link slowness to queerness or what it means to live queerly. For instance, Schoonover (2012: 74) poses the question, "do Slow Cinema's scandalous disruptions constitute a politically subversive practice?" He then pursues the notion that analogous to the aesthetics of Slow Cinema, "queerness often looks a lot like wasted time, wasted lives, and wasted productivity – queers ostensibly luxuriate while others work". Schoonover further observes that when an "innocent soul has the luxury of time, it often gets coded as a vulnerability to homosexuality" (Schoonover 2012: 73). In other words, Schoonover infers that "queers seem always to have time to waste". However, Schoonover's abstraction of queerness and slowness may not willingly lend itself to Hermanus's *Skoonheid*. In the actual sense [of queerness], Hermanus argues for the latent homosexuality of his characters, whose lives are at stake. Ultimately, I would concur with Schoonover's deduction that it might be crucial to delay the notion that seems to associate slowness with queerness until "we develop a more rigorous – even – queerer – materialism of slowness" (Schoonover 2012: 74).

The relationship between François and his wife is also backed up by Antonioni's discursive interrogation of 'Sick Eros', where François is 'voracious', and Elena is 'bored'. The latter could be adjudged as one of those women, who being in a state of affluence, continuing in marriage without any purpose or exertion and having extramarital affairs. Therefore, it is not strange that François, a stoic man of means, has impetuosity of passion, whose evil consequences he cannot prevent. François's yearning for youth tolerates an affinity for so attractive a man as Christian, who stirs the depth of his heart. François appears to have regard for his wife, and their tastes may even be similar, but their relationship is not bound by a solid and passionate sentiment that could equate to conjugal love. Francois's relationship with Elena is one of contentment and resentment; Christian, on the other hand, electrifies him and evokes both passion and pleasure. This excess is almost essential to the self-indulgent and impetuous François, who is overly obsessed with Christian, and is willing that fate should decide for him how and when he eventually has Christian for himself. He

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[124] This modernist perspective is consistent with Carl Jung's claim that the modern man is often to be found among those who call themselves old-fashioned for sufficient reasons – on the one hand emphasising the past to break with tradition and on the other, to counter that effect of guilt (Jung 1933: 199).

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implicitly trusts the same fate to let him risk whatever dangers he may. Fate does indeed answer the question for François, when in a moment of fitful passion, he attempts to be forcefully intimate with Christian. Still, he neither recovers himself immediately nor asks for forgiveness since, in this context, love is inseparable from its desires and acknowledges no law but its blind predispositions.

This analysis proceeded from the understanding that Hermanus's *Skoonheid* represents a mode of slow narrativising, aesthetics, and thematisation in its own right, distinct from yet in conversation with the films of Weerasethakul and Tarr. As my analysis has shown, *Skoonheid* broke new ground for Slow Cinema within African cinemas. Hermanus' style urges the viewer to contemplate issues of crucial importance to human behaviour. At the same time, the philosophical thrust of his film is an attempt at letting the spectator experience an impossible point of view. With this, I posit that Hermanus's *Skoonheid* allows this study to locate a cinematic style, which underlies and supports a Kenyan Slow Cinema film.

I also argue that the viewer recognises an indeterminate aspect of each film analysed in this chapter. This aspect is depicted, for example, in the significance behind Boonmee's preparation for the afterlife, Nietzsche's philosophical context in *The Turin Horse*, or acknowledging the existential plight of François's character in *Skoonheid*. I have attended to the Slow Cinema films analysed in this chapter based on their modes of address and, therefore, fully address the question, "How can cinematic slowness affect the viewer's experience?" This approach helps to grasp a dynamic potentiality of how Slow Cinema can be regarded and how the conceptualisation of a slow narrative and a slow aesthetic in Kenyan cinema can be achieved, as discussed in Chapters Four, Five, and Six.

3.6 Chapter Conclusion

With the close readings of the three Slow Cinema films, I have addressed how the conventions of Slow Cinema have been amplified in three selected films of acclaimed auteurs in the movement. Ideally, the oeuvres of Weerasethakul, Tarr, and Hermanus represent a realistic starting point for Slow Cinema to be situated in Kenyan cinema. At the outset, I have examined a broader framework for analysing a Slow Cinema film using the narrative discourse analysis method, which provides an interpretive path for a film analyst to make sense of Slow Cinema's narrative. I have shown that the goal of narrative discourse

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analysis in the context of Slow Cinema is to lay the groundwork for a Slow Cinema film to be placed within its sociocultural context and to explore features, which both integrate and situate it. I have also demonstrated how the analysis of narrative discourse in Slow Cinema provides a route consisting of various individual paths. These paths can be helpful in a study of the relationships between narrative and minimalism, as well as narrative and indeterminacy, and to the extent that they are inscribed in the aesthetics of a Slow Cinema film.

The second part of my analysis established how the modes of cinematic and spectator address in *Uncle Boonmee*, *The Turin Horse*, and *Skoonheid* lead to much the same terminus despite their diverse cultural, social and political connotations. I have demonstrated that the stylistic devices and effects used in their films may differ. Still, their contemplative overtones and philosophical intentions ring in clear harmony – all the cases converge around a general concern with existentialism.

First, in Weerasethakul's film, *Uncle Boonmee*, I have analysed various ways in which he tends to open a sphere of memory and a violent military past in Thailand. He does so by relying upon a direct association with slowness, vraisemblance, and the dream vision as stylistic devices that present subtext in his mode of cinematic address.

Second, from a conceptual perspective, Tarr's film, *The Turin Horse,* assigns analytical precision to history and politics with its use of slowness, unconventional dialogue, seamless camera movements, and philosophical overtones to paint a bleak social situation of the times facilitated by corruption.

Third and by no means least, Hermanus's attention to slow narrative and aesthetics in *Skoonheid* is an interpreted stylistic device. Hermanus largely bases this effect on the narrative-visual imagery that repeatedly punctuates human drama and existential distress, putting the film's meditative qualities on display.

Table 3.1 summarises the characteristics of different categories of Slow Cinema with specific reference to the occurrence of various narrative elements, temporality, aesthetics, and the embedded themes for the singular Slow Cinema films analysed in this chapter.

Table 3.1: Slow Cinema conventions in three selected films

CATEGORY	FILM		
Requirements	*Uncle Boonmee*	*The Turin Horse*	*Skoonheid*
Narrative	• Narrative permits immeasurable figurative interpretations. • It consists of a fragmented plot imbued with minimalism and indeterminacy. • The multi-dimensional story universe constitutes shifting narrative instalments, which prompt the spectator to question the power structures of the narrative itself.	• The narrative operates in a kind of scarcity mode addressing the most everyday activities of human existence. • Withholds narrative meaning and thereby emphasises minimalism and indeterminacy. • The staging of largely non-speaking characters places a high premium on contemplation.	• The narrative is lean, slow in tempo, restrained, voyeuristic and lacks dramatic urgency. • Abandons plot, often gravitating towards stillness and silence, tending, in any case, to be minimalist, indeterminate, and unresolved. • Narrative produces experiences of absurdity, emotional minimalism, and indeterminacy, thus encouraging in viewers a contemplative mode of spectatorship.
Temporality	• Makes meaning through embodied structures of temporality, during which the camera, landscapes, objects, and characters move or remain still within the frame. • Narrativises to the spectator	• Titular characters go about their daily routines in the arduous boredom of real-time. • Provocatively slow narrative comprising of thirty long takes, minimalist score and dialogue.	• The subtle workings of the film's slowness generally derive from the exhibition of its extended duration. • It depicts the protagonist sitting thoughtfully in his car, driving around in silence or just engaging in voyeuristic

	the nonrepresentational concept of an extended duration in which past, present and future events amalgamate. • Fragments the illusion of cinematic duration, with the moving image caricaturing the spectator's everyday experience of time.	• The temporal structure built into the film transfers to the receptive spectator a temporal frame of mind contrary to mainstream cinema.	activities, hence stressing the acknowledgement of time passing. • Low in instant spectacle, thereby providing the realism that places the spectator within its emotional context and permits witnessing moments as the protagonist would.
Aesthetics	• It consists of *long takes* filmed in static frames and less frequently movements of the camera and characters, immersing the characters and spectators alike in space and time. • Lighting, composition, and colour valorize the setting, making it difficult to isolate the figure from the background. • Long sequences of silence and dialogue enhanced by the	• Emphasis on mobile *long takes* with the camera reframing in seamless tracking shots to follow characters into different spaces. • Low-key and non-dramatic lighting causing the characters to merge with their surroundings. • Heightened diegetic sounds accompanied by a continuous and monotonous musical underscoring. • Minimal or invisible editing with camera	• Combines *long takes* and *short takes* to allow for more variation and intricacy in the film's narrative pacing. • Essential aesthetic features are encapsulated into the film through a colour palette that wavers between two excesses of abundance and the ugly side of nature. • The rhythm created in the shift from shot to shot complements the slowness advanced by the dialogue and tone of the plot.

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	use of elliptical editing. • Emphasis on the diegetic soundscape of the cinematic jungle accompanied by a hypnotic musical underscoring.	reframing into various shot types.	• Editing is frugal to intensify the film's subtle themes.
Themes	• Ageing and loss • Memory • History • Transformation • Spiritualism • Materialistic modernism	• Anguish • Alienation • Nothingness • Absurdity • Apocalypse • Transcendence	• Alienation • Incommunicability • Self-loathing existence • Eroticism • Queerness

The three films analysed in this chapter point to possibilities of exploring Slow Cinema and its conventions as situated in Kenyan cinema. Concerning the narrative-formal expressiveness envisaged in a Kenyan Slow Cinema film, in Chapter Five, for example, I experiment with the concepts of *vraisemblance* and the dream vision in *Uncle Boonmee* while exploring the themes of existentialism as espoused in *The Turin Horse* and *Skoonheid*. Important questions remain as to whether Slow Cinema can propose a different perspective on the spectator's experience of slowness regarding narrative, minimalism, and indeterminacy. Such a perspective could help stretch artistic expression in Kenyan cinema beyond the limits once associated with singular narratology and, consequently, interrogate Slow Cinema's idea and its intrinsic mode of spectator address. Such meditations on what slowness can mean to Kenyan cinema create a valuable starting point for the next chapter to examine the engagement of Slow Cinema with a form of Kenyan cinema that is dependent on the fast cinema narrative style and, by extension, digital media. Based on the knowledge gained from the textual analyses of *Uncle Boonmee*, *The Turin Horse*, and *Skoonheid*, it becomes possible for the chapters that follow to situate Slow Cinema as part of a broader cultural movement in the age of digitisation. I argue that Slow Cinema can reconsider the Kenyan viewer's interaction with the cinematic image, becoming a vehicle for philosophical address and contemplation.

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CHAPTER FOUR:

SITUATING SLOWNESS IN KENYAN CINEMA

4.1 Chapter Introduction

Scholarly work on Slow Cinema often operates from a traditionally Eurocentric, even Asia-centric standpoint of what constitutes a Slow Cinema film across all contexts of world cinema.[125] Nonetheless, it would be difficult to argue against the notion that African cinemas have substantially benefited from their varied relationships with Hollywood, European and Asian cinemas, primarily concerning generic and formal elements. The continent's position in world cinema has consequently elicited conforming and divergent views. Diawara (2010: 49), for example, suggests that African cinemas have indeed evolved from "the Sembènian pan-African, Marxist utopia" to a new era that has witnessed the emergence of many contemporary films with global influences. Akudinobi (2010: 237), on his part, observes that compared to their counterparts in world cinema, African cinemas have experienced slow and unsteady growth. Yet, they continue to evolve mainly in response to unique social and cultural formations.

Capitalising on this evolution and the status of African cinemas within world cinema today, this chapter critically describes a contextualised approach to Slow Cinema in complementing certain aspects of African cinemas.[126] The chapter specifies how the narrative-formal expressiveness of Slow Cinema can be inserted within local, historical and cultural contexts of Kenyan cinema. In the discussions that follow, I will present a single inclusive framework to address several questions, critical among them: how has the concept of African Cinemas been redefined to consider alternative film styles and genres such as Slow Cinema? Second, how have specific formations of Kenyan cinema emerged in historical, cultural, and social circumstances to adopt a range of generic, thematic, narrative, and formal elements? Third, how can Kenya's distinct film culture be understood as national or transnational to embody a body of Slow Cinema films? Finally, how can conventions or strands of Slow

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[125] See Chapter One (sections 1.1 and 1.2), for information on what constitutes a Slow Cinema film.
[126] See for example, Africa's Lost Classics (ALC) project supported by the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC), seeking to bring artistically innovative but rare and little-known classic African films to the public to expand the diversity of world cinema available to UK audiences.

Cinema be legitimised within the framework of cinematic engagement for film authors in Kenyan cinema? First, I address African cinemas' concept, especially the idea that a new struggle does not define the "New Age African cinemas" in Kenneth Harrow's terms. Instead, it is concerned with a contemporary sensibility affected by cultural currents that also mark cinematic tendencies, in this case, Slow Cinema, elsewhere throughout the world (Harrow 2011: 223).

Second, I revisit the history of Kenyan cinema to question its self-contained notion of generic, thematic, narrative, and formal elements. In particular, I want to suggest that Slow Cinema can be hybridised in the experiences of Kenyan filmmakers and their audiences. Third, I want to advance the argument that Kenya's film culture is of vital importance at both the national and transnational levels, chiefly as a means of promoting experimental filmmaking and, particularly, a body of Slow Cinema films. Lastly, in the fourth part of the discussion, I summarise how slowness can be situated within Kenyan cinema concerning the preceding factors and suppositions. Overall, I intend to use the textual analysis of the three Slow Cinema films in Chapter Three and my discussion of Slow Cinema as alternative cinema (see Chapter Two, section 2.3.3) to position Slow Cinema as an alternative point of reference in the multifaceted debates about Kenyan cinema. This analysis relies on an extensive review of the existing body of research surrounding Kenyan cinema and my knowledge and professional experience working in the Kenyan film industry.

4.2 The Concept of African Cinemas

The status of African cinemas permits a transitory definition to formulate a framework that considers alternative film styles and genres in world cinema. In his article, *Approaches to African Cinema Study*, Tanzanian filmmaker and scholar Martin Mhando reflects on the past four decades of African cinemas, which have been construed by critics, constituting a film discourse mode understood historically but defined artistically.[127] In other words, African cinemas preoccupy themselves with the information highlighted less by formal techniques than by an embedded worldview (Mhando 2000: 1). This view is reflected in the various definitions of African cinemas. Harrow (2011: 218) claims that attempts to define African

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[127]See Mhando (2000: 1) http://sensesofcinema.com/2000/film-criticism/african/ July 2000 Issue 8: Accessed 29 December 2019

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cinema as a cinema *engagé* date back to the 1960s and 1970s when it was crucial to creating a "cinema of social-political engagement to deal with Africa's social, economic, and political problems".[128] More so, embracing the challenge of the newly independent African state bracing itself for the future. For Shaka (1994: 71), whose definition of African cinemas draws on Diawara's (1992: 131) categorization of African cinemas, "the concept of African cinemas" captures an imagined African nation's tradition, which he argued; drew the commitment of most Africans. He further proposed that for a film to qualify as African, it must focus on Africans as its primary audience and conceived within a broad range of African identities, subject matters, and social experiences. That said, the question of what makes African cinemas African and whether it is associated with a distinct style, according to Murphy (2000: 239), has elicited debates about African cinemas. In Murphy's analysis, the definition of what could be referred to as an 'authentic' African cinema or even what an African film should look like compared to Western cinema remains intensely problematic, especially in light of "widespread agreement that colonial representations were distorted and inauthentic" (Murphy 2000: 239). Murphy contradicts Shaka's position of an *imagined* African nation when he puts forward the idea that the reality of "Africans filming Africa has not produced a unified, 'authentic' African cinema" (Murphy 2000: 239). For Bakari and Cham (1996: 168), attempts to create a "single African cinema and continental culture would be too limiting in terms of regional differences, historical forms of resistance, discursive strategies and definitions of Africa."

Akudinobi (2010: 237) presents a more optimistic view. He states that the idea of a unitary African cinema is now less dependent on politics, with the emergence of alternative artistic archetypes, cultural affinities, formal experimentations, and narrative modernisms mainly associated with the younger, post-independent generation of filmmakers. Suppose the terms "authentic African cinema" and "unitary African cinema" have long been debated in the continent. In that case, it may be imperative to join Bisschoff and Overbergh (2012: 113) in briefly addressing the question, "Who, then, are 'the people' in Africa?" It is evident that "the people" in Africa constitute a heterogeneous field, comprising different folkloric, religious,

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[128] This concept refers to a cinema that conveys a message, or one that takes sides and has for instance a political agenda. Another term used to describe such a cinema is militant or activist cinema. French-Swiss film director Jean-Luc Godard's films, including *Tout Va Bien* (1972) would be considered cinéma engagé. For more information see Buchsbaum, J. (1988).

industrial, philological, and class groups. In this context, Bisschoff and Overbergh (ibid.) note that despite these clear differences, there seems to exist no strict peculiarities in terms of social classes, but rather a complex network of affiliations and benefaction. As such, this claim emphasises the commonness of "the people" in Africa, especially concerning the often-disconcerting matters related to living in a stimulating and rapidly-evolving post-colonial society. It would therefore be conceivable, as Mhando (2000) contends, for African films to be presented as being 'African' because they reflect the "commonness" of the conditions that "the people" in Africa experience in their daily lives. Mhando (ibid.) continues these African conditions would then become the central purpose of filmmaking in the region. Additionally, Mhando suggests that to realize the notion of 'Africanness' in African cinema, the content in African films should relate to historical gravities, ecological, social concerns, technological advances, and philosophies, attitudes, and conceptualisations of "the people" in Africa.

As if to close the case on what is 'African' about African cinema, Zacks (1995: 15) acknowledged the presence of cultural syncretism in present-day Africa. However, he called for the outright rejection of the view that African cinema can exist authentically on its own. Zacks argued instead for the repositioning of African cinema as a fertile ground for hybridisation. Mhando (2000) agrees when he emphasises that acknowledging the existence of 'an African film,' in and of itself, becomes problematic. Critical to Zacks' suggestion of repositioning African cinemas is the notion that such a cinema is built on paradigms or styles copied from a western tradition. This tradition, according to Zacks, too often succeeds in diminishing African cultural commodities to the status of something inferior and subservient (Zacks 1995: 15). In other words, the idea of what is authentic African, according to Zacks, should not exclude European tendencies and place itself in opposition to it, as that would validate the belief that Europe is the centre and origin of all culture. Questioning the terms in which this problem of authenticity is posed often calls for a return to the site of the colonial conflict, pitting African culture against Western culture. Yet, as Murphy (2000: 241) asserts, Africa and the West are not mutually exclusive worlds that possess their own authentic and fixed characteristics. Instead, they should be viewed as "hybrid entities that refashion and influence each other". This exchange process should then be applied to African cinemas even though the West remains the dominant force. Therefore,

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it is clear that cultural syncretism creates avenues for the diversification of African cinematic styles because Africans are diverse: ideologically, ethnically, and culturally.

About the above discussion, the concept of African cinemas, and especially the process of hybridisation, establish the basis for the study's focus on situating Slow Cinema in Kenyan cinema. In many cases, Slow Cinema is seen from a Eurocentric angle. Therefore, any attempts to situate it in Africa would be construed as a contradiction within itself and the philosophy that forms its language. However, Turvey and Hendry (2008: 43) offer a clear perspective that positions the African continent as a vast market – even a significant dumping ground – for European, US, and Indian films. I argue that any school of thought that first considers Europe as the sole source of a body of Slow Cinema films and, secondly, views Slow Cinema as a tendency inauthentic to African cinemas forfeits the subtleties of new identities in a constantly evolving African continent. From all indications, this study should consider the different genres in African cinema that can position Slow Cinema in the interstices of form and narrative. Shaka (1994: 92) fittingly categorised these genres as firstly, the critical realist film, secondly, the colonial encounter film, and thirdly, the folkloric film. In Shaka's assessment, the colonial encounter film is a cinema that primarily deals with the oppositions between Africans and their European colonisers during the colonial era. In contrast, the folkloric film is propelled chiefly by reminiscence and the yearning to defend what filmmakers of this classification perceive to be the attrition of traditional African beliefs and customs.

It is the critical realist category, Shaka (1994: 92) argued, within which most films that have been made in the context of African cinemas fall. Many such films, Shaka emphasised, condemned corruption, the problem of negative ethnicity, and the overindulgences of the elites and instructed the masses to cherish the disposition of self-sustenance as a strategy aimed at developing the community. Diawara (2010: 95-98), for his part, dwells on the new wave of "post-Sembènian African filmmakers" regular engagement with world cinema. This new wave of African cinemas, Diawara contends, challenges the "desire for a unity of voices" as earlier stated by Shaka (1994: 71) while focusing on cinema as an art rather than an ideology. The key proponent of the new wave of African cinemas, according to Diawara (2010: 98), is Abderrahmane Sissako, whose films I have associated with Slow Cinema in this study. Thus, in the context of this discussion, it is important to emphasise, like Shaka

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and Diawara, that many films in African cinemas concern themselves with the question of how "the people" in Africa can negotiate their way through modernity without losing cherished traditional customs and beliefs. To this end, the conflict between modernity and tradition tends to feature as one of the critical themes in quite many Slow Cinema films. Hence, I believe that Slow Cinema can be used as an appropriate narrative strategy to diversify African film style. As Cham (1998: 49) argued, the future of African cinemas will continue to be characterised by a debate on narrative content, form, style, technique, and execution. Recent African films seem to be inclined towards greater diversity, the plurality of stories, themes, and ideologies. Cham (1998: 49) further observed that some filmmakers were also increasingly attracted to universal stories either in content, reference, or implication, while others opted for the local. In this sense, African cinemas should not be moulded in opposition to other film styles and genres in world cinema.

Consequently, this study calls for Kenyan cinema as an African cinema to consider divergent film styles and especially cinematic tendencies of slowness for a better philosophical understanding and an awareness of the political, social, and cultural issues facing "the people" of Kenya. What I propose is the recognition of Slow Cinema as a genre either under Shaka's critical realist category or Diawara's new wave of African cinema. Furthermore, this recognition may point to the situatedness of Slow Cinema's narrative and aesthetic strategies within Kenyan cinema as it relates to African cinemas. In the following sections, I attend to the emergence of specific formations of Kenyan cinema and how they speak to Kenya's historical, cultural, and socio-economic times.

4.3 A Kenyan Cinema Towards Slowness

In global cinema, Kenyan cinema is relatively unknown because it operates within a film culture that has not been institutionalised within the political economy of the country's media industry.[129] In this case, film culture refers to the materiality of film production, viewing and exhibition practices, and representation (see Hodsdon 2002: 1). There is, of course, a cluster of other factors that may determine the size of a particular national cinema to the global film culture, some of which are discussed later in this chapter. For now, it is crucial to acknowledge, as Slavkovic (2014: 189) does, that Kenyan cinema, like its East African

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[129] I will briefly discuss the political economy of film in Kenya later in section 4.4.

counterparts in Uganda and Tanzania, is infrequently researched. This shortage in research is attributable to the nature and direction of inquiry in addressing Kenyan cinema, which is often without any sustained reflection. That complicates further the task of situating Slow Cinema in Kenyan cinema concerning the existing scholarship.

Tracing historical, cultural, and socio-economic continuities in Kenyan cinema allows me to analyse specific formations that have proven particularly resonant in the Slow Cinema films analysed in the previous chapter. There are, therefore, several formations that underline my arguments about the situatedness of Slow Cinema conventions in Kenyan cinema, and each focuses on a different set of dynamics. The first formation historicises Kenyan film as a hybrid art form, enabling me to explore Slow Cinema's cultural connectivity. The second is interrogating thematic representations in Kenyan cinema and how they speak to its historical, cultural, and socio-economic circumstances. This operation makes it possible to map out continuities in the thematic concerns of Slow Cinema. The third is analysing the didactic narrative technique and how it operates. My point here is to explore the textual mechanism the didactic narrative is built on and validated, and possibly more so, how it departs from the narrative conventions of slowness. Lastly, the fourth formation looks at aesthetic features in Kenyan cinema that often constitute a particular film style, a process that explores a possible relationship with Slow Cinema. Such a strategy rests on Slavkovic's (2014: 190) argument that one cannot analyse the filmmaking practices in East Africa outside of their historical and socio-cultural settings. Similarly, the various developmental stages of these practices should be considered within their relevant frameworks. The abovementioned formations emerge as a particularly productive site to investigate how Slow Cinema can negotiate with the local to respond to the historical, cultural, and socio-economic forces at play in Kenyan cinema.

4.3.1 Historicising the hybridity of Kenyan cinema

Over the past years, the history of Kenyan cinema has received significant scholarly attention. Nyutho (2015: 1) traces the historical development of Kenya's film industry while looking at how "policies and institutional frameworks have been impacted by changing political and technological circumstances", from Kenya's colonial era to the present. Okioma and Mugubi (2015) endeavour to lay the groundwork for discourses on Kenyan cinema by tracing filmmaking practices in Kenya from pre-independence to postmodern Kenya.

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Kinyanjui (2014), on the other hand, takes a historical voyage through Kenyan film as she points to factors that have led to the successes and failures witnessed in Kenya's film industry. Evaluating the Kenyan film industry, Simiyu Barasa (2010), in his critically acclaimed documentary, *The History of Film in Kenya: 1909-2009,* takes a retrospective and forward-looking approach to the growth of the Kenyan film industry and the challenges faced by filmmakers. Whereas such scholarly works play a crucial role in understanding Kenyan cinema's historical and cultural contexts, most of them are relatively insular and only loosely tied together across multiple publications. Nyutho (2015: 7) himself concedes that whatever secondary data on the history of Kenyan cinema exists is disjointed and scattered in many sources.

Moreover, a large sum of existing literature on Kenyan cinema features across unpublished M.A and Ph.D. dissertations. [130] These inadequacies, therefore, make it challenging to understand the theoretical underpinnings of Kenyan cinema from a comprehensive standpoint. The resulting gaps heighten the need for this section to provide a historicised understanding that constitutes a fundamental interpretive approach to Kenyan cinema as a hybrid formation that can also be receptive to Slow Cinema. What follows is a brief look at the history of Kenyan film. Then an exploration of Slow Cinema's cultural connectivity, which I will show directly relates to hybridisation in the history of Kenyan cinema.

Of particular interest and complexity to this study are the origins of filmmaking in Kenya. Okioma and Mugubi (2015: 46) observe that Kenyan cinema was associated with missionaries, game hunters, and colonial administrators. Similarly, Nyutho (2015: 81) is keen to assert that Kenya was one of the first countries where British and Hollywood filmmakers made travelogues and game hunting films because they were fascinated with the country's flora and fauna. Nyutho further identifies Theodore Roosevelt's 1909 film *Hunting Safari*, which was screened in London and Washington in 1911, as one of the earliest films that featured the best that Kenya had to offer in terms of location. Slavkovic (2014: 191) points out that the historical journey through filmmaking in East Africa started

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[130] See Kenyatta University's repository:
https://ir-library.ku.ac.ke/handle/123456789/4651/browse?rpp=20&order=ASC&sort_by=1&etal=-1&type=title&starts_with=K Accessed 22/01/2021

during the interwar years in the 1930s. The International Missionary Council (IMC), the Carnegie Corporation, and the British Colonial Office sponsored the Bantu Educational Kinema Experiment (BEKE 1935-1937).

Film historian James Burns insists that BEKE "was the culmination of a decade of discussion and experimentation into the production of motion pictures for the subjects of the British Empire" (Burns 2002: 22).[131] The Carnegie Corporation, Smyth (1979: 444) states, provided the bulk of the finance to the tune of £11,000, but additional funds were acquired from the Colonial Development Fund (CDF) with two preconditions.[132] First, the experiment had to be devoted to the production and distribution of agricultural instruction films. Second, the governments of Kenya, Uganda, and Tanganyika (Tanzania) had to contribute two-fifths of the cost (£250), which they did with much reluctance. The primary purpose of BEKE, according to Shaka (1994: 109), "was informed by the desire to exploit the educational capabilities of the medium but, more so, to counter the influence of Hollywood films in British colonies". As Slavkovic (2014: 191) notes, BEKE primarily sought to propagate instructional messages ranging from money saving and coffee growing to malaria and hygiene through the production of at least 35 black and white 16mm films accompanied by a voice-over narration in English and several African languages. Mobile cinema vans and commentators travelled through the rural areas of East Africa, showing the films to the highly illiterate "natives." It is worth noting that Kenyans only featured as actors or subjects in the films but were not empowered to produce any of them and had little access to creative-economic resources.

Smyth (1979: 445) discusses the BEKE model in much more detail by locating the anxiety of the Colonial Office to see the British colonies exploiting the opportunity of "using the cinema constructively in the interests of Africa and the Empire". As Diang'a (2016: 2) insists, BEKE was solely responsible for advancing didactic films, which tends to emphasise the notion of infusing messages or information into entertainment.[133] Consequently, BEKE's sponsors and directors expected it to gain a more permanent footing after its two-year run. Still, the reluctance of East African governments to fund the initiative, as Smyth pointed out

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[131] See Burns, J. (2002).
[132] See Rosaleen Smyth (1979).
[133] I discuss the didactic narrative technique in detail in section 4.3.3.

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earlier, meant that BEKE was continually short of money. Thus, in June 1937, at the East African Governors' Conference in Nairobi, Kenya, and other East African governments declined to have anything further to do with BEKE. There were several other reasons for this resolution: the poor "technical quality of the films, especially the imperfect synchronisation of the sound-on-disk method" (Smyth 1979: 445). However, the impact of BEKE on Kenyan cinema in terms of its didactic function, representational features, and exhibition context of Kenyan audiences cannot be understated. As I will demonstrate later, BEKE's themes and mobility continue to characterise the workings of today's Kenyan cinema, and thereby a telling illustration through which to examine the narrative inclination of Kenyan films towards hybridisation.

The failed institutionalisation and continuation of BEKE led to revolutionary calls by East African governments for the domestication of film and other cultural products. In that respect, Diang'a (2017: 3) demonstrates that the establishment of the Kenya Film Corporation (KFC) in 1967 by the post-independent Kenyan government directly impacted the rise of Kenyan cinema. As Diang'a (ibid.) identified, the corporation's two main functions were distributing foreign films and producing local films. Kinyanjui (2014: 69) hastens to indicate that the tasks of KFC were further invigorated in 1976 when the Friedrich Ebert Foundation of Germany financed the establishment of the Kenya Institute of Mass Communication (KIMC). The institute was fully equipped with a lab for developing 16mm films to train selected Kenyans in all aspects of filmmaking. As is widely documented by some Kenyan film scholars (Diang'a 2017; Kinyanjui 2014; Nyutho 2015; Okioma & Mugubi 2015), the clamour for films by Africans for Africans began in the 1970s with Sao Gamba, who is widely regarded as the father of Kenyan cinema.

Gamba was offered a scholarship in 1964 by the Polish government to study filmmaking at the prestigious Film Institute in Lodz. After his studies, he worked for Idi Amin's government in Uganda until 1973. He returned to Kenya to head the Documentary Film Unit within the former Voice of Kenya (VOK) and to direct documentary films. In 1979, Gamba was invited by the African Society of Japan to visit the country. He made a cultural film about his visit under the title: "African Eye on Japan". This film provided a basis for his critically acclaimed film, *Kolormask*, produced in 1985 and funded by the Kenyan government through the Kenya Film Corporation. It marked the culmination of the clamour to have

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indigenous films that could correctly characterise Africans, their past, and culture to the world. Considered Kenya's first full-length feature film made by an indigenous filmmaker, *Kolormask* "is about a Kenyan student who returns home with a white wife and finds his marriage threatened by cultural differences" (Shaka 1994: 251). Despite its local success, Shaka was quick to comment that *Kolormask* was criticised at the 1987 FESPACO film festival "for being too exotic in its emphasis on documenting African culture" (Shaka 1994: 251).[134] It is also helpful to note at this juncture, as does Nyutho (2015: 97), that Kenya has a burgeoning Indian culture. Hence, films by directors of Indian origin are considered to be part of Kenyan cinema. Kenyans of Indian origin are arguably the leading pioneers of Kenyan cinema. Such films as *Mlevi* (1968) and *Mzembo* (1969), directed by Ramesh Shah, and especially Sharad Patel's immensely successful feature-length film, *Rise and Fall of Amin Dada* (1981), deservedly taking their place in the history of Kenyan cinema.

Diang'a (2017: 4) continues to call attention to the fact that after the production of *Kolormask* and its release in 1986, there was scarcely any feature-length film produced by a Kenyan filmmaker. This scarcity was because the Kenyan government was hesitant to fund another film after the enormous costs incurred to produce *Kolormask,* especially in the wake of economic liberalisation triggered by the clamour for multipartism in the early 1990s. Diang'a (ibid.) observes that the arrival of the much more affordable video film production technology in the country coincided with the demand for multipartism and signalled a new era in Kenyan cinema. Similarly, the expansion of media freedom due to the liberal economy led to the materialisation of privately-owned television stations in the country, giving rise to alternative film distribution channels for filmmakers. Of even greater significance, as Okioma and Mugubi (2015) and Shaka (1994) confirm, the call for democracy in the country around this same period saw the emergence of women filmmakers led by the KIMC-trained Anne G. Mungai, regarded as the country's first female film director. Mungai directed her first feature-length film, *Saikati,* in 1992, followed by a sequel, *Saikati: The Enkabaani,* in 1999. *Saikati* remains one of the most recognisable Kenyan films to date. It tells the story of a Maasai girl who flees from traditionally sanctioned early marriage but falls prey to the

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[134] The Pan African Film and Television Festival of Ouagadougou is a film festival in Burkina Faso, held biennially in Ouagadougou, where the organization is based. It accepts for competition only films by African filmmakers and chiefly produced in Africa. For more information see FESPACO website: https://fespaco.org/en/welcome-to-fespaco/ . Accessed: 10/08/2021.

corruption in the city. Afterwards, from the year 2003, the availability of cheaper digital technology, according to Kinyanjui (2014: 73), demystified filmmaking, meaning that a growing number of Kenyans were eager to try out their new skills and talents. As a result, it was not long before stand-up comedians, and upcoming music artists started taping their performances and selling them on VCD along the busy Nairobi streets. These were the earliest beginnings of *Riverwood*, which is considered Kenya's national cinema. The name *Riverwood*, Nyutho (2015: 177) asserts, "is created from a backyard street behind the Nairobi central business district named River Road."

The fast rise of *Riverwood* could be linked to the "Kenya Film Commission (KFC) establishment by the Kenyan government in 2005 to promote the Kenyan film industry locally and internationally" (Kinyanjui 2014: 73). In 2007, through a partnership with South African pay television company M-Net, KFC sponsored at least ten filmmakers primarily drawn from *Riverwood* to attend a filmmaking workshop in Nigeria, hoping to draw on Nollywood as a success story in the video film business (Banda 2007).[135] Consequently, *Riverwood*, which to Edwards (2008: 6) represents indigenous filmmaking in Kenya today, is modelled on the Nigerian example but is predominantly produced in vernacular languages with a mix of English and Swahili. The key themes in most *Riverwood* films, according to Diang'a (2017: 6), are pegged on the idiomatic authenticity that mirrors the day-to-day challenges facing many families in rural, peri-urban, and urban Kenya. To underline the importance and growth of such an industry, Slavkovic (2014: 200) ascertains that *Riverwood* produces between 20 and 30 films every week (comprising mainly of shorts), building up to 1,000 films a year. Yet, this figure could have been much higher considering the interruptions brought about by Kenya's post-election violence in 2008.

Yet, despite its global recognition, some Nairobi-based middle-class filmmakers, as Steedman (2019: 5) reports, do not consider themselves to be part of Riverwood, which they are eager to dismiss as 'amateurish'. As such, there exists in Kenyan cinema two parallel factions, namely *Riverwood* cinema and Mainstream cinema. Steedman (ibid.) notes that Nairobi-based middle-class filmmakers are widely regarded as the establishment of Kenya's

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[135] Banda, K. (2007). Kenya: Mission to Nollywood- Published by the Daily Nation, Nairobi. Downloaded 10/02/2020: https://allafrica.com/stories/200707160462.html

mainstream cinema. *Riverwood* cinema emphasises folkloric filmmaking that upholds traditional African beliefs and customs (see Shaka 1994: 92) and is also more market-oriented. On the other hand, Mainstream cinema mainly channels its films through film festivals as a beneficiary of foreign grants and transnational co-productions. In that case, Mainstream cinema in Kenya tends to hybridise its local content and practices with foreign sensibilities. Indeed, the history of Kenyan cinema cannot be complete without acknowledging the impact of international films produced. Ogunleye (2014: 66) observes that some international films may not have been made within the local or national culture, but they still belonged to Kenya's cultural context.[136] A 2013 report released by Emerging Market Economics Africa (EME) on the economic contribution of film and television in Kenya identifies a range of international productions made in Kenya. They include the Academy Award-winning film *Out of Africa* (Pollack 1985), *To Walk with Lions* (Schultz 1999), *The Constant Gardener* (Meirelles 2005), *The First Grader* (Chadwick 2010), and *Watu Wote* (Benrath 2017), to name a few. The report also indicates that since 1952, Kenya has been the ideal cinematic setting for over 80 highly acclaimed international films, some of which I have mentioned above.

Whereas the existing scholarship is limited to a general description of historical developments in Kenyan cinema, I aim, for the first time, to historicise specific periods in the development of Kenyan cinema. I illustrate how major social, political, economic, and cultural events in Kenya's history can lead to a historicised understanding of its cinematic tendencies. I should stress that this understanding does not position itself as a 'corrective' to any particular scholarly exploration of the history of Kenyan cinema. Instead, it is a direct expansion of existing scholarship, seeking to add new information and insights that illuminate the significant historical developments of Kenyan cinema. First, I will historicise two critical periods in Kenya's history that, to my understanding, have shaped Kenyan cinema since, at least, the 2000s. Second, I characterise how Slow Cinema can react to the hybridisation of historical-cultural products in Kenyan cinema. It is reasonable to argue that the last two decades can be considered the most outstanding example of the potential of Kenyan cinema. It would also be pertinent to designate the first significant part of the last

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[136] For example, *Out of Africa* (Pollack 1985), a Hollywood romantic epic that featured the people of Kenya's Kikuyu tribe.

twenty years (2002-2007) as the *golden age* of Kenyan cinema and the second part (2010-2018) as the *silver age.*[137]

To start with, I do not imply that the broad characterisation of the golden age of Kenyan cinema was extraordinary in terms of the economic boom associated with such a period. Instead, I link it to the growth in popular culture spending brought about by the postelection euphoria following the historic first electoral transfer of power in Kenya's history in 2002. The economic and political disturbances that characterised the 1990s were now behind. Therefore, Kenya was on the threshold of experiencing a period of peace, economic growth, and the belief that a prosperous future was in the offing. "The vast majority of Kenyans hoped that the victorious National Alliance Rainbow Coalition (NARC)" led by President Mwai Kibaki would reform and revitalise the government to fully realise democracy and economic prosperity (Wolf, Logan, & Owiti 2004: 4).[138] The post-election euphoria even made Kenyans the happiest people on earth according to the 2003 world happiness index. This period provided an opportunity that Kenyan filmmakers sought to tap into at the time.

In light of the above, I use the deliberate term "golden age" to describe the period between 2002 and 2007 in Kenyan cinema because filmmakers celebrated it for its prosperity and contribution to the creative economy. This golden age marks the time Kenyan filmmakers made several films and released them consistently to the public in cinema halls and through VCD or DVD formats. These films, which emphasised inspirational themes, elevated the spirits of the Kenyan people, who were even more enthusiastic about buying and watching them.[139] Therefore, according to Okioma and Mugubi (2015: 55), Kenyan filmmakers could earn a decent living from their works and produce more economically and artistically risky films from a relatively secure financial and artistic base. In quantifiable terms, the prospects of Kenyan cinema during the golden age seemed particularly promising, notably due to the unprecedented seven per cent GDP growth rate (which was unpredicted at the time), the

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[137] I compare this period to the Golden Age of Cinema (1929-1945) widely associated with the most exciting period in American film. During this period, according to Jewell (2007: 33), "the Studio System was at its peak and movies played a critical role at elevating the spirits of the public. The Golden Age of Cinema also defined the economics, technology, censorship, style, genres, stars and history of Classical Hollywood". For further reading see Jewell, R. (2007).
[138] See Afro Barometer Working Paper No.33. *A New Dawn? Popular Optimism in Kenya after the transition.*
[139] See Duncan's (2004: 1) article on the enthusiasm for locally made Kenyan films during this period: https://womensenews.org/2004/09/women-drive-film-industry-kenya/

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ease of doing business in the country, low inflation rates, and financial intermediation (see Njiraini 2012: 1).[140] These factors stimulated the demand for other products and services, including filmed entertainment. In addition, different social and cultural events helped usher in the golden age of Kenyan cinema, consisting of a vibrant media ecosystem, censorship constraints, and the growth of the Internet and mobile communication. In the golden age, Kenyan cinema also experienced an influx of experimental filmmaking, marked by an evolution of genres as filmmakers adopted new narrative strategies. Furthermore, the emergence of exceptional talent, new camera technology, and more freedom for screenwriters served up more optimism for Kenyan cinema (see Nyutho 2015: 184).

Examples of notable films released during the golden era of Kenyan cinema, according to the EME report (2013), include *Dangerous Affair* (Karago 2002), a romantic comedy about love, marriage, and affairs, *Naliaka is Going* (Wandago 2003), "depicting typical Kenyan problems of poverty, early marriage, education and unemployment", and *Project Daddy* (Karago 2004), which is about a young, upwardly mobile Nairobi woman's search for the right man with whom to have a child. Filmmakers expected the golden age of Kenyan cinema to last longer. However, the golden age eventually ended at the height of the much-reported 2007-2008 post-election violence in Kenya, negatively linked to ethnicity and competitive politics. There was also a sense of disillusionment among Kenyans that the NARC government had failed to fulfil its promises (see Karume 2006: 10). In particular, filmmaking gains during the golden age, were reversed as economic growth stagnated. Except for Wanuri Kahiu's, *From a Whisper* (2008) and Hawa Essuman's *Soul Boy* (2010), feature-length films were hardly released for the next four years following the post-election violence. As a result, Kenyan cinema provided a large array of different films during its golden age. However, it is reasonable to argue that Kenyan filmmakers may never replicate the economic and artistic gains accrued during the golden age period. The period immediately following the golden age of Kenyan cinema, in my assessment, was the *silver age* (2010-2018). According to Cusic and Faulk (2009: 3), the silver age would be characterised by technological changes, mergers and acquisitions, government regulation, and "some corporations engaged in many sectors of the popular culture economy", affecting consumer

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[140] See Njiraini's (2012: 1) article on Kenya's economic progress during the golden age of Kenyan cinema: https://www.standardmedia.co.ke/business/business/article/2000049257/president-kibakis-economic-legacy

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popular culture choices. To this end, the silver age of Kenyan cinema, as I will discuss below, was a predominantly popular culture based in a market-based economy and did not offer the golden age's possibility of artistic risk-taking.

The silver age of Kenyan cinema was prestigious and eventful but less so than the last golden age because of its average growth rate. This age was preceded by the promulgation of the new constitution in 2010, marking the beginning of a new political dispensation in Kenya, following the political crisis of 2007-2008. The new constitution uplifted the spirits of Kenyans and became a turning point in the country's history "by devolving power and responsibilities from the national government to 47 elected county governments" (The Constitution of Kenya 2010: 174). Under the new devolved system of governance, political and social spaces have expanded, and some sectors of the economy have demonstrated unique strengths (see Nyanjom 2011: 9). However, as I have suggested in the preceding paragraph, the silver age of Kenyan cinema was driven by the market-based economy. Therefore, the new constitution creates conditions in which Kenyan filmmakers as private actors encounter minimal restrictions on their activities. At the same time, resources and the means of production are freed from state controls.

Crucially, the freedom of artistic creativity is now enshrined in the new constitution. Furthermore, intellectual property rights have been included as property rights, meaning that film production businesses can thrive with more protection (The Constitution of Kenya 2010: 26). Finally, in the new constitutional dispensation, the silver age of Kenyan cinema has witnessed increased regional and international collaborations thanks to the reinvigoration of key government agencies such as the Kenya Film Classification Board (KFCB) and the Kenya Film Commission (KFC). Later in this chapter, I will discuss the advent of transnational co-productions as part of the new film culture in Kenyan cinema.

A cluster of other factors helped shape the silver age of Kenyan cinema. First, in 2015, Kenya officially implemented the digital migration policy, which allowed radio and television broadcasters to increase the quality and reach of their transmissions – a phenomenon that has turned Kenya into a pay-TV country (see Boruett 2015: 3). Therefore, the growth of pay-TV meant that Kenyan audiences preferred watching various TV programmes to buy DVD movies or watch films in cinemas. Second, the silver age of Kenyan cinema has also witnessed the growth of Cable TV. Third, the heavy investment in East Africa by corporations

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such as M-NET in films and satellite programming has largely influenced consumer preferences. As a result, consumers spend more money on TV entertainment than they do on cinemas or other forms of media. Currently, multi-channel digital broadcasting and satellite TV programming are the most prominent popular culture-based components of the information sector in Kenya. Still, they face intense competition from video-on-demand (VOD) services such as Netflix, Showmax, and Kwesé, as well as Viusasa, a new Kenyan VOD service. However, the same corporations that provide satellite and digital programming are also engaged in filmed entertainment and can finance the massive production outlays associated with filmmaking. Lastly, the period between 2010 and 2018 has seen an exponential growth of the Internet and the introduction of readily available broadband technology in Kenya, allowing content aggregation companies to deliver on-demand home movies. As a result, the output avenues and revenues of radio, recorded music, print media, and cinema have been altered (see CAK 2018: 7).

In light of how the above developments have shaped the silver age of Kenyan cinema, filmmakers from both sides of the divide (Riverwood cinema and Mainstream cinema) have to innovate to reach the elusive and TV-inclined Kenyan audiences. While most *Riverwood* filmmakers have fully transitioned to TV production and online content generation, their Mainstream counterparts have decided to explore opportunities in the co-production space. They especially seek co-productions with European and American film producers to appeal to both local and international audiences. Examples of award-winning and critically acclaimed Kenyan films that I would associate with the silver age of Kenyan cinema and which have benefited immensely from international co-productions include *Nairobi Half Life* (Gitonga 2012), *Something Necessary* (Kibinge 2013), *Kati Kati* (Masya 2016), *Supa Modo* (Wainaina 2018), *Disconnect* (Gitonga & Jones 2018), *18-hours* (Njue 2017) and *Rafiki* (Kahiu 2018). Many films that I have subsumed in the golden age of Kenyan cinema appealed to local sensibilities, and therefore fittingly classified under the national cinema movement.

On the other hand, films made during the silver age are more transnational because they are more concerned with local and international sensibilities.[141] This realisation, therefore,

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[141] Later in section 4.4, I discuss the concept of transnational cinema within the Kenyan context.

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sets the stage for later discussion on national and transnational cinemas within the context of Kenya's film culture (see section 4.4). To conclude this section, I will discuss how Slow Cinema can be situated in Kenyan cinema based on the existing historical and cultural forms of hybridisation in Kenya. In this study, I have operationalised the terms "hybridity," "hybridisation," and "hybridise" to refer to the fusion of existing narrative and stylistic elements of Kenyan cinema with Slow Cinema.[142]

Scholarly works in Slow Cinema (Luca & Jorge 2016; Flanagan 2008; Grønstad 2015; Romney 2012) have recast the term "Slow Cinema" in a broader historical context by theorising, mapping out, and situating slowness within the contemporary world cinema tradition. Other scholars have gone further to discuss the existing relationship between Slow Cinema and different genres. Çağlayan (2018: 162), for instance, argues that Turkish Slow Cinema director Nuri Bilge Ceylan's films "constitute a negotiation between a complex relationship with national culture and filmmaking traditions and a cultural interaction with European aesthetic and stylistic sensibilities". On the other hand, Jorge (2016: 172) asks: "can slowness surely be understood as an aesthetic mode that dialogues with, and is inserted within, a broader stylistic current?" These cogitations, I argue, speak to the concept of hybridity about how Slow Cinema dialogues with other genres or styles in cinema. My argument is supported by Mullen (2016), who refers explicitly to the oeuvre of Slow Cinema auteur Abbas Kiarostami as a collection of "hybrid films".[143] Mullen posits that Kiarostami's films, including *Taste of Cherry* (1997) and *Ten* (2000), exemplify the fluidity of hybrid filmmaking in employing elements of documentary neorealism dramatic filmmaking.

In that sense, I specifically want to show how slowness can be hybridised within Kenya's historical and cultural context. As I have demonstrated in the preceding paragraphs, the history of Kenyan cinema provides a setting for the hybridisation of Slow Cinema in the country's mythos and cinematic tendencies. This attempt does not suggest that all the theoretical and historical difficulties associated with the concept of hybridisation should be ignored. As Bhabha's (1994: 2) reflects, any attempt to articulate social difference from the minority viewpoint is likely to encounter a complex, incomplete negotiation that seeks to permit cultural hybridities that emerge in moments of historical formation. Kraidy (2005: vi)

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[142] See an explanation of hybrid genres by Jamieson, K.H., and Stromer-Galley, J. (2001).
[143] For further reading see Mullen, P. (2016).

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is more categorical in his assertion, terming hybridity as "a risky notion, which comes without guarantees" since it proposes ideas, concepts, and themes that at once strengthen and contradict each other. Kraidy (ibid.) suggests that it makes sense to amalgamate different forms of hybridity in a context that makes these forms understandable and practical. With that in mind, this study could perhaps make a critical contribution by establishing the basis for the cultural and generic hybridisation of Kenyan cinema with the conventions of Slow Cinema. Even though Çağlayan (2018: 116) wonders how Slow Cinema films relate to the concept of genre hybridity, his argument gives leeway to explore how for example, the various generic themes of Slow Cinema can be hybridised with past and present mythos and visual style of Kenyan cinema. Still, it would be necessary to ask what hybridity means in this context. Straubhaar (2017: 26) fittingly defines hybridisation as "the process by which existing forms become separated from current practices and evolve to recombine as new forms and a new approach".

Building on the above arguments, and particularly Bhabha's (1994: 7) writings on cultural hybridisation as "an encounter with newness that is not part of the continuum of past and present", I am keen to here position Slow Cinema as an art form that can revitalise Kenyan cinema overall in a move towards artistic expression and accomplishment over market-dependence. Still, I know there are other factors or variables to consider here, but they fall beyond the scope of my study's focus on Slow Cinema as a narrative-formal intervention in Kenyan cinema. Hybridity in Kenyan cinema is evidenced by Nollywood's influence on *Riverwood* films, felt through the value proposition of producing low budget films of five thousand American dollars or less. On the other hand, Kenyan mainstream filmmakers increasingly use narrative and formal style hybridisation strategies to reach regional and global audiences. For example, their storylines contain features of heroes or villains in foreign films. Such features have been mixed with Kenyan values and local beliefs to create hybrid characters and alter the construction of cultural production in Kenya.

Furthermore, co-production is an emerging trend in Kenyan cinema involving what Kraidy (2005: 5) describes as "the fusion of two hitherto relatively distinct forms, styles, or identities", which often transpires cross-culturally or across national borders. Thus, the collaboration between Kenyan filmmakers and their international counterparts has resulted in the hybridisation of cultural genres by adopting local artistic tastes, visual style, talent

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composition, hiring of local crew, visual effects, and distribution strategies. I draw on my arguments in Chapter Three to understand the process of Slow Cinema's hybridisation with the narrative and formal styles of Kenyan cinema. The textual analysis of *Uncle Boonmee* (see Chapter Three, section 3.3.3) acknowledges Apichatpong Weerasethakul's enunciation of Thailand's cultural memory and how it negotiates with modernity. Such a negotiation makes it possible to configure the cultural products of Kenyan cinema, not necessarily based on diversity, but the articulation of hybridity. For example, the crucial importance of *Uncle Boonmee* concerning Kenyan cinema is its uncanny ability to provide the discursive conditions for marginalised people to assert their indigenous cultural traditions and retrieve their repressed histories. Similarly, the textual analysis of Béla Tarr's existential narration and his use of cinematic space and duration in *The Turin Horse* (see Chapter Three, section 3.4.4) become sites for Slow Cinema's intricate narrativisation of displacement and despair.

In this regard, it may be possible to appropriate and rehistoricise the conventions of Slow Cinema through the hybridisation of elements that embody the traditional Kenyan mythos and formal expressiveness. After all, Staiger (1997: 15) particularly emphasised that the event of hybridisation permits dialogue between two languages as relates to patterns of plot structure and conventions of representation. Specifically, I propose the mixing of genres in Kenyan cinema as a valuable event of cultural hybridity with the conventions of Slow Cinema. This phenomenon, therefore, suggests that Kenyan films in the early years, in the golden age, and the silver age, as I have argued in this section, can be read as hybridised texts. But, again, as Staiger (ibid.) continues to discuss, "hybridity neither denies the traditions from which a film springs nor does a hybrid event signal the disappearance of the culture from which the hybrid derives". To this extent, Kenyan cinema can engage with what Çağlayan (2018: 117) calls "genre-bending strategies and reformulation of [its] conventions", and I would add, towards slowness. To better understand Slow Cinema's cultural connectivity with diverse local, historical, and intercultural contexts, I have historicised Kenyan cinema as a hybrid entity rather than merely describing the various historical cases that shape it. This understanding paves the way for the second formation to explore and understand how Slow Cinema's thematic concerns can speak to Kenya's historical, cultural, and social circumstances.

4.3.2 Themes in Kenyan cinema

I will now briefly interrogate themes in Kenyan cinema to map out continuities in the thematic concerns of Slow Cinema. First, Pramaggiore and Wallis (2006: 312) point to Third Cinema's strong influence on most Kenyan films, at least based on their thematic construction.[144] They underscore that this often stands in opposition to First Cinema, predominantly Hollywood, and Second Cinema, which tends to be author-driven art cinema. Second, Wamalwa (2018: 35) identifies neo-colonialism, underdevelopment, poverty, and the oppression of women as some of the themes in Kenyan cinema primarily associated with Third Cinema. Third, for Diang'a (2016: 10), Third Cinema's direct influence on the didactic narrative style is what she refers to as African message films. Third, based on the existing film culture in Kenyan cinema, Hollywood's entertainment-based thematic concerns predominate many Kenyan films, which employ modern cinematic devices to present their postcolonial themes. Thematic representations of Kenyan cinema seem to oscillate between First Cinema and Third Cinema and can occasionally be found in the interstice of Second Cinema, where Slow Cinema exists. I share the view that the historicity of Kenyan cinema points to a strong engagement with Third Cinema. For instance, Anne Mungai's 1992 film, *Saikati,* deals with women's emancipation in its depiction of Saikati, a young Kenyan Maasai girl running away from home to escape a forced marriage. Similarly, *The Price of a Daughter* (Munene 2003) follows the troubled journey of Naisenya, a 14-year old Maasai girl who is pulled out of school to be circumcised before her marriage to an older man.

The early years of Kenyan cinema (1983-1992) witnessed a preponderance of themes concerned with the clash between rural and urban life, the emancipation of women, and traditional versus modern value systems, as with Sao Gamba's 1986 film *Kolormask* (see Okioma & Mugubi 2015: 52). Diang'a (2017: 7) though maintains that the new millennium paved the way for new and liberal filmmakers, in what I have referred to as the golden age of Kenyan cinema, to experiment with both form and content. Many Kenyan films in the 2000s expanded the thematic boundaries to include a broader range of subjects that deal with the daily struggles of ordinary people. This thematic experimentation, Diang'a (2017: 8) further observes, has become more advanced in Kenyan cinema's "silver age". Okioma and Mugubi (2015: 57) acknowledge that Kenyan filmmakers are also experimenting with

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[144] In Chapter Two (section 2.3.3) I discussed First, Second, and Third Cinemas.

themes based on real-life events informed by the country's historical, cultural, social, and economic circumstances. Other important themes in the new age of Kenyan cinema, notes Slavkovic (2014: 200), include romance, overcoming trickery, spirituality, and ethnic tensions. I should stress that Wanuri Kahiu's 2018 film *Rafiki* is one of the few feature-length films in Kenya that explores the taboo subject of same-sex relationships. As I have indicated in the previous section, the high level of thematic experimentation in the new dispensation of Kenyan cinema is mainly precipitated by emerging trends in cross-cultural production and popular culture driven by the market-based economy.

I consider it more pertinent to return to the textual analysis of the Slow Cinema films in Chapter Three and map out some of the continuities that exist in the thematic concerns of slowness. The critical question that I formulate here, given the complexity of this undertaking, is, "How can the thematic concerns of Kenyan cinema accommodate slow themes?" The terrain is indubitably vast. As such, I would like to point to a few examples of thematic continuities in *Uncle Boonmee*, *The Turin Horse*, and *Skoonheid* that lend themselves well to the thematic demands of Kenyan cinema. I aim to initiate a theoretical discussion around Çağlayan's (2018: 117) "genre-bending strategies" and challenge Kenyan filmmakers to consider hybridising their themes with the techniques of slowness. When it comes to *Uncle Boonmee*, Weerasethakul presents an assortment of themes, which play an essential role in forming Thai cultural fantasy. These themes appeal directly to the spectator's incarnate identity, permitting a sense of connection and intersubjectivity. Kenyan film scholar Rachael Diang'a (2016: 2) attests that the Euro-Christian and indigenous forces at play in Kenya have gained prominence in the film industry. The indigenous details, which she argues are profoundly engrained in the distinct ethnography of the Kenyan people, can find an artistic voice of their own in the country's film culture. Drawing on the themes of nostalgia, history, memory, and loss in *Uncle Boonmee*, Kenyan cinema can capitalise on some areas that offer opportunities for hybridisation. For example, the weaving together of such themes as politics, spirituality, and the deeply personal, can form a new category of thematic concerns in Slow Cinema. However, as Diang'a (2017: 9) suggests, the implementation of exact thematic concerns alone cannot guarantee a productive film–audience relationship. The role of aesthetic features is also crucial in the way the film is received.

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Kenya's history is reminiscent of existential threats, including floods, ethnic tensions, electoral violence, corruption, joblessness, and terrorist attacks. These threats allude to the philosophical notion of existential nihilism in *The Turin Horse* as a Slow Cinema film. The film stylises themes that characterise existentialist thinking with liminal experiences of anxiety, emptiness, absurdity, anguish, and loneliness. In the context of Kenyan cinema, filmmakers can engage in a philosophical inquiry for understanding human life by showing the dignity and a right for a happy existence in the struggles of ordinary people, as Béla Tarr does in his Slow Cinema film *The Turin Horse*. It would be vital for Kenyan filmmakers to recognise that Slow Cinema fundamentally concerns itself with the philosophical in its thematic construction and could be hybridised with the country's mythos. Oliver Hermanus's narrativisation of such themes as alienation, incommunicability, self-loathing existence, eroticism, and queerness in his South African slow-burn thriller *Skoonheid* also suggest ways for other African cinemas such as Kenyan cinema to negotiate with slowness. Karimi (2016: 76) examines the theme of alienation in selected Kenyan films, where she analyses the five forms of alienation: economic, social, political, and psychological depicted in *Kibera Kid* (Collet 2006), *The Rugged Priest* (Nyanja 2011) and *Nairobi Half Life* (Gitonga 2012). These films, she argues, have been used as commentaries on forms of social alienation prevalent in Kenyan society. Wanuri Kahiu's 2018 gay-themed film *Rafiki* generated enough controversy to be banned by the Kenya Film and Classification Board (KFCB). However, the High Court temporarily lifted the ban.

4.3.3 Rethinking the didactic narrative technique in Kenyan cinema

The third formation invites comparison with Mhando's (2000) analysis of African cinemas. He argues that African cinemas are often viewed as artistic vehicles that foreground pedagogic narratives, also referred to as didactic narrative. In support of this notion, Diang'a (2016: 6) holds that the arts "traditionally play a socio-educational role in society" in the traditional African context. In itself, the primary objective for the filmmaker in the African perspective is to entertain and instruct the audience by living vicariously through the characters in the film. Even though the often labelled 'African film style' as argued by Shaka (1994: 76) is known chiefly to gain its narrative forms and constructions from conventional African oral narrative, it rarely departs from the narrative strategies advanced by the classical Hollywood style. It turns out that theories of narration can be applied beyond the limits of their origin. Therefore, my point here is to explore the textual mechanism upon which the

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didactic narrative technique is built on and validated, and possibly, more so, the way it departs from the narrative conventions of Slow Cinema. My attempt at making a Slow Cinema film relies on the notion that narrative strategies emerging in the didactic text are strictly parallel to the one appearing in the slow text of the three films analysed in Chapter Three. The slow narrative calls into question the usual strategy employed in Kenyan cinema, which consists of instructional text. I propose an alternative narrative strategy of slowness in what follows.

As discussed, didacticism in Kenyan cinema takes its cue from the British Colonial Film Unit (CFU), which advanced the view that cinema should primarily be used for instructional purposes. Slavkovic (2014: 192) affirms that East African governments elected to continue with the didactic narrative mode after gaining independence while relying on co-productions and censorship in local commercial cinemas to boost viewership. As noted, Mhando (2000: 1) shares the view that "immediate post-independence African cinema is repeatedly seen to imitate the style of didactic filmmaking set up under colonialism". In that sense, it is paralleled by developments in European cinema, where auteurism underscores the story of how the film was made rather than what it is about. This tendency may explain why Western critics have attempted to associate African cinemas with thematic substructures at the cost of more formal styles. Even more striking in Mhando's (ibid.) strong assertion is the view that the didactic narrative mode not only "emphasises content over artistic and cultural influences and styles" but also positions the spectator as cinematically undeveloped, uneducated, and in dire need of instruction. Equally, the debate about the best narrative strategies in Kenyan cinema has gained new prominence as many filmmakers seek to address the everyday realities in the society (Diang'a (2017: 6). Indeed, there is a need to codify Kenyan cinema's narrative and formal elements without necessarily formulating a distinct Kenyan film style, even if Hollywood and other cinematic techniques fundamentally influence it. Slavkovic (2014: 190) has argued for a dialogic expression in East African filmmaking, influenced by cross-cultural productions in economic and socio-political contexts. As discussed above, it is crucial to demonstrate how Kenyan film narratives can be hybridised with the aesthetic of slowness despite their enduring association with didacticism.

Hollywood has undoubtedly exerted its influence directly on the oeuvres of many Kenyan filmmakers. Yet, it should be recalled that the narrative strategy used in Kenyan films does

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not conform well to the classical Hollywood style that encourages, in Bordwellian terms, "intensified continuity". As William Maina has discussed in his study, *Analysis of Narrative Form in Three Kenyan Fiction Video Films*, it is problematic and even inappropriate to apply Hollywood narrative style to indigenous Kenyan films that "occupy a completely different spectrum in geo-historical and cultural purview" (Maina 2015: 24). This argument invites an opportunity, though very slight, to attend to the narrative strategies of several films in Kenyan cinema to situate Slow Cinema. For instance, a significant weakness of Kenyan film narratives, as Maina (2015: 24) has alluded to, is their constant effort "to provide the spectator with too much narrative information and thus, outing every one of its meaning to the surface". In such a case, the spectator is left with little plot material to construct. To a certain degree, these overindulgences may point to the value of minimalism and indeterminacy in the slow narrative that this study proposes. If Kenyan cinema affords the hybridisation of its narrative strategies with slow techniques, the result might be a sense of profound neorealism. Of significance, this technique would not oblige the Kenyan filmmaker to tie up any loose ends in the narrative by, for instance, offering easy answers to complex questions of existence and socio-political malaise. For Diang'a (2016: 9), the narrative structure of some Kenyan films "stems from the traditional African storytelling technique of building the conflict slowly while facilitating extended explanations and flashbacks, leaving little room for inference". Anne Mungai's *Saikati* (1992) is one such film.

In comparison, *Uncle Boonmee* presents itself in a relatively straightforward (that is, linear and mostly tempo-spatially coherent) manner with a slow narrative. Regardless, Weerasethakul has managed to create a Slow Cinema film that permits immeasurable interpretations. Similarly, as Béla Tarr implies about *The Turin Horse*, there are many important aspects of real life that filmmakers find boring. Yet, when stylised in a Slow Cinema film, they can bring the spectator closer to life than to the film itself.[145] This explanation could free the Kenyan filmmaker from the tyranny of film narrative and invoke the performative Slow Cinema films to understand the Kenyan society. As for *Skoonheid*, Hermanus constructs a lean, slow, and restrained narrative lacking dramatic urgency, which

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[145] This realisation points to my discussion of neorealism in Chapter Two (section 2.4.1)

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mesmerises viewers. [146] Furthermore, *Skoonheid*'s narrative conveys a sense of indeterminacy, making it possible for the spectator to search for coherence and meaning by closing the existing gaps amid its sparse storytelling. Therefore, if hybridised with the conventions of Slow Cinema, most Kenyan films could be much more indeterminate and open to several readings.

Another aspect of the Kenyan film narrative in Wamalwa's (2018: 51) considered view is the tendency to feature a character's journey from the rural area to the city in hopes of escaping the throes of poverty in the village. This tendency is depicted in *Saikati* (Mungai 1992), *Nairobi Half Life* (Gitonga 2012), and *Toto Millionaire* (Barasa 2007). The narrative style in these films, however, tends to rely on didacticism in their plot development. Nevertheless, there could be a semblance of hybridity with Slow Cinema since, in the case of *Uncle Boonmee,* for example, the dramatic structuring of the story places its primary focus on Boonmee's transcendental journey which unfolds at the intersection of a drifting narrative and cinematic slowness. Weerasethakul's intention here is arguably to place the spectator within the film's emotional context and enable an immersion into Boonmee's spiritual journey rather than investing in the narrative's plot.

Regarding *Skoonheid*, the film often abandons the plot instead of placing a lot of weight on the protagonist and resulting in sparsely interspersed action throughout the story. Such a narrative device of slowness produces minimalism and indeterminacy, hence encouraging in the viewers a contemplative mode of spectatorship. However, this narrative device is paralleled by the Kenyan film's inclination to a plot-driven structuring, which deemphasises contemplation. While expressing his dissatisfaction with films that accentuate the didactic narrative technique, Tarr (2011: 2) revealed that he tends to forfeit messaging in his films because the camera is "an observer that captures the atmosphere of a moment and reacts to life". If anything, he argues for a switch away from the narrative because, for him, the story is not only about human actions. Admittedly, Tarr only allowed the writing of a prose text for *The Turin Horse*, which was not even made into a script. However, characters in Tarr's world are also given an extended duration to contemplate their lives as the temporal structure built into the film "transfers to the receptive spectator a temporal frame of mind" that is rarely seen

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[146] See a review of *Skoonheid* (Beauty) by Ryan Gilbey (2012) on *NewStateman* https://www.newstatesman.com/culture/2012/04/review-beauty

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in the Kenyan film. This strategy calls for an exploration of a philosophical narrative approach in Kenyan cinema that disregards didacticism and brings a greater degree of neorealism and truth in the film's represented universe as the lived world.

Rafiki (Wanuri Kahiu 2018) is a notable Kenyan film that succeeds in its presentation of what Osinubi (2019: 1) calls "an assiduous aesthetics of loose ends and incompletion". In other words, the film stages Kenyan queer love, urban life, and politics in a narrative style structured to ask questions while imagining the prospects of future resolutions. Anti-gay sentiments continue to persist in much of Africa. Kenya declares in section 162 of its Penal Code that any sexual practices between males or females can be termed "gross indecency", punishable by 14 years of imprisonment. This punitive approach then raises difficult questions of queer representation in cinema. It also brings to sharp focus other cultural products that question the distinctive narrative or visual vocabularies that can aid queer aesthetics in film. As I have previously demonstrated in my textual analysis of *Skoonheid* in Chapter Three (section 3.6), Schoonover (2012: 74) theorises how queer aesthetics can be deployed in the practice of Slow Cinema since "queerness often looks a lot like wasted time, wasted lives, and wasted productivity". Schoonover then makes it possible to closely link slowness to "queerness or what it means to live queerly" (Schoonover 2012: 74). Returning to *Skoonheid*, Hermanus shows how slowness as an embodied narrative technique can be used in cinema to articulate queer aesthetics successfully. The film's slow narrative often fuels internal conflicts from François's sexual repression building incrementally rather than suddenly. Such an open-ended narrative pattern typically eludes tidy closure, hence indeterminacy. Considering Kenya's resistance to queerness and its representations in cinema, as Osinubi (2019: 1) explains, *Rafiki* does well to withhold closure and resist the stitching of narrative strands towards completion. Consequently, it is possible to envisage how *Rafiki* could have a more extended negotiation with queer aesthetics as facilitated by Slow Cinema conventions.

There is also a potential opportunity for the dream vision used in *Uncle Boonmee* as a slow narrative device to be deployed in a queer film. Weerasethakul creates a more distinctive and engaging experience through the dream vision by presenting a narrative structure that transports the titular character to past and future lives embedded within the present. In this context, the dream vision could be a valuable device for evading authorial

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influence and transmitting subtle narrative information on queerness. The director requires the spectators "to decide whether they have a claim to broader revelations" in the gay characters depicted in the film (Osinubi 2019: 2). Given all that has been mentioned under this section so far, one may consider it necessary to rethink the didactic narrative technique in Kenyan cinema towards a slow and experiential mode of address that encourages minimalism and indeterminacy, as withholding devices key to the embodied experience of the spectator. The subsequent paragraphs consider how the aesthetic features of Kenyan cinema can dialogue with Slow Cinema.

4.3.4 Aesthetic features of Kenyan cinema

Aesthetic features that relate to the cinema can often be more complex to analyse. Tarvainen, Westman, and Oittinen (2015: 2) present two rationales that underpin varied approaches to analysing aesthetic features in a film. They describe the first rationale as incorporating low-level features related to film style such as colour, sound, framing, and editing. On the other hand, the second rationale deals with high-level features related to affective experiences or abstract impressions often denoted by such terms as boring, dramatic, fascinating, shocking, and confusing, to name a few. Against this backdrop, it seems plausible in the following arguments to limit myself to the low-level features. My primary aim in this section is to consider how aesthetic features in Kenyan cinema can adapt to the techniques of slowness. In terms of visuality, most Kenyan films follow the dominant western conventions of film style. Gabriel (2011: 200) identifies these conventions as including eye-level perspective to facilitate the Spatio-temporal order of the film concerning the natural world, close-up shots to emphasise the emotional content, and the use of a fixed tripod operation to stimulate elucidation and understanding. Frequent camera movements are also used to study the psychological and physical states of the character.

Kinyanjui (2014) makes a critical observation of the latest Kenyan films, which she claims are more comparable to soap opera movies. She outlines several reasons for this claim; chief among them is the filmmakers' preference for interior scenes. Other key reasons include long dialogue that tends to nullify visual interpretation, coverage shots of buildings to introduce the actual location of the characters merely, and an overreliance on flashback scenes, which are at best dispensable. Kinyanjui's insistence here can be interpreted as the need for a Kenyan film to transmit subtle narrative information to the spectator through

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minimal aesthetic features. Analysed in Slow Cinema's perspective, Kenyan cinema can draw on the film syntax in *The Turin Horse*. The film presents the interplay of multiplane staging that involves the film's mise-en-scène and lateral camera movements extending the frame laterally and in depth to show the spectator the anguish of human existence.

Similarly, Kinyanjui's rumination can be understood through *Uncle Boonmee*'s syntax, which involves long-takes filmed in static frames and infrequent movements of the camera and characters. This technique contributes to the expansion of time, freezing it in a temporal ambience and allowing the main characters and spectators to immerse themselves in the mythic landscapes and time. The film syntaxes in *The Turin Horse* and *Uncle Boonmee* can, therefore, act as withholding devices that negate the influence of interiorised performances noticeable in Kenyan films.

Kinyanjui's critical analysis should not obscure the fact that some Kenyan films engage satisfactorily with space aesthetics to capture different perceptions of reality. *The Rugged Priest* (Nyanja 2011), *Nairobi Half Life* (Gitonga 2012), *Veve* (Mukali 2014), *Kati Kati* (Masya 2016), and *Supa Modo* (Wainaina 2018) are examples of Kenyan films that combine the rural and urban milieu simultaneously or distant from one another to manipulate space and time. Relevant to the concept of space is Weerasethakul's use of evocative mise-en-scène and *vraisemblance* in *Uncle Boonmee*. On several occasions, the camera abandons its focus on the human subjects to sightsee the ethereal landscapes that surround them. Regarding vraisemblablisation, the camera undertakes a more distanced position to focus on the cultural *vraisemblance*, which entails the sharing of cultural knowledge acceptable to the spectators as part of the characters' surroundings. Weerasethakul renders the landscape as a body with its own personality beyond the film's plot and characters in these conditions. That said, Kenyan filmmakers can adopt the aesthetic features of Slow Cinema to capture the naturalistic and expressionistic mise-en-scène in their films and make the physical spaces independent of the characters or even of the narrative itself. This strategy might also highlight the insubstantiality and irrelevance of the characters wandering within the vast and dream-like landscapes.

The silver age of Kenyan cinema has also brought with it an emphasis on the formal elements of filmmaking. Kenyan filmmakers increasingly concern themselves with what Third cinema scholar Teshome Gabriel described as "technical brilliance and visual

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wizardry", which often predominate the film's narrative concerns. Gabriel further elucidates that such "Third World" filmmakers aim to create a spectacle that mimics the aesthetic features of Hollywood. This spectacle, he admits, "runs counter to the needs for a serious social art" (Gabriel 2011: 188). *Nairobi Half Life* is one such Kenyan film that African literature scholar, James Hodapp (2014: 232), recognises its "technical brilliance". He adds:

> In short, *Nairobi Half Life* is a textbook film demonstrating contemporary filming and editing techniques, perhaps most visibly in a climactic scene in which *Mwas* escapes from the corrupt cops and rushes to the National Theatre for the opening curtain. The scene bears striking similarities to *Run, Lola, Run* as Mwas runs through the streets of Nairobi, with the film oscillating between telephoto lens images that isolate him as the city blurs past to wide-angle shots that contextualise him in various neighbourhoods to highlight his speed and determination in an already hectic city.

Like Hodapp (2014) above, I highly regard the aesthetic features of *Nairobi Half Life*. The film's production values ranging from lighting and sound to complex shot types and camera angles are outstanding. This technical accomplishment may also highlight the aesthetic potential of Kenyan cinema. Yet, my argument here dwells on Béla Tarr's particularly satisfying balance between idiosyncratic storytelling craft and technical prowess as a Slow Cinema auteur. About my textual analysis of *The Turin Horse* in the preceding Chapter, Tarr stylises the themes of nothingness and alienation through wide-angled long takes complemented by seamless tracking shots, wherein the absence of action, the reflective side of the spectator's mind is engaged.

Furthermore, his combination of static and mobile long takes exhibits the camera's fluid repositioning abilities, including the tendency to follow a shot to its conclusion while maintaining the one-off frame that often opens and closes each moving shot. If applied to hybridise the narrative strategies of Kenyan films, such dominant aesthetic features of slowness can limit the accent on the spectacle that regularly characterises Mainstream Kenyan cinema. As I have pointed out in Chapter Three (section 3.6), *Skoonheid* may not fit deftly into lucid modes of Slow Cinema compared to *Uncle Boonmee* and *The Turin Horse*. Still, it might serve as an exemplar of hybridisation in the African context. For instance, Hermanus hybridises the shooting and editing of *Skoonheid* through a combination of long-takes (Slow Cinema) and short-takes (Hollywood cinema) to enhance the film's visual appeal, establish motifs and parallels, develop themes and ideas, and emphasise character

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development. Overall, the film's editing is frugal in some cases and intensified in others to enhance the themes of emptiness, alienation, and existential paralysis that handicaps the protagonist. This aesthetic quality, in my view, can contribute to the aesthetic concerns of Kenyan cinema, which exists as a hybrid entity.

I have discussed the concept of African cinema in the mould of how it can be redefined to consider alternative film styles and genres and thus, lay the groundwork for the hybridisation of Slow Cinema in Kenyan cinema. Crucially, I have repositioned Kenyan cinema toward slowness by historicising Kenyan cinema as a hybrid aesthetic while questioning its thematic concerns and the didactic narrative technique. Finally, I have appraised its aesthetic features within the framework of Slow Cinema. In the subsequent sections, I examine how Kenya's distinct film culture can be understood as national or transnational to accommodate a body of Slow Cinema films.

4.4 Kenya's Film Culture: Between the National and Transnational

In a country that is often depicted as highly polarised, partly due to diverse ethnic communities, the idea of nationhood and what it means to be a Kenyan citizen indeed continues to provoke discussions. The focus of these discussions is directed on building the cultural, spiritual, and mental infrastructure of the Kenyan people. Yet, the question that remains unanswered is how the Kenyan nationhood can be reconstructed from what Lagat (2017: 24) sees as "the shaky grounds upon which it was laid by the British colonists". Indeed, Kenyan scholar and constitutional lawyer Prof Yash Pal Ghai (2013) has pointed to the fundamental principles that can facilitate the process of nation-building in Kenya. These principles include citizenship, human rights and social justice, language, religion, culture, lifestyles, minorities, representation, and power-sharing. I suggest that these principles ought to be viewed, for example, in the context of how cinema can negotiate with the country's sensibilities of nationhood, especially in the era of transnationalism. Generally, in that regard, I want to explore how Slow Cinema as a transnational cinematic tendency can serve to reconstruct the country's presentations of public perceptions on nationhood through the existing framework of national cinema. Specifically, I want to advance the argument that Kenya's film culture is of vital importance at both the national and transnational levels, chiefly as a means of promoting experimental filmmaking and attending to a body of Slow Cinema films.

This section identifies four areas of interest that might serve to situate Slow Cinema in Kenyan cinema. First, it shines a bright light on Kenya's national cinema agenda, showing that such a concept has meaning in its continued negotiation with other cinematic affinities. Second, the section presents an optimistic view of transnational cinema as a common tendency within the national framework about its genres, themes, narrative trajectories, and formal elements. Third, it examines the state of Kenya's film culture, demonstrating how it is structured by the country's political economy, theoretical assumption of hybridity, and bringing into focus the consequences of negotiating the national and transnational film cultures. Lastly, the fourth part follows the trajectory charted by the preceding subsections by speculating on what basis Slow Cinema might build a sense of transnational identity within the national framework that is not merely the sum of its thematic, narrative, and formal conventions.

4.4.1 The national cinema agenda in Kenya

The concept of national cinema, acting conjointly with such terms as 'national' and 'nationalism', has received considerable attention from film scholars. Schlesinger (2000: 22), for example, suggests that the word 'nation' should be addressed as a singular entity. At the same time, it would be necessary to examine 'national cinema' by inquiring about a particular country's filmic efforts. Another definition of national cinema, according to Schlesinger (2000: 23), relates to its commercial quality, its modes of exhibition and spectator address – specifically their impact on national culture, and lastly, questions of representation relating to the choice of particular genres. For Higson (2000: 64), 'national cinema' can be understood in the light of how home-produced films or, specifically, indigenous filmmaking can add value to the cultural affairs of a nation against the backdrop of Hollywood's domination over the transnational market. Schlesinger (2000: 22) also attends closely to Higson's exposition, stating that the contemporary issue of national cinema has gained currency given the cultural pressure that Hollywood's dominance continues to import into the national space. This understanding, therefore, allows my study to expand the national cinema agenda, for instance, how Kenyan cinema as a national cinema has progressively been infused with transnational content and how this permits the entry of Slow Cinema. After all, Schlesinger (2000: 24) calls for a reconsideration of what represents the 'national' in the wake of cultural syncretism.

The above arguments debunk the idea of a homogeneous nation and raise the fundamental question of whether it is possible to envisage a national cinema in the Kenyan context. Is it even logical to see Kenyan cinema as a national cinema, or must it now be regarded as transnational cinema due to its regional, continental, and global engagement? As Higson (2000: 63) points out, it is indisputable that a robust national cinema can provide harmonious images of the nation and boost its indigenous culture. Kenya, for example, is in the process of legislating for a national cinema policy envisioned to promote national culture and heritage, national cohesion and integration, and build the national brand. Of significance, the Kenya national film policy also aims at developing a national film archiving strategy.[147] Currently, the Kenyan national cinema functions amorphously without legislation. However, such a concept is still meaningful considering that the Kenya Film Classification Board (KFCB), through its various mandates, continues to develop strategies to defend and uphold the local cultural production while calling for cultural diversity through transnational cinema. Nyutho (2015: 190) is confident that *Riverwood* is Kenya's national cinema, judging from its narrative conventions and how it resonates with the Kenyan spectator. Either way, Higson (2000: 66) asserts that petitioning and enacting a national cinema policy will valuably cultivate a framework that ensures cultural, political, and economic representations. It is also important to consider, as does Iordanova (2014: 266), that the existing Kenyan national cinema has successfully transitioned to the Internet and gained more exposure transnationally.

I have argued elsewhere (see section 4.3.1) that the sensibilities of nationhood defined both the early period and the golden age of Kenyan cinema. The idea of national cinema emerged from various themes conceptualised in many Kenyan films at that time. Whereas the films produced during the two periods could be classified under Third Cinema, there is nothing to suggest that they could not negotiate with other cinematic affinities, and specifically Second cinema, where Slow Cinema exists. For many years, Kenya's national cinema has presented itself as a cinema that is willing to experiment with different genres, narrative strategies, and film styles from the regional, continental, and global continuum. It is possible to draw on this insight and find ways to situate the narrative and cinematographic

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[147] See Ministry of Sports, Culture, and the Arts (2015). *The Draft National Film Policy*: Downloaded 28/01/2020 https://ifree.co.ke/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/Draft-National-Film-Policy.pdf

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concerns of slowness in Kenyan cinema while retaining the focus on national cinema. Again, referring to my reading of *Uncle Boonmee* in Chapter Three, I submit that Weerasethakul was keen to stoke the concept of nationalism from the historical background where he grew up in Thailand. As such, his film is a type of national cinema seen in how he manages to reconstruct the prickly truths of history in his country by weaving together the themes of transmigration, politics, death, and memory.

However*, Uncle Boonmee also stands out* as a type of transnational cinema that adopts the conventions of Slow Cinema in terms of its narrative and aesthetic strategies. Additionally, Weerasethakul's devotion to promoting experimental and independent filmmaking is a notable characteristic of transnational cinema. This idea speaks to what Higbee and Lim (2010: 10) acknowledge as the strong presence that national cinema continues to make within its transnational counterpart. The paragraphs that follow offer a similar perspective by suggesting that transnational cinema can be domiciled within national cinema with its genres, themes, narrative trajectories, and formal elements regardless of its label. Overall, this consideration brings to the fore the idea that Slow Cinema's philosophical regard and transnational quality can be used to reconstruct public perceptions on nationhood with regards to Kenya's national cinema.

4.4.2 Towards a transnational cinema in Kenya

Cinema has traditionally been operating both at national and transnational levels. Even though studies in 'national cinema' predominate scholarly work, the notion of 'transnationalism' in cinema, as Higson (2000: 61) highlights, has been advanced since at least the 1920s, when films were made as co-productions. During this period, filmmakers from different nation-states sought to share resources and expertise to enhance the cinematic experience for their audiences. Since transnational cinema is a multinational mode of filmmaking transcending the limits of national borders both in terms of impact and reach, Higbee and Lim (2010: 10) hasten to affirm that studies on transnational cinema are currently gaining traction. Scholars continue to recognise the potential of international co-production in challenging the special place of national cinema. Africa has always been a privileged site for international co-production and filmmaking collaborations involving creative or technical crew from around the globe. According to Tomaselli, Shepperson and Eke (1995: 23), this undertaking should not be seen as a unique experience since many

African filmmakers move physically or mentally across borders to collaborate with their counterparts either in Hollywood or in world cinema.

In most cases, it is worth mentioning that these transnational co-productions tend to disregard the cultural, economic, and aesthetic implications that the filmed products may have on the individual state seeking such an arrangement. Another dimension of transnational cinema in Africa results from the diasporic experiences of many young African filmmakers. They are either eager to explore the emergent multinational thematic concerns or capture their perspectives – often linked to living in a foreign country (Bisschoff 2013: 152). The growing stature of transnational cinema within African cinema gives special attention to my earlier discussions on hybridity. My position on this subject is further encouraged by Higson's (2000: 61) suggestion that contemporary cultural creations are unvaryingly hybrid and impure due to the amount of artistic interbreeding and rendering beyond national boundaries. In the following subsections, I demonstrate various ways in which transnational cinema operates within Kenyan cinema in terms of themes and narrative strategies, filmmaking expertise, distribution, and spectatorship. In practical terms, I want to advance the view that transnational cinema can act as a means of promoting independent filmmaking and Slow Cinema.

The first indicator of transnationalism in Kenyan cinema relates to the various themes and narrative strategies hybridised in some Kenyan films that have received national and international attention. One cannot discuss the impact of transnational cinema on Kenyan cinema without mentioning "One Fine Day Films (OFDF), an alternative production company founded in 2008 by German film director Tom Tykwer and Marie Steinmann-Tykwer" (Steedman 2019: 7). The original idea behind the formation of the OFDF project was to create a dynamic setting for African filmmakers to write and produce captivating indigenous stories under the guidance of experienced international filmmakers. In turn, African filmmakers would reach global audiences, who enjoy the experience of big cinema screens (One Fine Day Films 2016). OFDF's key partners, as reported by Steedman (2019: 7), include "DW *Akademie* (a German development organisation committed to media capacity building) and Ginger Ink Films (a British-funded production company based in Nairobi) with the support of Goethe Institute Nairobi". Notable Kenyan films that have been produced under the OFDF banner include *Soul Boy* (Essuman 2010), *Nairobi Half Life* (Gitonga 2012),

Veve (Mukali 2014), *Kati Kati* (Masya 2016), *Supa Modo* (Wainaina 2018), and *Lusala* (Nthiga 2019).

Whereas the films mentioned above have unique themes and narrative strategies in their construction, I want to draw particular attention to the narrative style of Tosh Gitonga's *Nairobi Half Life* because of its hybridised quality. The film is also arguably the most successful Kenyan film of all time in its reach and impact. *Nairobi Half Life* has won many international awards and even considered by the Oscars in 'the best international film' category. The film, which bears similarity with Tom Tykwer's strong cinematic repertoire, follows the journey of Mwas, a young aspiring actor. He sets out for Nairobi but is eventually immersed in the world of crime. What is striking about *Nairobi Half Life*'s narrative strategy claims (Hodapp 2014: 232) is the somewhat dramatic retelling of Quentin Tarantino's *Kill Bill: Vol. 2* (2004), and specifically the death of Bill towards the end of the film. Mwas tries to entice a group of gangsters to buy a DVD of Tarantino's film through a cheesy reenactment of Bill's death, foreshadowing his violent journey as a character throughout the film.

In Tarantino's exposition, Pai Mei, the trainer, teaches Beatrix the secret technique she uses to kill Bill. Still, in his close reading of *Nairobi Half Life*, Hodapp (2014: 232) proceeds to show in detail how Mwas manipulates the plot to ensure that it is Bill himself who teaches Beatrix the underhand technique she uses to kill him. This seemingly minor recapitulation of a scene in Tarantino's film, in my opinion, not only extols the mythos of American gangster films but also hybridises it as a genre in Kenyan cinema. In Hodapp's concluding remarks, Nairobi Half Life's theme and narrative strategy is a hybrid of *City of God* (Meirelles & Lund 2002) and *Tsotsi* (Hood 2005), except for its prominent Kenyan locations. In this connection and similar to *Nairobi Half Life*'s transnational quality, I want to postulate that Slow Cinema as a narrative mode, with its minimalist and indeterminate conventions, can be hybridised or manipulated both thematically and visually to engage with Kenyan cinema critically.

Concerning filmmaking expertise, Steedman (2019: 2) found that Nairobi-based filmmakers received negligible government support in film funding, infrastructure, and distribution. These inadequacies have necessitated the need for transnational connections with experienced filmmakers and production companies. Wanuri Kahiu, states Osinubi (2019: 3), is one of the few Kenyan filmmakers whose films have been produced with

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transnational help from cultural institutions in the global north. In highlighting the concepts of hybridity and transnationalism even further, Wanuri's most successful film *Rafiki* was inspired by the work of Ugandan writer Monica Arac de Nyeko. Nyeko won the Caine Prize for African Writing with a story about lesbianism in *Jambula Tree and other stories* (2006). Steedman (2019: 5), however, warns that Kenyan filmmakers should not be vilified for their transnational engagements, as Wanuri has on several occasions. Her work or the works of Tosh Gitonga and his colleagues under the OFDF label cannot simply be interpreted as inauthentic due to their involvement with non-Kenyans at whatever phase of the film production workflow. In other words, Steedman calls for the lauding and due recognition of transnational cinema as part of the new filmmaking ecosystem, which enables African film producers to tap into the global film economy. According to the Emerging Market Economics Africa (EME 2013) report, it is also significant to note that transnational cinema has enabled some Kenyan crew and talents to get involved in international co-productions elsewhere in the world. The report further indicates that broadcasting companies like *MultiChoice* have also initiated exchange programs involving crew and talents from Kenya, Nigeria, and South Africa to promote local talent and building capacity for content creation.

On the question of distribution and spectatorship, it is evident, as Steedman (2019: 2) suggests, that Kenyan audiences, particularly those living in and around Nairobi, have similar tastes and preferences with their equals abroad. Still, they are hampered mainly by the country's poor distribution marketing mix. On the other hand, Slavkovic (2014: 203) indicates that most Kenyan film entrepreneurs have sought to fill this gap by targeting consumers frequenting the informal but booming video parlours with their low-budget films in the hopes of recouping their investment. That said, Kenyan audiences are increasingly watching across borders in true transnational fashion. For Iordanova (2014: 265), it is the best possible way for filmmakers to comprehend the workings of contemporary cinema with all its multidimensional subtleties. Kenyan films have the potential for transnational distribution because as Higson (2000: 61) implies, even small cinemas, the likes made by indigenous Africans in contexts of limited resources, can draw an international audience given the right transnational help and marketing mix. Therefore, I conclude that situating Slow Cinema in Kenyan cinema requires a deliberate, conscious attempt at hybridising the existing national film framework with genres, themes, narrative trajectories, and formal elements of slowness through the concept of transnational cinema as a means to

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experimental filmmaking. Next, I attend to the state of Kenya's film culture and, later, the agents of film culture that can facilitate the repositioning of Kenyan cinema to negotiate with the national and other modern styles in transnational cinema towards slowness.

4.4.3 The state of Kenya's film culture

Kenyan cinema may still be finding its way, as claimed by Edwards (2008: 3), but it has made considerable progress. The reason for the 'missing middle', which Edwards could be referring to here, might be attributed to several factors. Among the most important is the non-institutionalisation of the country's film culture within Kenya's current political economy. First, my arguments for the institutionalisation of Kenya's film culture are based on Wasko's (2004: 224) characterisation of political economy. Wasko (2004: 224) argues "that political economy draws upon several disciplines such as history, economics, sociology, and political science". In addition, Cannon's (2011: 11) writings on the influencing or limiting role that social, economic, and political structures play on industry and society are central to understanding the political economy of an industry. Wasko (2004: 225) further observes that studies on the political economy of media industries have been evident in "communication and media studies since the late 1980s". In the Kenyan context, for example, Ogola (2011: 77-95) examines "the political economy of the media in Kenya from Kenyatta's (Kenya's first president) nation-building press to Kibaki's (Kenya's third president) local-language FM radio". Ogola (2011: 77) "demonstrates how Kenya's news media are entangled in a complex power structure, which has enabled and constrained its development.

Similarly, Ogenga (2011: 151-162) studies how the "political economy of the Kenyan media enhances the culture of active citizen journalism". He particularly identifies the weak policy context as a factor that has ensured the Kenyan media remain gullible to political machinations. Unfortunately, however, there has been little or no focus on research activity in the political economy of the Kenyan film industry. Moreover, as Cannon (2011: 6) notes, academia has not adequately addressed the structures and institutions of independent film industries, as is the case in Kenya.

Wasko (2004: 227) asserts that "the political economy of the film must understand motion pictures as commodities manufactured and distributed within a capitalist industrial structure". Similarly, Cannon (2011: 9) states that critical political economy should insist on the

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distribution of films rather than their production processes because it is through distribution that the fundamental relations of the film business can be analysed. Wasko (2004: 224) and Cannon (2011: 5) agree on the two standard techniques of political economy, namely Marxist and institutionalist frameworks. While Marxist political economists generally focus on the failures of capitalism itself, their institutionalist counterparts insist on the patterns of partnering and competition between and within media institutions (Cannon 2011: 5-6). I recognise the impact of the Marxist political economy on Kenyan cinema. Still, my arguments are based on the institutionalist political economy and how it can potentially transform Kenya's film culture with specific Slow Cinema references.

For the current study, the political economy of Kenya's film industry would be concerned with how Kenyan cinema can succeed artistically and financially while encouraging competition within itself. However, for that to happen, Kenya's film culture must be institutionalised. Contemporary Kenyan cinema is predominantly characterised by independent productions modelled on self-distribution (by individual Kenyan filmmakers). Many challenges face the self-distribution of Kenyan films, and chief among them is the insufficient relationship between these processes and strategies. Kenyan filmmakers lack the technical know-how of film marketing and distribution, meaning that their films rarely attract the expected revenue once released to the public. More significantly, the self-distribution of local films in Kenya and across its borders also hinders the availability of industry-supplied information and relevant data to base a critical analysis of the political economy of the Kenyan film industry. As such, Kenyan films' commercial benefits and artistic achievements are assumed and rarely questioned (see Wasko 2004: 229). In other words, a political economist may not apply an institutionalist framework needed to analyse the patterns of partnering and competition in the Kenyan film industry.

There is sufficient evidence to suggest that Kenya's film culture has not been institutionalised within the more significant media industry's political economy. For instance, the 2019-2020 "Audience Measurement and Industry Trends Report" released by the Communications Authority of Kenya (CAK) only recognises radio and television as the

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primary sources of entertainment, information, and education in Kenya.[148] The report presents explicitly relevant data on the audience demographics for radio and television and the allocations by industries and medium for the two outlets. Interestingly, the report concludes that radio and television are "a powerful medium for influencing culture, beliefs, and values as well as a tool for economic growth and development" (CAK 2020: 2). There is no reference to Kenya's film culture throughout the report, hence putting paid to the idea that the Kenyan film industry is not part of the larger political economy of Kenya's media ecosystem. In the absence of an institutionalist political economy of the Kenya film industry, it becomes difficult for scholars and policy-makers to examine how Kenyan films can dominate the African continent. It is also challenging to suggest how the Kenyan government can become more involved in the infrastructural building of the film industry and how Kenyan films are related to other media products in terms of their marketing and distribution strategies. Finally, the implications of the non-performing film industry for Kenya's film culture may not be adequately examined. As Wasko herself puts it: "film must be placed within an entire social, economic, and political context of a country and critiqued in terms of the contribution to maintaining and reproducing structures of power" (Wasko 2004: 227).

Similarly, Higson (2000: 63) and Hagener (2014: 7) share the view that the government's institutionalisation of a national cinema may not only provide scope for transnational cinema to thrive but also protect the existing film culture from Hollywood's total domination, if not other dominant world cinemas. In light of the preceding discussion, it is helpful at this point to define the term "film culture" even if, as Hodson (2002) admits, it is difficult to do so. Hagener (2014: 302) agrees, stating that in large part, film culture tends to be self-contradictory. Otherwise stated, Hodson (2002) describes film culture as various ways in which a particular country addresses its films, the craft, and the industry that produces them. As a result, these discourses lead to the formation of specific standards, methods, operations, and establishments that, as a whole, institute film culture. Hagener (2014: 1) is more direct in his usage of the concept, which he says constitutes various interventions surrounding a particular country's film schools, film events (such as festivals), film criticism, and film archiving.

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[148] For more information on the CAK (2019) report: https://ca.go.ke/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/Audience-Measurement-and-Broadcasting-Industry-Trends-Report-Q1-2019-2020_compressed-min.pdf. Accessed 26/01/2021

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Drawing on Hagener's definition, there are other ways in which Kenya's film culture can be institutionalised for the industry to be further recognised within the larger political economy of the country's media industry. These include film schools, film festivals, and film archiving, which I will discuss going forward. Film criticism in Kenya is not well advanced and would therefore be difficult to theorise within the scope of this study. For now, I want to take my cue from Hodson (2002), who links film culture directly to the access of films. To understand Kenya's film culture as either national or transnational, I want to discuss the state of film spectatorship in the country briefly. This discussion will enable me to explore how film schools, film festivals, and film archiving can act as agents of film culture in Kenyan cinema. Mhando (2000) offers the most unambiguous indication of how access to films within the African continent remains problematic. While acknowledging the role of film and video products in the appraisal of culture, he reckons that African films and videos are challenging to obtain abroad and in their country of source. First, Mhando's assessment supports my discussion of film distribution as a critical tenet in the political economy of film in Kenya. Second, it helps shed light on the concerns raised by (Diang'a 2017: 9, Nyutho 2015: 180, Okioma & Mugubi 2015: 48) about Kenyan audiences' preference for foreign productions, including Hollywood, Bollywood and Nollywood films. Third, it gives credence to Edwards' (2008: 13) critical observation that most cinema theatres in Kenya are reserved for the latest Hollywood and Indian films. At the same time, Kenyan filmmakers are made to try their luck in informal cinema halls or the direct-to-video market. With that, Kenyan filmmakers can hardly hope to break into the international film market unless they co-produce their works with international filmmakers or production companies.

Still, the worrying trends documented in the Kenyan Audience Consumer Trends Survey report (2010) and the EME (2013) report on the dwindling numbers of filmgoers in Kenya can be linked to – though not wholly attributed to – the non-institutionalised Kenyan film industry within the larger political economy of the country's media industry. Suppose Kenyan audiences are not accessing films in the more than 20 licensed cinema theatres around the country, as documented in the abovementioned reports. Where and how do they access filmed entertainment? The answer can be found in hundreds of informal video halls distributed across the country. According to Slavkovic (2014: 199), video jockeys (vee-jays) provide highly animated and exaggerated commentaries of Hollywood and Chinese films in particular.

Furthermore, most Hollywood films in Kenya are pirated and sold for far less than a dollar in video shops and along the streets by DVD vendors (Nyutho 2015: 72). Thus, Kenyan spectators are exposed to films across borders. This exposure locates spectatorship in Kenya as both national and transnational and paves the way for the country's film culture to accommodate Slow Cinema films, even if such inclusion remains noninstitutionalised. Therefore, it is appropriate to argue for a film culture that negotiates with various entities, traditions, and film styles. At the same time, it continues to promote local films that address culturally sensitive issues within the national framework. As the filmmaker and critic James Potts observed, it would be ill-conceived to theorise a distinct national or ethnic film style if there still exists a methodology that endeavours to unify the global and the national features of filmmaking (Potts 1979: 74). Based on Potts' perspective, it may also be possible to institutionalise experimental filmmaking in Kenya, which reinvigorates the country's film culture, ultimately leading to the development of Slow Cinema in Kenyan cinema. The above discussion has created a framework that enables the following subsection to substantiate how the agents of film culture: film schools, film festivals, and film archiving can ease the repositioning of Kenyan cinema. This repositioning enables Kenyan cinema to embrace other modernist styles that are mainly concerned with Slow Cinema.

4.4.3.1 Film schools in Kenya

As Barnett (2008: 129) proposes, most film schools have auditoriums, screening rooms, or lecture halls, providing enabling conditions for experimental films that are less focused on entertainment and more attuned to discoveries. Furthermore, through research, Kenyan film schools can give serious recognition to Slow Cinema as an innovative and intellectually rich cinematic tendency that can expand Kenya's film culture within the framework of Kenyan cinema. Finally, for Petrie (2014: 280), film schools are broad spaces for transnational engagement and dialogue due to the demographic diversity of their faculty and student populations. This diversity, in my consideration, can further enhance the status and significance of Slow Cinema in Kenyan cinema.

The past decade has witnessed the growth of tertiary institutions in Kenya committed to offering either media or film production programmes. As a result, the country's film culture has expanded to promote media and film literacy for the general public and a new crop of film enthusiasts eager to explore transnational cinema. This trend has further enabled film

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scholarship to gain momentum as academic institutions continue to widen the space for film practice and theory. For instance, existing film curricula in several Kenyan universities aim to teach essential skills in screenwriting, directing, cinematography, and even animation. Additionally, research interests in Kenyan cinema have been diversified to focus on both the creative and technical elements of filmmaking to uphold the significance of national cinema (*Riverwood* and Mainstream cinemas) against Hollywood and other dominant film movements. However, it is also noteworthy that most Kenyan universities and film schools lack the necessary infrastructure to teach film production techniques effectively. To minimise the effects of these shortcomings, academic institutions partner with production companies in the film industry to conduct intensive workshops for their students. The constant interaction between the academy and the industry is seen as a symbiotic relationship that ultimately boosts the Kenyan film industry.

I have demonstrated that Slow Cinema is virtually inexistent in Kenyan cinema at the time of writing this thesis. The role of film schools as centres of artistic experimentation and intellectual engagement can accelerate the transmission of knowledge and skills essential to the growth and development of Slow Cinema to improve Kenya's film culture.[149]

4.4.3.2 Film festivals

Film festivals play a significant role in showcasing national and international film products while also providing an enabling framework for co-productions. Like her counterparts in Eastern Africa, Kenya hosts several annual film festivals that seek to attract national and international filmmakers. Some important film festivals in Kenya include Kalasha International Film Festival (May 5th - 7th), Lake International Panafrican Film Festival (February 14th – 28th), and Lola Kenya Screen Festival (December 7th – 12th). However, from a national perspective, the terrain appears more complex regarding the influence these film festivals exert in promoting Kenya's film culture and the customised demands of the film industry. For instance, no category recognises experimental cinema or artistic films seeking to challenge the country's dominant filmmaking paradigms. As such, the significance of Slow Cinema in providing an alternative to the existing narrative and formal structures of Kenyan

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[149] Refer to section 4.4.2, where I specifically discuss how the hybridisation of Slow Cinema conventions with the existing genres in Kenyan cinema can be beneficial to narrative and aesthetic strategies employed by Kenyan filmmakers.

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cinema cannot be fully realised. From a transnational standpoint, Kenyan filmmakers continue to rely heavily on the international festival circuit, which Mhando (2000) sees as a handicap for African filmmakers because of the demands often attached to such critical acclaim. It may also be essential to theorise, as Slavkovic (2014: 203), why successful Kenyan films that have been critically acclaimed in international film festivals are yet to break even financially or earn lucrative international distribution deals.

On the other hand, no documented evidence shows substantial financial rewards gained through online distribution networks such as Netflix, Vimeo and YouTube. In light of Kenyan film festivals' role in shaping the country's film culture, it is worth suggesting that Slow Cinema can be domiciled within the national cinema framework. Slow Cinema can also be recognised for its potential in the narratology of Kenya's historical, social, political and cultural development.

4.4.3.3 Film archiving in Kenya

Calls for film archives begun as early as the 1920s, leading to their consolidation in various sites across Europe (Hagener 2014: 293). Certainly, archiving of films is crucial because it enables regular screening and studying, and thus, opens up the possibility for a serious engagement with the cinematic medium. Unfortunately, most of the audiovisual materials are either on the verge of deterioration or permanent destruction for Kenya. The direct effect of this worrying trend, for example, is the existing gap for any sustained reflection by Kenyan film scholars and researchers. As mentioned, there is no evidence of Slow Cinema in Kenya, which could be ascribed to a nonexistent national film archiving body. However, efforts for its establishment have not borne fruit. In Okong'o's (2009: 9) documentation, the first attempt was in late 2007, when an Archives study group was formed to consider the approaches for curating and exhibiting audiovisual materials in Kenya. However, other than the publication of a working paper by the study group, no specific body was charged with forming a national film library in Kenya. Recently, the Kenya Film Commission (KFC), a state corporation, invited qualified consultants through an open national tender to register their interest in developing a film repository and archive concept paper to establish a National Film Archive. [150] This body will facilitate the collection, preservation, and availability of historical and

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[150] See an advertisement of the open national tender by KFC:

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cultural films across all genres, including feature-length films, short films, and documentaries. Consequently, there is an opportunity for a Slow Cinema film, such as the one conceptualised and made in the context of this study, to form a meaningful part of and be preserved through a national film archiving framework. This archiving will ease a sustained reflection by interested future film researchers and enthusiasts towards a more vibrant film culture.

4.4.4 Slow Cinema and a transnational film culture

A specific area of attention in Slow Cinema studies today is the shift towards a discourse of transnational film culture. This shift is reiterated by Çağlayan (2018: 221), who submits that the Slow Cinema movement espouses a transnational aesthetic mode and an institutionalised film culture, adjudicated on its own right. Elsewhere, Çağlayan (2019) insists that minimalism is a transnational artistic singularity based on its aesthetically reductive approach.[151] This inference is critical to the objectives of this study because I am more interested in how the conventions of slowness can be inserted within the historical and cultural context of Kenyan cinema. Perhaps even more critical to Çağlayan's (2018: 221) perspective is that there is no set framework or blueprint prescribed for an individual film director to propagate the Slow Cinema tendency within given national film culture. Çağlayan is eager to clarify that despite Slow Cinema operating mainly as a transnational paradigm, there remains a persistent and worrying gap in the theoretical basis of transnational cinema itself, which is incapable of considering Slow Cinema within its ranking. Here, my interpretation of Çağlayan's concern acknowledges Slow Cinema as a relatively precise movement and yet, it is often difficult to accommodate it in specific circumstances of transnational cinema. As such, it would not be challenging to consider transnational cinema as a tendency that compliments the hybridisation of Slow Cinema's conventions in national, regional, or global contexts. The Slow Cinema films of Apichatpong Weerasethakul and Béla Tarr, for example, are viewed far beyond the contexts of their production. They are open to a wide variety of interpretations not beholden to strictly 'national' positions.

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http://kenyafilmcommission.com/images/tenders/KFC-open_tender-CONSULTANCY_SERVICES_ON_THE_DEVELOPMENT_OF_FILM_REPOSITORY_AND_ARCHIVE_CONCEPT_PAPER.pdf

[151] Conference paper, Dead, Silent, Slow: Notes Towards a Cinematic Minimalism, Film-philosophy conference July 2019.

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Suppose Slow Cinema is a continuously expanding paradigm of experimental practices, reaching across transnational film cultures, as Çağlayan (2018: 222) further argues. In that case, it may also be possible to draw attention to the often-overlooked question of spectatorship related to Slow Cinema. I draw on the views of Higbee and Lim (2000: 18). They argue for examining the aptitude of national or international audiences to interpret a variety of denotations in transnational cinema. In practice, my study seeks to address how Kenyan audiences, in particular, can construct or deconstruct Slow Cinema's narrative, which accentuates minimalism and indeterminacy. This study does not suggest that Slow Cinema is capable of drawing significant numbers of spectatorship in Kenya. After all, many Slow Cinema films remain unseen, making it difficult for Slow Cinema to claim a position of influence within a national framework. Equally, as Bartling (2003: 126) has suggested, the spectator has the power to resist and recast filmic or cultural representations. The sense of optimism expressed in this study in response to situating Slow Cinema in Kenyan cinema is informed by several Slow Cinema films circulating transnationally, and some of which I have analysed in Chapter Three. For instance, in my analyses of *Uncle Boonmee*, *The Turin Horse*, and *Skoonheid*, I demonstrated how Slow Cinema could address questions of national consciousness and cultural identity. This undertaking provides a means of contemplating and building a nation's sense of itself, its philosophy, and its mores.

Slow Cinema's potential in appealing to the sensibilities of national audiences cannot, therefore, be undervalued, especially in response to the social, political, and economic inequalities present in many nations, and which national cinemas try to address (See Koutsourakis 2019: 40). In summary, I would argue that the consolidation of transnational cinema within Kenya's national cinema can give rise to the growth and institutionalisation of the country's broad film culture, which would then lead to sustained efforts in experimental filmmaking for Slow Cinema to take root. The preceding discussion on national cinema, transnational cinema, and film culture, lays the groundwork to consider the imaging of slowness as a cinematic framework for film authors in Kenyan cinema. This consideration builds a basis for Chapter Five, in which I present my exegesis of a Kenyan Slow Cinema film as a means of experimenting with slowness in Kenyan cinema.

4.5 Imagining Slowness as a Cinematic Framework in Kenyan Cinema

As the final part of this chapter, this section takes advantage of the different suppositions and alignments I have presented in each preceding paragraph. So far, I have entertained two propositions. First, Kenyan cinema can be repositioned towards Slow Cinema by historicising Kenyan cinema as a hybrid entity through its themes, narrative technique, and aesthetic features. Second, Slow Cinema can be developed within diverse contexts of Kenya's film culture from the national to the transnational. Given these propositions, my argument in this last section will be that, first, the development of film authorship in Kenyan cinema establishes a framework for Slow Cinema's conventions to be legitimised as part of the country's film culture. Therefore, I deem it essential in the second aspect to provide a preliminary mapping, although not in great detail, of how the different strands of Slow Cinema can guide my analysis of an independent Kenyan Slow Cinema film in Chapter Five. The exegesis in Chapter Five then informs the interpretation of findings from the selected viewers' experiences of *Men of the Hill* as a Slow Cinema film in Chapter Six. Overall, in this section, I want to show that Slow Cinema can positively influence film authors in Kenyan cinema and define for itself a new terrain among film cultures that it can conveniently and constructively occupy into the future.

4.5.1 Film authorship and the forms of slowness in Kenyan cinema

This section offers the opportunity to invoke the auteur theory, which undergirds my thinking in this study regarding how the narrative conventions of Slow Cinema can be situated within historical, and cultural contexts of Kenyan cinema reflect the film author's artistic vision. Staiger (2002: 50) postulates that auteurism is a tool of self-performance, which constructs and reconstructs the individual film author as a performing subject within history. That is, the auteur repeatedly asserts a distinctive sense of the self through social and cultural settings. Pertinently, DeAngelis (2002: 248) insists that auteurism is most often associated with film directors, whose oeuvres contain recognisable visual styles, a consistent artistic identity, or recurring thematic hallmarks. Yet, an essential point that Gerstner (2003: 4) poses in the discussion of auteurism, which is my focus in this subsection, addresses the gap between the authorial influence of a filmmaker and the film author, an abstract instrument of a corporatised, homologous Hollywood film culture. At a time of intense global competition, auteurism would call for Kenyan film authors to find the right narrative strategy and film style

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for the suitable film, thereby choosing to interrupt the influence of Hollywood's dominant narrative within the national cinema framework. Although each film style should be considered on its own merits, the Kenyan film authors can consider the themes, narrative style, and formal elements that Slow Cinema apportions to address specific gaps faced in the exploitation of Kenya's film culture. Staiger (2002: 27) reiterates that auteurism does matter, especially to those in nondominant film cultures in which asserting the performative work of a film author is significant for daily existence. In the ensuing paragraphs, I propose several steps that Kenyan film authors could use to deploy slowness as a cinematic framework for their works.

Iordanova (2014: 261) argues that it is challenging to find films that directly oppose the dominant status of Hollywood cinema. The auteur theory provides an insightful opportunity for film authors in Kenya to engage with alternative narrative and visual styles that can promptly address national agonies and self-depreciation problems. Feature-length films are the mainstay of any serious film industry globally, but many Kenyan film authors are currently dedicating their time and resources to short films. The apparent reason for this trend is that these filmmakers cannot compete with the big-budget feature films at the box office. Another factor influencing their decisions is that short films can serve the same purpose as a business card to attract clients for more lucrative productions such as documentaries and television commercials.

Moreover, aspiring film authors are keen to use short films to build a portfolio that can attract investors for feature-length films in future. Conversely, while acknowledging the absence of new African feature-length films, Turvey and Hendry (2008: 43) dissuade African film authors from focusing their energies on short film production, which is not only profitless but also preserves the domination of foreign film distributors. Further to this, it provides a confirmation bias that African film authors are not a reliable source of films. Therefore, it is my considered view that Slow Cinema's exaltation of artistic value and its emphasis on the minimalist and indeterminate narrative strategy can respond to the concerns raised by Turvey and Hendry. It can also provide an alternative cinematic framework for Kenyan film authors to explore.

The second important step in deploying slowness within Kenyan cinema has to deal with an issue that many Kenyan film authors have grappled with for many years: the weak audience-film relationship, as confirmed by Diang'a (2017: 9). This problem, Diang'a explains, is partially attributable to an attempt by Kenyan cinema to mimic Hollywood cinema in particular. By the admission of Iordanova (2014: 261), the uncooperative relationship between film authors and their audiences emanates from the poor self-image and instabilities exhibited by many small cinemas. The EME report (2013), which the Kenya Film Commission commissioned, duly acknowledges this problem. The report proposes an audience development program that can expose Kenyan audiences to various films worldwide and make it possible for them to appreciate different aesthetic strategies and creative approaches to the narrative style. In that case, slowness can be deployed as a cinematic alternative to the dominant paradigms existent in Kenyan cinema.

The third step would be to identify the forms of slowness inherent in Kenyan cinema, whether known or unbeknownst to the film authors in question, to reapply them within a recognisable framework. The search for slowness in existing Kenyan films is predicated on temporary reconstruction and a spectrum of unsubstantial proofs of what a Kenyan Slow Cinema film might represent. While describing how Third World films grow from the folk tradition, Gabriel (2011: 198) notes that in the African setting, communication mostly unfolds in a manner akin to slowness and that time is hardly rushed in any given situation. This phenomenon, he hints, influences the cinematic pace in African films, thereby placing a high priority on nondramatic elements, which by Hollywood standards, serve no unifying purpose. The link between the reality of African existence and the cinematic universe of African films signals a point of departure for imaging slowness in Kenyan cinema. There could be several Kenyan films that express certain forms of slowness. Still, it is necessary to briefly point to two successful films made in the early period of Kenyan cinema. Sao Gamba's *Kolormask* (1986) and Anne Mungai's *Saikati* (1992) provide a good starting point. The camera in both films essentially adopts a distancing technique with minimal coverage shots while frequently sightseeing the rural cosmos. This technique serves to withhold narrative information from the spectator as embodied by Weerasethakul in *Uncle Boonmee* and Béla Tarr in *The Turin Horse*. It is, however, unclear whether Gamba and Mungai were intent on asserting a particular visual style or artistic identity of slowness. Perhaps, this form of slowness was the easiest way to accomplish a specific narrative task in their respective films. Though, what is

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characteristic of Slow Cinema in every context is that the camera participates in perpetuating an aesthetic of the long take, which happens to be the film author's cultural or social point of view.

4.5.2 A preliminary mapping of slowness in Kenyan cinema

Since this study is the first to explore how Slow Cinema can be situated in Kenyan cinema, it is necessary to provide a preliminary mapping of how the different strands of the slow aesthetic can inform the works of contemporary Kenyan filmmakers. First, Kenyan filmmakers have an opportunity to sample alternative narrative strategies and film styles and even hybridise their works to regulate or enhance their authorial signatures in the filmmaking process. However, for the conventions of Slow Cinema to productively take hold, the promotion of experimental cinema is inevitable. According to Kovács (2007: 27), experimental cinema describes non-commercial films that "focus on and exploit the possibilities of the formal aspects of the cinematic medium". Indeed, the experimental film culture in Kenya is marginal, even if it is flourishing under the OFDF banner and various filmmaking workshops around the country. The Kenyan government does not fund filmmaking activities in the country, let alone experimental film, but it can create the necessary infrastructure for such an enterprise to thrive. Certainly, Slow Cinema could present a new paradigm and the possibility for a unique style of philosophical narrativising in Kenyan cinema. Still, the new knowledge that emerges from the study of Slow Cinema can help address the existing challenges more meaningfully and thus create new forms of filmic modernism and experiences for the Kenyan film authors and their audiences. Concerning the above assumptions, it is possible to make at least a preliminary mapping of how slowness can be situated within Kenyan cinema. This mapping also serves as a precursor to the 'experimental' Slow Cinema film discussed in Chapter Five and the selected film viewers' experiences of Slow Cinema's conventions presented in Chapter Six.

- In the first instance, experimenting with Slow Cinema could offer a distinctive theory of how a Kenyan film author can dialogue with a slow narrative technique and the processes of producing and showcasing the Slow Cinema film to an audience that is more attuned to mainstream media.

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- The themes primarily associated with Slow Cinema could articulate some of the ills bedevilling the Kenyan society and attend to the country's diverse socio-political framework. Kenyan film authors have undoubtedly found it difficult to make films that may appear critical of the powers that be. Therefore, Slow Cinema could offer philosophical possibilities for political comment and critique in that regard. In addition, the themes portrayed in a Slow Cinema film could instigate public participation and national dialogue that surpasses mere entertainment and monetary benefits.

- Considering that most Kenyan films predominantly contain linear narratives, Slow Cinema's attention to minimalism and indeterminacy could allow for the emergence of innovative personal narratives that address Kenya's history of ethnic tensions, marginalisation of minority communities, and corruption. In this sense, Slow Cinema could enable the Kenyan film authors to find their voice and offer a contemplative narrative-aesthetic approach that promotes national consciousness and reconciliation.

- Lastly, the form and content of Slow Cinema may provoke a sense of social awareness among the Kenyan film viewers, since, from my own viewing experience of *Uncle Boonmee*, *The Turin Horse*, and *Skoonheid*, Slow Cinema does encourage active viewing where the silences of film sometimes invite peer dialogue during (and not just after) the viewing experience. This viewing approach is an oppositional stance to mainstream cinema, which requires concentrated watching then reflecting later once the viewing experience is complete. Slow Cinema, therefore, offers a kind of spontaneous dialogue between the film and the viewer. Moreover, as Gabriel (2011: 202) has pointed out, a successful film pushes the viewers toward a more philosophical awareness of reality and motivates them against mere spectatorship.

4.6 Chapter Conclusion

This chapter has expanded Slow Cinema research by creating a broad understanding of Kenya's film culture at national and transnational levels and identifying entry points for moving the discussion of Slow Cinema further in various concrete contexts. A clear lesson from the preceding discussion is that Slow Cinema cannot be entirely situated without the

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explicit institutionalisation of Kenya's film culture within the political economy of the country's media industry. This situatedness requires identifying entry points for Slow Cinema within the historical, political, socio-economic, and cultural frameworks of Kenyan cinema and the identification of various agents in all sectors of Kenya's film culture. As I have attempted to illustrate in a limited number of specific contexts, refiguring these entry points to bring greater attention to the conventions of Slow Cinema identified requires different strategies. As pointed out in section 4.3.1, the gradual adoption of hybridisation in the historicity of Kenyan cinema provides the starting point for Slow Cinema's contextualisation. However, in section 4.4, it is clear that advancing the conventions of Slow Cinema in Kenyan cinema requires more than a vibrant national or transnational framework. A critical factor in the successful hybridisation of Slow Cinema is the strengthening of film schools, film festivals, and film archives. Generally, to bring attention to Slow Cinema, there must be ways to promote and facilitate Kenya's film culture nationally and transnationally.

In section 4.5, I have argued that there are important lessons to be learned from the auteur theory. Specifically, it facilitates the imaging of slowness as a cinematic alternative for the Kenyan film authors as they try to cultivate a productive relationship with their audiences.[152] Finally, I have suggested preliminary strategies used to map out Slow Cinema within Kenyan cinema. I have emphasised that priority should be given to addressing the customised needs of film authors and their audiences as an essential means of ensuring the gradual hybridisation of Slow Cinema's conventions with the country's narrative strategies and film styles (see section 4.5.2). The next chapter presents an exegesis of the first-ever Kenyan Slow Cinema film (*Men of the Hill*) to experiment with the aesthetic of slowness in the context of Kenyan cinema.

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[152] Refer to Chapter Two (section 2.3.3), where I have discussed Slow Cinema as alternative cinema.

CHAPTER FIVE:

MEN OF THE HILL: AN EXEGESIS OF THE CREATIVE PROCESS OF EXPERIMENTING WITH SLOWNESS IN KENYAN CINEMA

5.1 Chapter Introduction

Undertaking practice-based research in filmmaking, as Anderson and Tobin (2012) emphasise, often attracts arguments and counter-arguments.[153] In particular, scholars such as Kerrigan, Verdon and Aquilia (2018) support the framing of creative production research in the academy and the significant role that such an undertaking plays in the industry.[154] Contrastingly, a necessary counter-argument highlighted by Anderson and Tobin (2012: 954) questions the intellectual rigour and accessibility of creative production research within the academy, even if an exegesis complements the work of art. In response, Nelson (2013: 64) asserts that "Practice-as-Research (PaR) projects comprise a range of techniques in a multi-mode inquiry". Rigour is exercised in the design of the method, different dimensions of the overall creative production process, and critical reflection. Rigour also includes an awareness of the model and context in which the researcher-practitioner can employ the suitable standards for judgment (Nelson 2013: 65). This rigour, Nelson adds, involves the process of gathering, selecting, and editing materials.

For this chapter, it is also valuable to underscore that an exegesis, understood in relation to Arnold (2005: 41), is a form of evaluation that positions the researcher-practitioner as an expert reader or critic of their creative work (painting, sculpture or film) in light of existing theory and practice. In so doing, the exegesis sufficiently describes the creative process undertaken by the student to produce an original work of art whilst providing a basis for judging it. Thus, in light of the counter-argument highlighted by Anderson and Tobin (2012: 954), it is appropriate to situate the methodological approach at the outset of the exegesis. First, this doctoral thesis adds to the emerging practices in Slow Cinema scholarship by proposing a paradigm that consolidates the rigour of academic research with the

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[153] For a detailed discussion, see Anderson, L. and Tobin, A. (2012).
[154] For further analysis, see Kerrigan, Verdon and Aquilia (2018).

performative and reflective techniques of producing an experimental Slow Cinema film. Vannini (2008: 815) affirms that "since researchers are also "situated", they need to reflect on how their observations and analyses result from their dealings with that location". Second, this exegesis should not be viewed as a separate section but should be analysed in conversation with the entire thesis. The exegesis is informed by the theoretical and conceptual framework discussed in Chapter Two, not just for reference purposes but also for further contextualising and reflecting intellectually on my work. Third, my textual analysis of the three selected Slow Cinema films (see Chapter Three) drawn from Thailand (Asia), Hungary (Europe), and South Africa (Africa) have served as primary reference texts throughout this chapter.

To address the fourth aim of this research, I made (at the time of writing) the first-ever Kenyan Slow Cinema film, *Men of the* Hill. This film emphasises narrative, minimalism, and indeterminacy (see Chapter Two, section 2.4.2). By doing so, I sought to find out how the creative production of a Slow Cinema film could accelerate the understanding of Slow Cinema for Kenyan filmmakers, scholars and film viewers (the discussion around which continues in Chapter Six). I have broken this exegesis into three parts. The first part focuses on the exegetical context of my creative production, wherein I describe my journey as a practitioner-researcher. This description is followed by an overview of the creative inspiration for experimenting with Slow Cinema and then a brief elucidation of the cultural and theoretical constructs underpinning the production of a Kenyan Slow Cinema film. I also provide a synopsis of *Men of the Hill*. In the second part, I recount my experiences making Men of the Hill from the pre-production and production phase to post-production and exhibition. In each phase, I identify the main activities that informed the creative process of experimenting with slowness within the Kenyan context. Finally, in the third part, I present a close reading of *Men of the Hill*, mainly focusing on the film's thematic concerns, narrative dimensions, and visual language.

Fundamentally, this close reading contributes to the area of scholarship that deals with narrative, minimalism and indeterminacy. This analysis leads to a better understanding of how Kenyan cinema can align with the form and function of Slow Cinema to convey images and narratives authentic to Kenya, as argued in Chapter Two (section 2.3) and then discussed at great length in Chapter Four. The exegesis combines a reflexive voice and

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scholarly interpretation to locate and critically examine the situatedness of Slow Cinema conventions in Kenyan cinema, as I have problematised in Chapter One (section 1.2.3). I will make multiple references to *Men of the Hill* throughout this exegesis. I recommend the film's viewing before reading this text (refer to Appendix A).

5.2 The Exegetical Context of *Men of the Hill*

In this section, I offer a context in which *Men of the Hill* can be positioned as a Kenyan Slow Cinema film. In the discussions that follow, I acknowledge that I am knowledgeable about my subjectivity while maintaining a critical distance towards the creative process of making the film.

5.2.1 My journey as a practitioner-researcher

First, I specifically use the term "practitioner-researcher" in this study because Barnacle (2012: 81) asserts that it refers to a "doctoral candidate within the art, architecture and design fields, for whom a doctorate accompanies a thriving, professional practice". As such, professional practice and research are mutually informing and transforming. In this context, as a practitioner-researcher, I am undertaking academic research to improve the action of my filmmaking practice through Slow Cinema. I started experimenting with cinematic form and narrative in 2006 as an undergraduate student of Electronic Media at Daystar University, Nairobi, Kenya. My interest in filmmaking was precipitated by the golden age of Kenyan cinema (see Chapter Four, section 4.3.1), which was characterised by a flurry of filmmaking activities and events. Fifteen years later, my journey as a practitioner-researcher has followed a trajectory in which I continue to deepen my understanding of screenwriting, directing, and film scholarship. Following my graduation from Daystar University, I was employed as a screenwriter in a local production company. As a result, I was exposed to many great experiences that enhanced my creativity in screen production. During this period, I developed the habit of watching Hollywood films regularly because my primary focus was working with narrative. My inclination to Hollywood films was informed by regular discussions with peers in the film industry. As I have demonstrated in Chapter Four, Kenyan filmmakers tend to hybridise their content with Hollywood cinema's narrative and aesthetic strategies.

Similarly, Kenyan audiences are attuned to watching Hollywood films, making Hollywood the go-to-standard for learning about narrative. In reference to my discussion of Slow Cinema as an alternative cinema (see Chapter Two, section 2.3.3), it is also worth mentioning here that Nollywood films have dominated the Kenyan film culture for a long time hence providing an alternative cinema to many audiences. Moreover, Nollywood films still provide a reliable source of entertainment for many Kenyan viewers. Yet, in their creative works, Mainstream filmmakers in Kenya are hesitant to incorporate the narrative and aesthetic strategies used in Nollywood films. My extensive viewing experiences of Hollywood films increased my love of cinema. They expanded my knowledge of the Western screen culture, particularly how it can positively influence the Kenyan film culture. Furthermore, I gained a more explicit awareness of my identity as a practitioner-researcher when I started working as an adjunct film lecturer at the Kenya Institute of Mass Communication (KIMC), where I facilitated screenwriting, directing, and producing courses.

As a practitioner, I have had the privilege of working on diverse filmmaking projects both for television and for the cinematic medium. My most significant accomplishment has been in educational entertainment (edutainment) TV serial dramas. I have created, designed and written multi-layered storylines inspired by people's daily lives to appeal to the viewers' psychological needs. *SIRI* (Swahili for secret) remains one of the most successful edutainment TV serial dramas in Kenya. I co-created the programme as the lead writer for the four seasons it was aired on national television. The programme was voted the best television drama during the 2011 *Kalasha* Film & TV Awards for creating a skilful balance between HIV/AIDS messages and entertaining storylines. Most notably, *SIRI* redefined co-production in Kenya because the technical crew was primarily drawn from South Africa. I benefited immensely from the co-production engagement with the South African team, particularly in the expertise of screenwriting and directing. Since then, my creative works have reflected the great lessons in characterisation and plot development, which I learned from my screenwriting mentors, Paul Rawlston and Brian Tilley. After four years working on *SIRI* and other TV projects, I quit my day job as a screenwriter to focus on my postgraduate studies and independent filmmaking. For the last eight years, my screen production career has been characterised by the periodic production of documentaries, infomercials, and feature films.

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I work as a university lecturer offering instruction for undergraduate courses in film and media production in tandem with my filmmaking career. My decision to take up a long-term teaching position was in part due to the view popularised by some film scholars and practitioners that there exists in Kenya a gap between film instruction in the academy and film practices in the industry. From this, my primary goal has been to teach film production with a particular focus on professional practice. As a lecturer, I have collaborated with my students to organise several film events that have brought together scholars and practitioners to share knowledge and experiences in filmmaking. Also, due to my past co-production experiences, I was motivated to start the East Africa Student Film Festival (EASFF) in 2017, funded by the Kenya Film Classification Board (KFCB) with the support of the Kenya Film Commission (KFC) and several film production companies in Kenya. The hugely successful festival event attracted students, scholars, and film practitioners from Kenya, Tanzania, and Uganda. Plans for subsequent editions of the festival are underway. In the recent past, I was asked to lead the process of developing a new film curriculum for my alma mater. The curriculum is now awaiting approval by the Commission for University Education in Kenya (CUE).

My love of cinema coupled with the desire to contribute to film scholarship has led to my doctoral research, which in several ways expands the possibilities for an exploratory engagement with the cinematic medium in Kenyan cinema. First, as I have shown in my research approach, the production of a Slow Cinema film in the context of Kenyan cinema makes it possible for me to galvanise my position as a practitioner-researcher. It also validates practice-based research, which as Anderson and Tobin (2012: 954) have indicated, is often underappreciated. Second, the creative production permits my doctoral study to potentially influence the pedagogy of film in Kenya's academic setting and the country's film culture at large. Third, the film bridges the previously mentioned traditional gap between the academy and the industry within the Kenyan context. Lastly, since my doctoral research pays particular attention to the creative production of a Slow Cinema film, it has reestablished my practice towards various forms of film experimentation and reflection as a filmmaker and scholar. As a result, one of my long-term objectives is to create an enabling environment for the hybridisation of Slow Cinema conventions in my future creative works while encouraging Slow Cinema research within the academy. In what follows, I describe

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how I was inspired to experiment with the conventions of Slow Cinema in the context of Kenyan cinema.

5.2.2 The creative inspiration for a Slow Cinema film

I decided to pursue a doctoral degree in film studies because I was keen to expand my boundaries and crafts as a practitioner actively engaged in teaching. Judging from the positive professional experience that I gained while working with the South African film crew, I was mainly determined to study at the University of Pretoria (UP) in South Africa. My initial research interest was in film distribution, with specific reference to the advent of video-on-demand (VoD) services in Kenya. However, in one of my earliest correspondences with Prof Marie-Heleen Coetzee, the Head of the then Drama Department at UP, she suggested other areas of research interest that I could consider. As a result, my research focus immediately shifted to particular alignments between cinema and film aesthetics focusing on Slow Cinema. Prof Coetzee then referred me to Dr Chris Broodryk, who further advised me on what my preferred research might entail while explicitly noting the lack of extensive research in Slow Cinema. Dr Broodryk's advice set me on a path of discovery as I began to read more about Slow Cinema and, for the first time, experience a Slow Cinema film in its true narrative and form. One Slow Cinema film that Dr Broodryk had recommended was *Once Upon a Time in Anatolia* (Ceylan 2011). I found enthralling about this film its minimal use of film syntax, the indeterminacy of its plot, and the emphasis on contemplation.

Further readings exposed me to Slow Cinema's debates, especially among the exponents of fast cinema. Counter-arguments on the narrative conventions of Slow Cinema specifically stirred my intellectual curiosity. I felt the urge to contribute to these discussions from the perspective of Kenyan cinema because Slow Cinema's narrative seemed to be antithetical to all the screenwriting lessons I had learned thus far. Through constant engagement with my Supervisor, Dr Broodryk, I began to question what the creative production of a Kenyan Slow Cinema film imbued with minimalism and indeterminacy could mean for my doctoral research. Our conversations were not so much about the Slow Cinema film itself but rather about formulating a research question that was suitably fitted for my thesis. In essence, I had to propose a research question to test against a generalisable methodological approach to other researchers. Indeed, the conceptualisation process of a Kenyan Slow Cinema film enlarges the possibility for multiple readings and inspiration from

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Slow Cinema thinkers and auteurs. To functionally contextualise my creative production within the tradition of Slow Cinema, I watched several available Slow Cinema films. Some titles that inspired my Slow Cinema film in new ways include:

1. *Uncle Boonmee who can recall his past lives* (Weerasethakul 2010)
2. *The Turin Horse* (Tarr 2011)
3. *Taste of Cherry* (Kiarostami 1997)
4. *The Wind Will Carry Us* (Kiarostami 1999)
5. *Five Dedicated to Ozu* (Kiarostami 2003)
6. *Norte: the end of history* (Diaz 2013)
7. *Once Upon a Time in Anatolia* (Ceylan 2011)
8. *Winter Sleep* (Ceylan 2014)
9. *Beyond the Hills* (Mungiu 2012)
10. *Skoonheid* (Hermanus 2011)

Each of the films mentioned above spoke to me in distinctive ways. Still, in the end, I had to make a Slow Cinema film that could represent my cinematic intuition, as I will expound later under the story development section. Meanwhile, it is worth emphasising that my engagement with the conventions of Slow Cinema has led to the interrogation of the intricate relationship between neorealism and fiction. Thus, my creative work seeks to subvert the notion of cinematic reality and time by blending daily human life with the spiritual. It asks the viewers to slow down their viewing processes to make sense of hidden meanings emplaced within an audiovisual language of minimalism and indeterminacy. As a Slow Cinema film, it attempts to situate cinema as a sensory vehicle that transports viewers into multiple temporalities. Even seemingly ordinary experiences may have alternate meanings and extended durations. The film seeks to repudiate what Koepnick (2014: 95) calls "cinematic iron regime of arrow-like time."

5.2.3 The cultural and theoretical constructs of a Kenyan Slow Cinema film

Throughout my PhD journey, I have been concerned with the production of context-centred knowledge of Slow Cinema in Kenyan cinema. I inevitably saw the production of a Kenyan Slow Cinema film as a means of exploring this complex task, in large part due to the unavailability of locally made Slow Cinema films. I wanted to experiment with the concept of

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slowness in more practical and invariable ways, without the obligation of providing social commentary on the most prominent issues of Kenyan concern. Therefore, it was imperative to ground a Kenyan Slow Cinema film firmly in auteurism's cultural and theoretical constructs. In that respect, my creative work interrogates a specified task of the Slow Cinema film director in Kenyan cinema. It asks how a film director exerts his artistic vision of slowness in recognisable and recurring ways that compel the spectators to read beyond the film's surface while appreciating its meditative qualities? The cultural and theoretical matrix within which the creative process of experimenting with slowness is structured reflects the parallels between the typical Kenyan film style and the conventions of Slow Cinema in a feature-length film context. In Chapter Four (section 4.5.2), I made a preliminary mapping of slowness within Kenyan cinema. I theorised that experimenting with slowness could influence the Kenyan film author to dialogue with Slow Cinema in meaningful ways and, consequently, provoke a sense of social awareness among the Kenyan film viewers. The primary creative work of slowness discussed in this chapter offers a critical response to the above concerns. It serves as an experimental tool to explore some practical ways of mapping slowness within the framework of Kenyan cinema. As I will show in subsequent sections, my experiences in making a Kenyan Slow Cinema film suggest that such an approach could have far-reaching consequences for Kenya's film culture.

As Antonioni (1963: 50) once observed, the film director's concern is "to catch a reality which is never static, but always moving toward or away from a moment of crystallisation, and to present this movement as a new perception." In *Men of the Hill*, I aimed to evoke Kenya's elusive contemporary reality, which typically emerges through a trajectory of national culture. In essence, I have designed the film's retelling to invoke some of the country's problems and, in this way, ask the viewer to slow down and understand what the film is doing in light of these problems while thinking seriously about cinema. However, the overriding focus on the question of what constitutes Kenya's contemporary reality only increases the film's sense of spiritual and existential absurdity, and the result is a challenging indeterminacy. Further, *Men of the Hill* demonstrates Kenyan society's inherent oppositions and unreconciled social, economic, and political problems while at the same time presenting religious beliefs and otherworldliness in increasingly stylised ways. Bakari and Cham (1996: 172) argue that the theoretical frames of the Western world have mostly discounted modes of religious and spiritual address. Yet, such magnitudes "largely shape rural and aspects of

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urban, African subjectivities". This argument supports my point in *Men of the Hill* because I am more interested in ontologies that seek to establish contact between the mortal world and the spirit world, creating a sense of dreamlike quality and cerebral drama.

5.2.4 A synopsis of Men of the Hill

Dr Grofki Zetuni (Joel Otukho) is a medical doctor who suffers from complex visual hallucinations characterised by insufficient sleep with hypnagogic hallucinations, mood disorder, posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and partial seizures. The story revolves around his eccentric life, his interaction with his wife, patients, colleagues, and strangers. The film opens with an image of Dr Grofki's car snaking its way through a picturesque landscape in Kenya's Rift Valley region. As a seemingly contemplative Dr Grofki drives on, the slow-paced narrative reveals the routines of his daily life. His studious demeanour is perhaps a glimpse of the odd relationship he has with his reclusive and sickly wife, Marybeth Zetuni (Peace Ocholla). Although Dr Grofki lacks peace in his private life, he is diligent and loyal to his patients and sometimes strangers he meets on his way to and from work. He is particularly committed to Luke Rehani (Ryan Felix), a suicidal patient at the community hospital with a somewhat twisted view of life. As Luke increasingly becomes Dr Grofki's frame of reference, the latter finds himself in a collision path with Reverend Peter Shanzu (George Ojema), the chaplain. It takes a tragedy to resolve the differences between them finally. Although, inherently, Dr Grofki would find it easy to confront the challenges that come with his profession, only if his judgment would be less clouded by the daily encounters off it. Reluctant to seek help for his complex visual hallucinations and partial seizures, Dr Grofki becomes a danger to himself and the people around him. Failure to profoundly connect with the mortal world means that he may only find solace in what appears to be comfortable in the spirit world.

5.3 The Making of *Men of the Hill*

The creative process of experimenting with slowness in *Men of the Hill* was exhilarating, gratifying, and informative in every aspect. I had to rely on my creative and technical skills to undertake numerous and often-combined priorities in accomplishing the desired goals, mainly under the constraints of time, funds, and technological challenges. At the beginning of the process, I was more concerned about the context in which these creative ideas would

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materialise. Still, with continued research and inspiration from the works of Slow Cinema auteurs, my understanding of what a Kenyan Slow Cinema film might look like became clearer. Even then, I felt torn between making a Slow Cinema film that lucidly attends to the pre-existing conditions of the Kenyan society and one that unalterably applies the conventions of Slow Cinema without paying particular attention to social commentary. It is also important to clarify that as much as this is practice-as-research, I did not engage in the creative process of experimenting with cinematic slowness as a sole practitioner because such an undertaking requires collaboration with the cast and technical crew. However, I was able to exert my artistic vision as the writer and director of the film. In this section, I present the different phases that characterised the making of *Men of the Hill*, starting with the pre-production phase.

5.3.1 The pre-production phase

The pre-production phase of *Men of the Hill,* which occurred between January and November 2018, was arduous and unpredictable. While there was an option of using production management software such as Studio Binder, I wanted to preserve the experimental nature of the practice by recording every aspect of pre-production manually. In addition, the pre-production phase provided an opportunity for testing, validating and verifying a broad range of activities to ensure reliability during the production phase and ultimately reflect my overall vision for the film. Partly on account of my position as a practitioner-researcher, I maintained considerable control of the pre-production process to prepare the ground for smoother collaboration during the shooting (production) stage. I was in charge of both creative and administrative issues, including developing the screenplay; making budget estimates; selecting cast and crew; creating the production schedule; location scouting; and securing props and supplies.

Additionally, my duties as the director entailed the cinematic interpretation of my own original script, overseeing production design, and working with the cinematographer to determine and execute the film's visual style. A crucial part of the process also involved the conceptualisation of necessary measures that I would take to mitigate the effects of non-conformances in the production phase. Figure 5.1 summarises the above activities, although I will underscore the importance of screenwriting, funding and budgeting, casting and crewing, and location scouting to the creative work for all practical purposes.
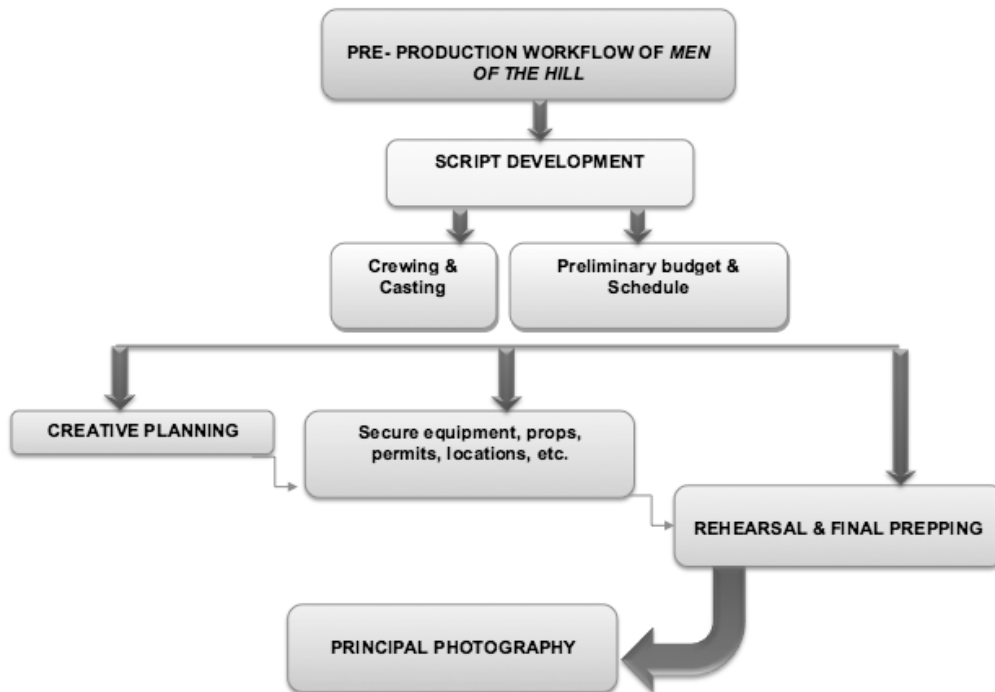
Figure 5.1: *Pre-production workflow for* Men of the Hill *(Author 2020).*

5.3.1.1 The screenplay

I have spent a better part of my career reading various screenwriting primers, such as Robert McKee's *Story* (1999), David Trottier's *The Screenwriter's Bible* (2014), Blake Snyder's *Save the Cat! The Last Book on Screenwriting You'll Ever Need* (2005), and John Truby's *The Anatomy of Story* (2008). The overarching lesson I have learned from each of these books is twofold: a sustained emphasis on characterisation; and the significance of narrative structure. These two techniques of story development have moulded my oeuvre in screenwriting over the years. However, the knowledge and skills I have acquired from Slow Cinema so far have recast my views on the dominant paradigms in screenwriting. For instance, I have found that most Kenyan screenwriters have a greater affinity for linear narratives that tend to valorise the concept of cause and effect while creating too much sympathy for the protagonist. As I have argued in Chapter Four (section 4.3), many Kenyan audiences indeed celebrate such narrative concepts that persist in local productions. Of significance, perhaps, but more complex, my task was to carefully craft slowness into the screenplay of *Men of the Hill* by deemphasising character development and narrative construction. In the following paragraphs, I will discuss specific parts of the screenwriting

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process of *Men of the Hill*. First, the film's title (*Men of the Hill*) is a cue to understand the entire film as an allegory. In that sense, the screenplay is a fusion of a particular poem in my unpublished poetry chapbook titled *Men of the Hill*, and some hazy ideas in my dreams:

<u>Men of the Hill</u>
They are men of the hill,
Unseen, Unheard, unspoken, unbounded,
Walking on and on and on,
Their long, thickly veined limbs,
Responding in a monotone,
Echoing their woeful cries.

Men of the hill,
Like pilgrims with their burdens,
Haggard, staggering,
Born of wrong, born of right,
Born of tales,
Of lost ambition,
Of enchanted execution,
Of expectations,
Of despair.

They are men of the hill,
Their hearts clothed with disquiet,
Unusual rapid throbbing,
Hard to bear,
Coerced to keep vigil
Holders of erratic dreams,
In hot pursuit of their obscurities.

Men of the hill,
Walking with ravaging fires,
Deep within their cold hearts
Seething, sinking, sinning,
Limping perilously,
On thin ice,
With fire beneath,
Swearing to guzzle them.

They are men of the hill,
Trudging on,
Weary, contused, stilted,
Hampered to endeavour,
Entangled in the strings of blackness,
Wrinkled garments,
Woven,
By the hands of a past apparition.

(Written by Emmanuel Wanyonyi, 2016)

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I am fascinated by the idea of using cinema to amalgamate poetry and dreams. I took inspiration from Weerasethakul's poetic narrative in *Uncle Boonmee.* Film publicist Matt Mazur (Pop Matters 2011) calls Weerasethakul's oeuvre "a filmic tone poem, which is at once independent, experimental and unconventional in every sense". Similarly, Lim (2016: 92) has referred to the oeuvres of Slow Cinema auteurs Weerasethakul and Greece's Theo Angelopoulos as "spiritual or poetic dimensions in the form of cyclical temporality". In Africa, film director Abderrahmane Sissako has been labelled by Walker Magazine (2015) as "Africa's visual poet" for his poetic narrative in *Timbuktu* (2014).[155] Therefore, writing the *Men of the Hill* screenplay was challenging yet rewarding because I had to appeal to my conscious sensibilities while being attenuated to my subconscious. Specifically, the poem's story in the script suggests indeterminacy by working symbolically as a deliberate allusion to the themes of Slow Cinema. At the same time, the protagonists continue to reveal themselves subconsciously in unstable and incoherent ways. This narrative technique points to Kunda's (2018: 2) description of symbolism in Slow Cinema, which she states, requires a certain kind of lyricism, as particularly evident in the works of Nuri Bilge Ceylan and Abbas Kiarostami. The poem's enabling narrative tropology in *Men of the Hill* is construed in new ways to clear new paths for the Slow Cinema film's wide field of open narrative possibilities. *Men of the Hill* conflates both time and space so that past, present, and future can exist simultaneously in the film's spatio-temporality. Moreover, the screenplay's intentions are symbolic, to enable the substance of the work to emanate from sub-textual human vulnerabilities and poetry of the form.

The second part of the screenwriting process involved characterisation. The narrative revolves around Dr Grofki Zetuni and framed through my perspective as the director. From the outset, there was an existing tension between creating a complex lead character and the desire to provide sufficient character motivation to drive the plot forward to engage the film's spectator emotionally. As evident in many stories that adhere to the classical Hollywood paradigm of the three-act structure (see Chapter Two, section 2.4.2), narrative closure is often achieved when the protagonist ultimately overcomes the seemingly insurmountable obstacles on their path. Thereby, the screenwriter's primary task is to deftly resolve all the mysteries implanted in the story to achieve the protagonist's primary goal.

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[155] Further reading on Walker magazine (2015):
https://walkerart.org/calendar/2015/series/abderrahmane-sissako-africas-visual-poet

However, from the perspective of Slow Cinema, I had to disassociate myself from the protagonist (Dr Grofki) because I was neither looking to create a memorable character for my audience nor one that I could empathise with as prescribed in the principles of screenwriting. It is customary for the director of a Slow Cinema film to keep a distance between spectator and protagonist, sometimes by withholding character information. I had no clear path where I wanted Dr Grofki to end up in substance, so I allowed him to lead me to unknown terrain. I used the same approach with the characters of Marybeth Zetuni and Luke Rehani, who are seemingly contained and repressed by the world around them. This approach requires the viewer to look beyond the film's surface to have both a deeper understanding of the character's symbolic interior and the director's intentions. Lastly, it is worth emphasising that I flattened the hierarchy of characters in *Men of the Hill* to create an opportunity for tertiary characters to have range in the slow narrative arc and free the screenwriter from character development.

Thirdly, since the screenplay subverts the classical Hollywood narrative structure with its emphasis on narrative pace, closure and resolution, as well as any other dominant paradigm of plot development, the film's spine cannot be broken down into simple plot points or beats that unfold within a clear dramatic three-act structure. Instead, the plotline consists of multiple narrative strands, which are often fragmented to heighten the film's sense of minimalism and indeterminacy. The under-dramatisation of the screenplay's narrative and the minimal exposition of the characters and setting of the story emphasise the banality of contemporary life while obliquely implying the characters' baffling and unresolved conflicts. For instance, the backstories of Dr Grofki, Marybeth, and Luke are underdeveloped in the screenplay, hence deemphasising their influence on the diegetic realities of the film. As a result, I considered the spectator's understanding of the characters as limited to what they (the characters) are doing in the present. As Jaffe (2014: 5) confirms, the psychology of Slow Cinema characters tends to be one-dimensional. This sensibility speaks to the concept of minimalism in Slow Cinema, which serves to impede narrative progression and character exposition while emphasising aesthetic economy. The minimalism of dialogue in the screenplay of *Men of the Hill* also ensures that narrative progression is inhibited since the film's spine divests itself of background information. After completing the first draft of the screenplay, I had a series of thought-provoking conversations with my supervisor, who further advised me on characterisation and the significance of a slow narrative structure.

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These conversations also served as a clear reminder of the need to place my creative practice in the appropriate scholarly context. Consequently, while working on the second draft of the screenplay, I revisited the research question that initiated the creative production process. This recursive element produced a particular pattern in the screenplay that created new questions answered in the production phase.

Overall, the narrative situatedness of the screenplay improved my ability to address cinematic slowness as it pertains to the choice of narrative and aesthetic styles that do little to provide social commentary on Kenya's current situation. Yet, such decisions present an opportunity to experiment with minimalism and indeterminacy. The final locked screenplay of *Men of the Hill* was 72-pages. It was mainly characterised by scenes of extended temporal duration, repetitive action and lengthy descriptions of mise-en-scène to convey and achieve slowness. I drew inspiration from *The Turin Horse* because Tarr had emphasised the need for a director to know the entire film from beginning to end for the narrative to reside in the subconscious. In this regard, the screenplay can effectively be translated into cinematic language and guide the director emotionally to find the right images. This strategy may be considered risky, but far less so and is actually creative when the same person is writer and director as with Tarr. Next, I discuss the funding and budgeting processes for *Men of the Hill*.

5.3.1.2 Funding and budgeting

I conceptualised *Men of the Hill,* intending to explore the step-by-step patchwork finance model, otherwise referred to as "slow budget filmmaking", a concept proposed by Haas and Holzinger (2008).[156] Under this model, the filmmaker maintains flexibility in production while exercising complete independence from film financing institutions, production companies, and distributing agencies. The model proposed by Haas and Holzinger also excludes public support or funding, which works well for a micro-budget film in the context of my creative practice. Specifically, *Men of the Hill*'s funding model takes its cue from the evidence that Çağlayan (2018: 171) presents regarding art film directors individually funding their productions on a micro-budget. Speaking in the context of Turkish cinema, Çağlayan (2018:

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[156] Hass and Holzinger (2008: 1) expound further on this approach, although the reference to "slow-budget" is not directly linked to Slow Cinema. See explanation: https://archive.org/details/Slow-budget-filmmaking-by-ilMareFilm/page/n1/mode/2up

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172) further argues that filmmakers tended to employ the concepts of austerity and minimalism as a way of repelling and defying the mainstream culture. He quotes Slow Cinema auteur Nuri Bilge Ceylan, who once observed that "working on a low budget was not only a matter of necessity but also a preference". In other words, Ceylan perceived minimalism as a way of resisting mainstream consumption trends and the culture of excess, which characterises the modern-day world. For Çağlayan (2018: 172), minimalism coupled with micro-budget production transmits an aesthetic that can operate theoretically well for Slow Cinema directors anywhere in the world. In short, Çağlayan concedes that many Slow Cinema filmmakers across the globe have to rely on personal savings to finance their works because funds from the government and the private sector are mostly inaccessible. Additionally, Luca and Jorge (2016: 12) have pointed to power relations and national authenticity issues in cases where Slow Cinema films, particularly from Iran, Asia, and Latin America, rely on European agents and institutions for funding. Therefore, *Men of the Hill* is an independent Kenyan Slow Cinema film due to the financial model used in its making.

In this spirit, I decided to experiment with cinematic slowness within the context of Kenyan cinema, partly to show that making a slow feature-length film can be a financial possibility, considering that it may not be as expensive as a traditional film. Brown (2016: 87) supports this approach, advocating for a "low-budget and melancholic film" linked to the digital revolution. *Men of the Hill* is certainly not the first micro-budget feature-length film I have worked on, but it is a unique experience because I made most of the production choices in the spirit of experimentation. To rationalise the production process and reduce overhead costs, I had to dedicate more time to pre-production activities, which took at least ten months (January to November 2018) to complete. During this period, I conceptualised the entire production workflow from the beginning to the end bearing in mind that a micro-budget film requires little or no margin of error. Even – especially – a micro-budget film requires clear and logical production planning similar to a big-budget feature. My discussion of funding and budgeting for *Men of the Hill* does not necessarily provide a clear roadmap for the success of similar creative productions in the future. Still, it may offer some valuable insights into the process of experimenting with cinematic slowness within very real logistical and resource-restricted parameters.

The final budget for *Men of the Hill* was approximately 8,000 American dollars, which I raised with the support of my wife.[157] The fact that I received no public or institutional support to fund *Men of the* Hill effectively means that I reserve all the rights for the film. My wife acted as line producer, and she ensured that we remained on schedule and budget. We spent funds mainly on obtaining a film license (refer to Appendix D), paying honoraria to the lead cast, buying wardrobe and props, paying for locations, transport, catering and post-production. Collaboration with some members of the crew also helped to cut costs. Working with a small team is a practice often associated with Slow Cinema film directors. For instance, in writing about Filipino director Lav Diaz's oeuvre, Ingawanij (2015: 106) observes that Diaz's films are shaped by the contingencies of filming, particularly in his selection of cast and crew. Jones (2015: 63) describes this approach as Guerilla filmmaking because it involves developing relationships with other filmmakers, and those relationships "lead to crews who are looking for experience right now". For example, the Director of Photography provided his GH4 Lumix camera, lenses, lights, and other accessories. In addition, the camera operator brought his GH5 Lumix camera and provided drone services, while a professional colleague in the industry provided his sound gear. I worked with a minimal crew of six, and none of them was remunerated. The objective was to ensure the available funds were spent on what would end up on the screen, considering that we were working on a micro-budget. This approach allowed the cast and crew to be more creative and innovative during the production phase.

5.3.1.3 Casting and crewing

While important, in my experience, casting in a Slow Cinema film is less elaborate, as is the case with a mainstream film. My analysis of Weerasethakul's casting for his film, *Uncle Boonmee*, informed this assertion. Weerasethakul (2010: 4) categorically states that "he could not use professional actors who tend to have many public personalities". He explains that a sense of amateurishness is artful for a kind of Slow Cinema's acting style (quoted in Wong 2011:83).[158] Similarly, Wong (2011: 83) references French director Robert Bresson, who calls his actors "models". This approach reinforces Bresson's ideas of minimalist

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[157] I here acknowledge the annual bursary I received from the University of Pretoria, which enabled me to pool financial resources towards making *Men of the Hill*.
[158] The "amateurishness" suggested by Weerasethakul in this context, refers to both an aesthetic strategy and a form of cultural production, which are based on the notion of authenticity. See for example, the definition of amateur acting by Holdsworth, Milling, and Nicholson (2017: 5).

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filmmaking because the actors do not embrace extensive, expressive acting as demanded by mainstream cinema. The concepts described above were of significant importance to the casting process of *Men of the Hill* since it is universally recognised that many Slow Cinema film directors consider non-professional actors in their works (Jaffe 2014; Luca & Jorge 2016; Mai 2016). Jaffe (2014: 17) notes explicitly that the presence of non-professional actors in a Slow Cinema film generally ensures minimalism of drama and emotion, both of which are valuable to this study as a whole. Yet, considering that Slow Cinema is a new genre in Kenyan cinema, it was essential to have a rational balance between professional and non-professional actors for the casting call of *Men of the Hill*. As such, I worked with six professional actors and eight non-professional actors. The "amateurishness" that Weerasethakul (2011: 5) refers to was an equally important consideration for me while experimenting with slowness. In the ensuing paragraphs, I will briefly discuss the main cast of *Men of the Hill* and then, later, the significance of working with a small crew in the context of experimental film.

Joel Otukho, who plays the character of Dr Grofki Zetuni, is my longtime friend and collaborator. A trained actor, Joel has appeared in many films, television, and theatre productions in Kenya. He is best known for his roles in several acclaimed films, including *Nairobi Half Life* (Gitonga 2012) and *The Captain of Nakara* (Bob Nyanja 2012), to name a few. Internationally, Joel has appeared in *Taking the Flak* (2009), a comedy-drama TV series directed by Jon Rolph and Adam Miller. Joel's extensive knowledge of Kenyan cinema, coupled with his ability to play complex characters skillfully, was a significant factor that influenced my choice when casting him for the lead role in *Men of the Hill*. It is pertinent to note that Joel also played a crucial role in casting other professional actors in the film. They include Peace Ocholla as Marybeth Zetuni, Dennis Musyoka as Prof Laban Ikulu, and James Webo as Fabian Mundu. The process of casting non-professional actors was less demanding because it involved seeking the services of my former students. They are passionate about the filmmaking craft and particularly curious about experimental film. George Ojema, who plays the Reverend Peter Shanzu, is a professional actor with vast experience in theatrical productions. His background in Christian-themed stage plays provided a solid basis for his role as a Chaplain in *Men of the Hill*. It is also important to recognise that being a Master's student in 2018, George's research interests ranged from

film studies to broadcast media. In a general sense, I found these characteristics a valuable addition to the experimental nature of my creative production.

In addition to situating myself in the study as writer and director, I made a credited cameo to fill the small role of the Witchdoctor (traditional healer), who provides a somewhat comical diagnosis of Dr Grofki's complex ailment in the film. This cameo was in homage to the epilogue of Abbas Kiarostami's *Taste of Cherry* (1997), where Kiarostami himself enters the story in the company of his film crew. Kovács (2007: 384) notes that Kiarostami is the "best example of the postmodern auteur" in Slow Cinema. In this sense, Kiarostami provides his vision about different global issues and "appears in different auteurial roles in his films". By doing so, he represents a different auteurial discourse. According to Kovács (2007: 384), "this postmodern auteur becomes a part played in the narrative". I found this sense of self-reflexivity to be quite intriguing because it would allow me to reflect upon my role as the director of *Men of the Hill* and directly experience the narrative trajectory of slowness by being part of the conversation in the film. In the final analysis, my character in the film heightened the sense of indeterminacy around Dr Grofki's troubled life. It made the spectators question whether they should even take the protagonist's complex ailment seriously. Playing the Witch doctor's role also stands in stark contrast to the medical profession of the protagonist. It allowed me to step into the confusion presented by Dr Grofki's troubled life and exert my power as the writer, actor, and director of the film. This experience is a testament to the fact that I genuinely had fun making the first-ever Kenyan Slow Cinema film rather than being a passive observer of cinematic slowness.

Finding the crew for my Slow Cinema film was difficult. I experienced a tension between a need to work with experienced film professionals on the one hand and, on the other, a need to afford emerging talent a foothold in the craft of feature filmmaking. Choosing to work exclusively with an experienced professional crew in an experimental feature-length film could portend certain risks. First, the professional film crews in Kenya tend to juggle multiple projects, potentially exposing a micro-budget production to the risk of non-completion. Second, it would require a relatively bigger budget to hire the professional crew on a full-time basis; and thirdly, multiple professional voices may interfere with the project's experimental nature.

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On the other hand, working with a non-professional crew could be advantageous because they are between jobs and, perhaps, looking for opportunities to break into the mainstream cinema market. However, the supposition is, the non-professional crew have relatively limited knowledge and experience in filmmaking. Hence, they may not operate to the extents to which a professional crew would achieve a technically sound feature-length film. After weighing both sides, I opted to collaborate with two start-up independent film production companies: NMK Films and KennVisuals, respectively, owned by my longtime friends Gatehi Mwaniki and Ken Gichuhi. Under the co-production agreement, both companies provided camera gear, lighting instruments and crewing services to make *Men of the Hill*. As a result, the crew consisted of early and mid-career professionals, who brought positive attributes that served the interests of the entire production. In addition, the post-production crew consisted of a professional editor and a sound designer, both of whom I had previously collaborated with on documentary production. Our shared background in documentary filmmaking was beneficial to the creative output of a Slow Cinema film because we possessed relevant skills and experience in capturing a kind of neorealism depicted in documentaries, primarily through diegetic sounds.

5.3.1.4 Location scouting

As I was exploring existing Slow Cinema films, I chanced upon some scholarly articles on the cinema of Michelangelo Antonioni. Of specific interest to me was the well-considered view that Antonioni sought to reflect his characters' troubled and hollow lives through the landscapes in his films and create an original film language (Gandy 2003; Méo 2014). The interest and concentration with which Antonioni, for example, treated the rocky islands in *L'Avventura* (1960), the emptied streets and scrublands in *La Notte* (1961), the dreary land in *Red Desert* (1964) and the spectral deserted London parks in *Blowup* (1966), was a great source of motivation in my choice of locations for my creative production. Since I view *Men of the Hill* as primarily a poetic narrative, I was keen to have the camera roam above Kenya's Great Rift Valley. Doing so reflects the inextricable connection between my alienated and troubled characters and the vast landscapes they traverse.

Furthermore, I wanted to portray the landscapes in *Men of the Hill* in ways that seemingly reject and dwarf the principal characters with their magnificent presence. From the outset, I visualised Dr Grofki's daily routine unfolding in the long trips he makes between his hilly

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residence and the hospital. Therefore, the first task was to scout for Dr Grofki's residence, which took me to the Great Rift Valley for a two-day recce of the Samich Resort, located at the Kerio escarpment of Elgeyo Marakwet County in Kenya. The resort was entirely consistent with everything I had envisioned for Dr Grofki's residence: vibrant design of living structures, foggy weather, and scenic views of the mountain ranges and valley. In addition, the resort's management was very friendly and helpful. Filming in and around the resort did not attract any charges. I was only required to pay a subsidised fee of $700 for the production team's accommodation and meals for the three days we were on location.

Hospitals and religious spaces have always been sites of my cinematic fascination, first because of my past filming experiences in health promotion edutainment drama.[159] Second, my upbringing as a pastor's child. For that reason, I envisioned hospital and church settings as bodies in *Men of the Hill*. I initially wanted to film in a real hospital, but due to the bureaucratic nature of gaining access to such a sensitive location, I did not make headway. I later approached the then Nursing Department Head in my alma mater to film in the nursing laboratory. Thankfully, she allowed me to film on location and use all available medical equipment without any charges or time limit. I managed to hire a religious-based organisation's facilities for 150 American dollars a day to shoot the hospital's chapel scenes and exterior shots.

In conclusion, the reality of invoking the auteur theory in the pre-production phase was more visible in the sense that the experimental requirements of the film allowed me to exert more control on processes that would often require a more collaborative form of auteurism. Yet, as much as I wanted my creative production to be recognised for a distinct style of writing and directing concerning cinematic slowness, the decisions I made in the pre-production phase ultimately provided the basis for the cogitations of the cast and crew to determine the actual authorship of the final product. In cases where I took a solid and artistic vision in the spirit of experimentation, it was because of my knowledge depth in Slow Cinema rather than a strictly director-centric approach. This strategy was crucial because some cast and crew members initially found it challenging to understand how a Slow Cinema film

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[159] Churches are also sites of significance in some Slow Cinema films, such as *Beyond the Hills* (Mungiu 2012). In this film, the church is an ambiguous presence which according to Mungiu (2013) is unclear as life itself. For further reading see Mungiu (2012) interview: https://lareviewofbooks.org/article/as-unclear-as-life-itself/

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expresses itself narratively and aesthetically without character exposition, plot development, and reverse-shots. Next, I describe the experiences that marked the production phase of *Men of the Hill*.

5.3.2 The production phase

The process of designing my production strategy was not clear-cut because I did not want my traditional inclinations of complex production techniques to have a significant impact on the creative practice of slowness. I had to envisage a distinct model to the production process that would allow me to diminish a particular focus on controlling the creative experiment at the shooting stage. The emphasis throughout this phase was on empowerment and shared responsibility to yield the desired results. This model emphasised spontaneity concerning performances within the production process while attempting to consolidate an aesthetic style that could shape a narrative around the themes of Slow Cinema. Still, drawing on my past experiences and the works of prominent auteurs in Slow Cinema to design the overall production strategy was crucial in my experimental practice of a Slow Cinema film. Principal photography lasted ten days (between December 2018 and January 2019) and an additional two days on reshoots. In what follows, I highlight the significance of a production diary, my directorial approach, cinematography, and sound in the making of *Men of the Hill*.

5.3.2.1 Production diary

Since the inception of the project, my Supervisor emphasised the value of developing a production diary, explicitly noting that the making of a Kenyan Slow Cinema film had to be accompanied by a systematic process of documenting my reflections and experiences. Accordingly, I kept a production diary throughout the process of experimenting with slowness to record creative ideas and my thinking on the mechanics of making a Kenyan Slow Cinema film. Basing my actions on PaR as a methodology, I kept two types of diaries in written notes and video diaries. The written notes enabled me to holistically and explicitly record thoughts that belonged to a particular moment within the production. At the same time, the video diary (filmed as behind-the-scenes) implicitly captured data relating to the facial expressions and emotions of the cast and crew on set. Consequently, the process of reading the two diaries helped form my critical discussion in this exegesis.

5.3.2.2 Directorial approach

Directing *Men of the Hill* placed me in a creative position unlike any other because the crew nor I had experienced the practicalities of making a Slow Cinema film. Whereas I had enlisted the services of crewmembers in production management, cinematography, assistant directing, sound recording, and script supervision, my work as the director of the film emerged from creative isolation. In this sense, my directorial approach was fundamentally informed by my analysis of the existing Slow Cinema films, rather than a deliberate collaboration with my crew. For instance, how I could control the mise-en-scène in *Men of the Hill* was partly inspired by Weerasethakul's work in *Uncle* Boonmee. My staging style, particularly on blocking the actors' movements relative to an aesthetic of slowness, was strongly influenced by Béla Tarr's *The Turin Horse*, Nuri Bilge Ceylan's *Winter Sleep*, and Lav Diaz's *Norte: the end of history*. These films laid the groundwork for me to adopt a directorial approach best suited for a Kenyan Slow Cinema film and examine the anticipated results.

To emphasise the minimalism and indeterminacy of Slow Cinema's narrative, I used single long takes crafted in wide and medium shot sizes. This staging technique mainly provided restricted camera coverage and minimal editorial control dissimilar to the intensified continuity of mainstream cinema. Hence, it would be appropriate to concede that directing *Men of the Hill* was an invaluable learning process that required more flexibility on and off the set. I learned that for a Slow Cinema film, the director cannot be too organised and should endeavour to get whatever is possible on the set. That is not to say that there are no rules for directing a Slow Cinema film. I applied all the theories of composition and even adopted the quadrant system (see Heyes 2015: 1) for staging the action when it was necessary to do so.[160]

In what concerns my work with talents on and off the set, I forged a professional relationship that enabled me to see the actors as collaborators. For instance, I had several meetings with the lead actor, Joel Otukho, during the pre-production phase to specifically

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[160] The quadrant system is a simple compositional technique used in the application of the Rule of Thirds to divide the frame into right, left, top, and bottom parts, thus helping to make the scene in a film more vibrant. For further reading see: Heyes (2015: 1) https://www.slrlounge.com/the-quadrant-system-a-simple-composition-technique-explained/#:~:text=Inside%20the%20the%20Rule%20of,in%20the%202011%20film%20Drive

discuss issues of character depth and the process of casting professional actors for unique roles. However, both the lead and supporting actors relied on my directorial input for a creative approach to their performance. Favourably, I did not have to contend with the problems that unruly actors sometimes cause. All the actors observed the marks I gave them during blocking, even if the takes were longer than they had anticipated. To uphold the sense of validity in an experimental Slow Cinema film, I tried as much as I could to refrain from replaying or enhancing the actors' performance on set.

Similarly, I wanted to maintain the film's authenticity by experimenting with the "amateurishness" that Weerasethakul referred to earlier. This approach meant that I would mostly get one chance to see and evaluate their performances on set as the take went on while directing the actors. In some instances, I had to employ some distancing camera techniques or introduce a sound image to minimise the nuances that could remind the viewer that I was working with inexperienced actors or non-actors, for that matter.

5.3.2.3 Cinematography

I envisioned *Men of the Hill* as the first-ever Kenyan Slow Cinema film, based on the Slow Cinema framework and methodologies, in guiding and informing the filmmaking process in its entirety. With that in mind, I figured it would be meaningful to collaborate with a director of photography (DP) who has experience in experimental filmmaking. Kunda (2018: 4) affirms that good collaboration between the film director and DP is crucial to achieving a successful Slow Cinema film. She offers the example of Andrei Tarkovsky (Russia-Soviet) and Sven Nykvist (Sweden), who achieved "perfect synchronisation in Slow Cinema" when making *Sacrifices* (1986), as well as Abbas Kiarostami and Homayun Payvar (both from Iran) in *Taste of Cherry* (1997). The DP (Gatehi Mwaniki) and I started discussing the project during the story development stage to determine the cinematic look of the film and align it to my overall vision. For the most part, we considered the essential technical elements of focus and their practical significances to the cinematic footage. These technical elements included aspect ratio, lighting, frame rate, colour grading, contrast, composition, and stabilisation. I substantiate some of these elements as follows. The aspect ratio was an essential element of focus because it more or less affects the frame geometry of the film, especially in the modern era of wide-screen ratios.

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Since I had envisioned landscapes as bodies in my creative production, my preference was to use a cinemascope aspect ratio of 2.35:1 and increase the overall filmic image. However, I did not have the funds that could support the use of an anamorphic rig set up to maximise my use of the image sensor. Still, to achieve the sense of a wide-screen image, we used the 1.85:1 aspect ratio, but we were keen to maintain the entire full-frame image when filming. Therefore, *Men of the Hill* was shot on Panasonic Lumix GH5 4K digital camera and DJI Phantom 4 PRO V2.0 professional drone that can shoot 4K/60fps. As Lav Diaz himself has avowed, he was enabled by digital filmmaking equipment, which he insists, has liberated his cinema to the extent that he can shoot more extended takes and adopt the long and slow aesthetic style (Brown 2016: 114). Brown (2016: 87) further notes that films created using lightweight digital cameras allow for greater intimacy in working in smaller locations and getting closer to the actors. Therefore, the slowness of *Men of the Hill* should be examined as an aesthetic strategy applicable to Kenyan cinema and a distinct mode of production aided by digital technology in its making (see Jorge 2016: 172).

Moreover, the decision to shoot 4K, 10-Bit cinematic footage for my creative production was motivated by the desire to see intricate details in stunning contrast while displaying more shades of colour. Since colour grading is an essential element in post-production, I wanted to best convey the cinematic look of the film by recording footage in warm browns, ambers, rich greens, and deep yellows. The DP was instrumental in the process of realising this vision on set.

The DP had the latitude to do light layering. This task involved short and backlighting patterns for most interior scenes. This technique meant that lighting was pooled to expose core portions of the set occupied by an actor, with the darker side of the subject appearing closer to the camera as light falls away quickly. Since many scenes in *Men of the Hill* were exterior and shot across different counties in Kenya, where it is mostly bright and sunny, it was not difficult to get good lighting exposure. Lightweight cameras can also be used in natural lighting conditions, thus minimising hiring lighting instruments (Brown 2016: 86). My relationship with the DP was based on shared responsibility because I made all decisions regarding camera placement, framing, and composition. At the same time, it was his job to choose which lenses to use and obtain the correct light layering for each scene. The DP also ensured that the final footage had the desired contrast and the footage was stable

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enough to enhance the slow narrative. It was gratifying to work with my DP on the project because he elevated my directorial vision by introducing ideas and concepts of the cinematic footage that I had not considered initially.

5.3.2.4 Sound

According to Lovatt (2016: 192), a Slow Cinema film comprises locational sound, "field sound recordings, and an absence or minimal musical score". Lovatt refers to these elements as "soundscapes". Soundscapes foreground the sensory matter on screen, thus enabling "a sense of connectedness between the acoustic space of reception and that of the diegesis". For example, Slow Cinema auteurs Weerasethakul, Zhangke, and Alonso capture the everyday life of characters in their films, which creates an immersive experience for the viewer through sound design that produces a dense auditory field (Lovatt 2016: 192). In the context of this study, I worked with a sound mixer and a boom operator during the production phase and a sound designer in post-production to create the "soundscapes" in my Slow Cinema film. In this subsection, I want to focus on the aesthetics of sound at the shooting stage. But, first, my analyses of the three selected Slow Cinema films in Chapter Three established the basis for me to experiment with the concept of "soundscapes" in *Men of the Hill*. Miller (2013: 729) defines soundscape as "the totality of the sound environment emphasising how it is perceived and understood by the individual or by a society". In other words, it refers to the diegetic sound emanating from the natural setting and how the spectator interprets it.

The soundscapes in *Men of the Hill* comprise birds chirping, the constant drone of insects, sounds of swaying leaves in the trees, the howling sounds of the wind, and reverberation of traffic noise, both complement and subtract from the image on the screen. It means that in each particular instance, the viewer is immersed into the diegetic world of the film and tasked with the responsibility of determining the soundscape's purpose, significance, and practicality while constructing a slow narrative (see Lovatt 2016: 192). There was also a deliberate attempt in certain scenes to create polarisation between sound and image by adding off-screen information that was both temporally and spatially incongruent to the film story – even if the viewer would perceive them as synchronous. This technique is an essential feature in many Slow Cinema films (see Kovács 2007: 142; Lovatt 2016: 198). Kovács, for instance, explains that off-screen space is used to "enhance dramatic tension

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to raise the viewer's curiosity because the plot is taking place in spaces not visible onscreen but contiguously attached to onscreen space through sound effects" (Kovács 2007: 142).

Another important characteristic of sound in *Men of the Hill* concerns the absence of non-diegetic music in favour of musical performances recorded on the set and complemented by the soundscape. The cinematographic music exists within the overall slow narration of my creative production. In practical terms, I got an actor-singer; whose songs were captured diegetically by the sound recordist during the actual take, then a wild track after the shooting was done.[161] Furthermore, since wide shots dominate the film, it was also possible to record wild dialogue tracks, especially for off-screen sounds. As such, the actors could perform freely without the pressure of delivering their lines in close shots. Lastly, we made sure to record room tone for all interior scenes after each take.[162] I could use this room tone to supplement the diegetic sound and fill any gaps if there was a need to design post-synchronous sound. In the end, I figured that for a Slow Cinema film, soundscapes might enrich a spectator's experience of slowness in the absence of multi-layered non-diegetic soundtracks that characterise most traditional films. Generally, the evidence I have presented under the production phase section offers an exciting alignment with auteur theory because I could exert my artistic vision in collaboration with the cast and crew.

5.3.3 The post-production phase

To further secure my film's vision during post-production, I constantly thought about picture and sound editing during the production phase. Dwyer and Perkins (2018: 104) argue that the defining characteristic of Slow Cinema is its avoidance of editing techniques. This act of image construction is rooted in the narrative efficient long takes edited in the camera, as epitomised by Béla Tarr's proclivity for intra-sequence cuts in *The Turin Horse*. Consequently, my approach to the editing of *Men of the Hill* adhered to Nielsen's (2007: 198) view that covering scenes within a long take can assume "editorial control over the final shape of the film" delaying narrative progression. Even more significant for my film was Tarr's (2011: 2) claim that editing did not play a massive role in the final shape of *The Turin*

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[161] Also known as wild sound, which is an audio recording that is synchronised with images in the film but recorded separately. For further reading see Hauck, B. (2013).

[162] Room tone refers to the sound of an empty room, or a room in which all the actors are standing silently. See Media College (2018: 1) https://www.mediacollege.com/audio/ambient/room-tone.html for more information.

Horse because his editor was on set throughout the shooting stage, hence minimising editing in post-production. This editing approach would have been the ideal situation for *Men of the Hill,* but my editor was working around a full-time job in a different municipality at the time of filming. Despite this spatial separation, we were in regular communication to ensure that all the production activities were aligned with post-production procedures. The post-production phase was decidedly collaborative compared to the two preceding stages because I worked with an award-winning professional editor and an experienced sound designer.

Furthermore, as soon as the four-hour rough cut was ready, I sent it to my supervisor, whose insights helped inform my thinking and understanding of the final picture in terms of cinematic slowness. Fundamentally, the purpose of this collaboration was to practice a certain level of disassociation with the film in a way that would not directly influence the theoretical basis of the experiment. Nonetheless, I was solely involved in the process of logging the footage and making the paper edit. Figure 5.2 shows the post-production workflow, but here, I want to focus on my creative license with specific reference to the paper edit, rough editor's cut, director's cut, and online editing.

5.3.3.1 The paper-edit

The entire post-production process took 18 weeks (between June 2019 and July 2020) to complete, with ten weeks spent on the paper edit and the rough editor's cut. Editing of *Men of the Hill* did not begin right away, owing mainly to the amount of time I dedicated to writing the PhD thesis. Before embarking on the paper edit, I ensured that the dailies were transferred correctly to reliable storage media.[163] I made the paper edit while watching and re-watching the dailies, which was necessary for proactive reflection.[164] The reasoning behind the making of a paper edit was to reduce the amount of time spent in the edit suite, trying to decide the order of the clips that should be edited together or entirely omitted. For a micro-budget Slow Cinema film, making a paper edit is one way of saving money because

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[163] A paper-edit refers to the technique used by a film director to reduce the time spent in the edit suite by explaining to the editor (on paper), exactly what should be included in the rough-cut, thereby eliminating guesswork time and ultimately, saving money (Gross 2009: 51).
[164] Dailies are the unedited footage for a film that is collected at the end of each day for viewing by the director or selected members of the film crew. For further reading see MasterClass (2021: 1): https://www.masterclass.com/articles/how-film-dailies-can-improve-the-quality-of-your-movie#quiz-0

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it allows the director to explain on paper exactly what the editor should include in the final picture.
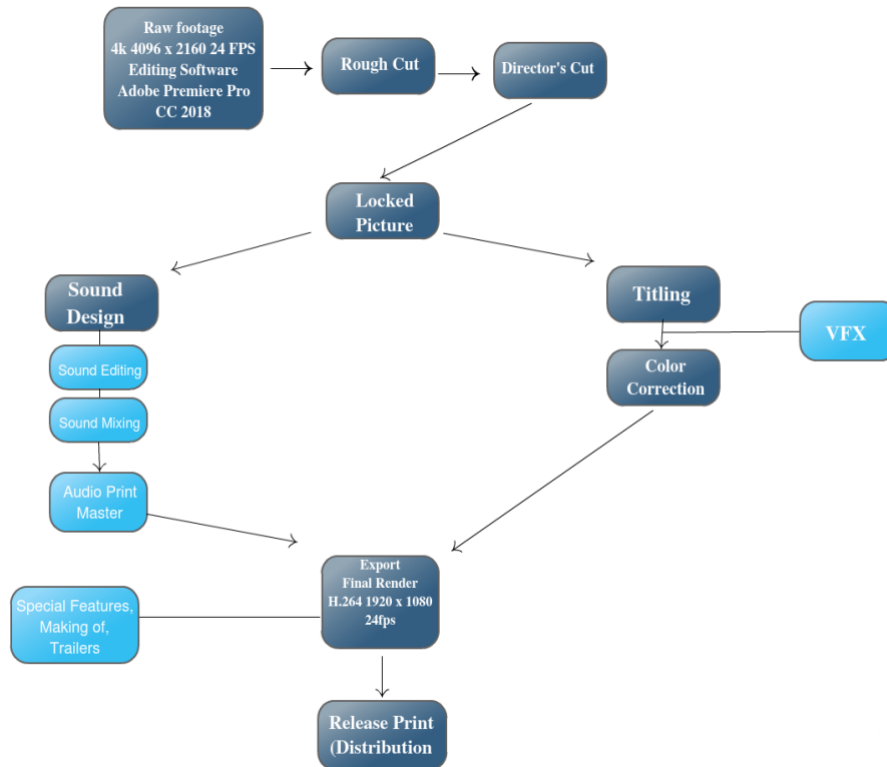
Figure 5.2: *Post-production workflow for* Men of the Hill *(Author 2020).*

5.3.3.2 Rough editor's cut

The editor started synchronising and assembling the preselected clips as soon as the paper edit was complete. He used the Adobe Premiere Pro CC 2018 editing system, which can support the native editing of huge 4K files. Even though the editor relied on my paper edit to construct the rough cut, I would still label it as the editor's cut. I gave him the freedom to select the best moments from each shot and drop those he felt would not add value to the overall performance. Editing a Slow Cinema film was a new terrain of experience for the editor. For example, it took longer for him to achieve the narrative efficiency of mobile long-take staging in scenes involving Dr Grofki routinely traversing the landscape by car or on foot. Generally, it was difficult to determine what could be cut out or remain altogether. The rough editor's cut ran a little over four hours because many of the shots were long takes. As an experienced professional who has won a major national award for his editing work, the

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editor also admitted to feeling immobilised or mostly frustrated while editing the rough cut of *Men of the Hill*. He argued that there were no reverse-shots or coverage shots to achieve dramatic economy. However, he was very enthusiastic and intrigued about editing a Slow Cinema film, a new Kenyan cinema genre.

5.3.3.3 Director's cut

Since *Men of the Hill* is a product of self-financing, I had the final say on both the director's cut and final cut. The main task in the director's cut was to edit the film for length because my Supervisor and I had agreed that the total running time would be a maximum of 150 minutes (two and a half hours). Therefore, I had to explore different strategies to achieve the desired length while retaining the temporal and spatial qualities that qualify cinematic slowness. In addition, the director's cut was a reminder of the significance of every shot I took on set, making it even more challenging to determine which shots or scenes should end up on the cutting room floor. Thankfully, I got some valuable information from my supervisor on approaching this daunting task. A significant strategy I employed involved retaining the running time of what I considered to be the strongest scenes in their narrative efficiency, minimalism, and indeterminacy. On the other hand, I significantly shortened or deleted transition scenes with little or no effect on my artistic vision. In other instances, I used hard cuts between scenes of varying shot lengths.

Similarly, I utilised L-Cuts and J-Cuts to create different sound images to manipulate the ASL of important long take scenes. For example, the J-cut enables the viewer to gaze at the clip of Luke lying in bed while hearing audio from the clip of Nurse Rukia talking to Dr Grofki about Luke's suicidal thoughts (see TC 00:23:53).[165] For the L-cut, the viewer hears the dominant voices of medical board members probing Dr Grofki but only sees the latter responding to their questions reluctantly (see TC 02:42: 51). In this fashion, the first goal of a director's cut was to create a sense of indeterminacy in the plot and, by doing so, enhance the experience of viewing a Slow Cinema film for the spectator. In my creative production, the result of a director's cut was a locked picture, which signalled the finishing stage of post-production. Despite all the interventions mentioned above, it was impossible to cut the film down to two and a half hours. In the end, the total running time (TRT) of *Men of the Hill* was

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[165] Throughout this Chapter, I provide time codes (TC) for specific scenes in *Men of the Hill*.

2-hours and 59-minutes. It was much longer than each of the three selected Slow Cinema films analysed in Chapter Three.

5.3.3.4 Online editing

This stage involved reconnecting the low-resolution files to the total quality 4K-footage, colour correction, titling, and layering of the final audio mix. Again, the editor had complete control over the above intricate details. I was only categorical about my preference for deeper, richer colours with less grain and more contrast. However, the downside of this inclination was that it took much longer to export the final render in 4K. Next, I briefly consider the viewing strategies suitably fitted for *Men of the Hill* as a Kenyan Slow Cinema film.

5.3.4 Exhibition and promotional strategies

Slow Cinema films are considered inaccessible primarily to many filmgoers worldwide and much less to Kenyan audiences. Çağlayan (2018: 26) attributes this inaccessibility to the fact that "Slow Cinema films hardly exist outside the boundaries of the international film festival". Nonetheless, Çağlayan (2018: 222) explains that technological advancements "such as official streaming services, Internet piracy, and home video high-definition systems have increased the visibility and accessibility of Slow Cinema films". In its current experimental form, *Men of the Hill* was made for research purposes. I initially envisioned a public screening for film enthusiasts in Kenya as part of my PhD examination process. Still, I figured this option would present logistical and budgetary challenges, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic season. In the end, I decided to screen the film through YouTube premieres (as proposed by Çağlayan above) to over 100 selected Kenyan audiences in partial fulfilment of the requirements for my doctoral research.[166]

   I would still be open to future partnerships to screen the film in cinema theatres across the country. As argued in Chapter Four (section 4.4), there are several agents of film culture in Kenya where *Men of the Hill* could feasibly reach different types of audiences. First, the film can be presented to the Kenya Film Commission (KFC) for archiving and the Kenya Film Classification Board (KFCB) to catalogue and recognise its generic contribution to Kenyan cinema. These two bodies play a crucial role in promoting Kenyan films locally and

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[166] For more information on YouTube premieres see Creator Academy (2018):
https://creatoracademy.youtube.com/page/lesson/hype-with-premieres_ytpremieres_video

internationally. Another strategy would be to make the Slow Cinema film available in film schools and university libraries for screening and possible research activities. Social networks equally present meaningful ways for a wider reach and this would be adequately tailored for *Men of the Hill*. Lastly, I intend to submit the film to several local and international film festivals. Of significant interest to me is the annual Slow Cinema film Festival (SFF) held in Mayfield, East Sussex in the United Kingdom (UK). SFF celebrates experimental Slow Cinema films in response to frequently conflicting temporal and landscape moving image art, which is analogical to my creative production. So far, I have highlighted the exegetical context of my creative production. I have traced my journey as a practitioner-researcher and located the cultural and theoretical constructs of a Kenyan Slow Cinema film. I have also recounted the process of making *Men of the Hill* from the pre-production phase to exhibition and promotional strategies. In the last part of this chapter, I put into context the various components of Slow Cinema through my reading of *Men of the Hill*.

5.4 The Slowness of *Men of the* Hill: A Close Reading

As an artistic reader of Slow Cinema films and, indeed, of my creative work of slowness, I want to disabuse any view that attempts to define Slow Cinema solely by its extended duration or commitment to the long take. Instead, through a textual analysis of *Men of the Hill*, I seek to demonstrate how Slow Cinema can negotiate its thematic concerns, narrative dimensions, and aesthetic construction given the cultural, social, and political environment in Kenyan cinema. The effectiveness of this approach has been exemplified in my analysis of *Uncle Boonmee* (see Chapter Three), where, for example, I have illustrated how Weerasethakul combines *vraisemblance* and the dream vision to produce a kind of slow narrative that is more enigmatic. Similarly, in *The Turin Horse*, I have shown how Béla Tarr stylises Nietzsche's existential nihilism to construct a minimalist and austere aesthetic of slowness. Finally, in *Skoonheid*, I have explored how Hermanus thematises alienation, incommunicability, self-loathing existence, and queerness through the narrative-formal expressiveness associated with Slow Cinema. Thus, the above-mentioned philosophical aspects provide a foundation to position *Men of the Hill* beyond the borders of temporality and spatiality and towards a conceptual field characterised by the theatre of the absurd – considering, in particular, the structuring of the film's narrative, relative to minimalism and

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indeterminacy.[167] Jaffe (2014: 4) equally recognises the influence of "the theatre of the absurd" on Slow Cinema auteurs.

Men of the Hill borrows a trip form, which Deleuze (1989: 9) describes as "a train journey, taxi ride, bus trip, a journey by bicycle or on foot". The trip form in *Men of the Hill* predominantly involves Dr Grofki traversing a mostly deserted landscape either by car or on foot. In other words, *Men of the Hill* contains elements of the road movie, with the road itself being used as a metaphor. Gott (2016: 299) asserts that, "despite the traditional association of the road movie with speed, Slow Cinema and road movies are a "natural pairing", particularly in the contemporary European context, where they speak to political and economic issues". As Rascaroli (2013: 22) further explains, road movies focus on socio-cultural tensions that remain unresolved in the transformative experience of the journey. *Heremakono* (Sissako 2002) is an African Slow Cinema road movie, which serves a political point. It invites the viewer to contemplate the travellers' political status and their waiting experiences (Gott 2016: 300-307). In *Men of the Hill*, Dr Grofki regularly takes on what Romney (2010: 43) calls "the single-minded walk-in-the-wilderness". The scenes of Dr Grofki's solitary wanderings inhibit narrative progression while encouraging the viewer's mind to wander on issues outside of the film (see, for example, TC 02:25:13). This kind of contemplation invokes the general sense of indeterminacy and austere minimalism in the film (see Romney 2010: 43). It lays the groundwork to discuss the thematic concerns of *Men of the Hill*.

5.4.1 Thematic concerns in Men of the Hill

The textual analysis of three selected Slow Cinema films in Chapter Three made easier my ability to construct the main themes that emerge from *Men of the Hill*. Yet, I had to use different metaphors to show the themes that would provide what Ford (2012: 193) called "formal-thematic thrust", which shapes the film's slow narrative regarding characterisation, action and plot structure. For instance, I assigned the central character a symbolic occupation of a medical doctor concerning specific themes integral to constructing a slow

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[167] British dramatist Martin Esslin coined the term "Theatre of the Absurd" in 1962 to refer to stage plays that were inspired by the existentialist French Philosopher Albert Camus, who described the human condition as fundamentally absurd and bereft of purpose. Mankind in this perspective is left feeling miserable, disoriented, and restless. For further readings see Esslin, Martin (1962).

narrative. Hence, the film's central theme examines the conflicts inherent in the life of a medical doctor and his knowledge of what his role should be while providing an opening for the viewer to reflect on these conflicts against public expectations. Simply stated, the central theme can be summarised as follows — a medical doctor who suffers from complex visual hallucinations questions the purpose of life. As the main character, Dr Grofki is not totally in control of his actions but is exposed to darker, inner compulsions. Similarly, other protagonists in the film are often anxious, restless, isolated, and unable to socialise. In the broader sense, *Men of the Hill* explores, among other themes, existentialism, incommunicability, emptiness, alienation, and spiritual malaise – some of which I explore further in the subsequent paragraphs.

5.4.1.1 Existentialism

This section draws on my discussion of existential nihilism in Béla Tarr's *The Turin Horse* (see Chapter Three, section 3.5). Existentialism has to do with characters in the *Men of the Hill* experiencing a sense of demoralisation, turmoil, or anxiety in the face of an ostensibly purposeless or absurd world. Existentialism is noticeably evident in symbolic locations such as rocky hills, dry and rainforest landscapes, hospitals, and spiritual sites (see TC 00:01:13). *Men of the Hill* opens with an aerial tracking shot of rocky hills, then cutting to Dr Grofki's car as it raves up a winding road. This sequence announces the existential connotations of irrepressible nature characterised by isolation, confusion, helplessness, and uncertainty. Of even greater significance is the film's portrayal of society's dependence on God to satisfy its physical and spiritual needs. This dependency is exemplified by Reverend Shanzu's compassion towards patients and their relatives who are seemingly experiencing existential crises and, therefore, eager to find the meaning of life itself (see TC 00:24:55).

Moreover, the off-screen conversation between Dr Grofki and Nurse Rukia as concerns Luke's suicidal thoughts further fortifies the theme of existentialism. The existential threat brought about by the uncertainty of Luke's underlying health condition and his attempts to self-emancipate illustrate the weaknesses of modern medicine, which ultimately prevents him from finding his place in the world. Additionally, the presence of Dr Grofki in Luke's ward represents a near-death situation, which is symbolic of Dr Grofki's life at present. From that standpoint, the case's urgency of Luke's repeated suicidal ideation suggests that Dr Grofki needs to do something about his existence. Equally, the ensuing debate in the car between

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Dr Grofki and Prof Laban should be understood both as a philosophy of chance within Kenya's contemporary modernity and an articulation of the film's more prominent theme of death in existentialism. For Prof Laban, some of Dr Grofki's patients are destined to die despite all the interventions to save their lives. He, therefore, urges Dr Grofki to accept that "those who must die will die and those who must live will live" (see TC 01:23:45). Prof Laban's ingrained conviction ascribes value and substance to the fact that man must die, and such absurd viewpoints serve to reinforce the theme of existentialism in *Men of the Hill*.

The film also allows the ideals of existentialism to shine through Dr Grofki's complex visual hallucinations in a manner that positions him as an elusive protagonist who only seems to gain existential relevance by losing the world around him. For instance, the shadow figures of Reverend Shanzu, Luke, and Sandra (the female musician) that Dr Grofki sees in his bathroom mirror are created images of his cerebral processes, which intuitively affect his struggles with the existential coming of being (see TC 01:55:40). Lastly, Dr Grofki presents an identity of confusion in his reality when it comes to finding the meaning of life, as when he returns home to find Marybeth gone. In this instance, his inner self is profoundly fractured and volatile. The image of Dr Grofki spending the night on the patio is replete with the metaphor of depression and mental suffering in a contemplative form (see TC 02:42:20). This incident, by and large, reflects both his embodied experience and a sense of existential insecurity and affliction.

5.4.1.2 Incommunicability

The film's emphasis on the theme of incommunicability is reflected through Dr Grofki's interaction with his wife and the medical staff at his workplace. However, it is necessary to point out that incommunicability also extends to the close relationship that Dr Grofki has with his vehicle and how he seems to be wholly devoted to it. Even more pertinent, the vehicle represents Dr Grofki's imprisonment in a world that is constantly evolving. His attempt to cling to his association with an inanimate object speaks to modern man's obsession with technology and his inability to build strong relationships with his fellow humans or surroundings. Gott (2016: 302) explains that a slow cinematic approach is well suited to capture the lived experience resulting from modernity and chronic insecurity. The theme of incommunicability and what it entails in *Men of the Hill* is evoked by the odd relationship that Dr Grofki has with his wife, Marybeth. For example, when Dr Grofki arrives home to find

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Marybeth reading her novel next to the fireplace, the present moment becomes a metaphor for their marriage: little action, less satisfaction, and apparent absence (see TC 01:00:10). The lingering silence between Dr Grofki and Marybeth at the beautifully set dinner table resonates with an existential sense of non-belonging and incommunicability. We expect them to eat, talk about their day, and perhaps, express love to each other before calling it a night. However, none of the above happens. Later, on a similar occasion, Marybeth sets the dinner table but declines the invitation to join Dr Grofki. Instead, she heads to the patio, where she eats alone in silence, assumedly as an act of defiance. Marybeth's unexplained illness and about which Dr Grofki is less concerned, is another example of incommunicability. Dr Grofki would rather watch a movie after dinner than talk to his wife about his shifting emotional realities or the sense of futility he could be experiencing in life. Dr Grofki and Marybeth could be explaining their problems in psychological terms. However, ironically, they struggle to communicate with themselves first due to their existential anxieties and the desperate need to fulfil their sterile lives without knowing how.

5.4.1.3 Emptiness

The act of self-medication by Dr Grofki is indicative of his instinctual side taking control of his empty life. He is aware that perhaps he needs to find harmony and accord in some aspect of his life, but the easy route out of this difficulty is developing object relations with prescription drugs. The emptiness in Dr Grofki's life is further amplified through his frequent encounter with Fabian at the drinking joint. Interestingly, Fabian remarks about the apparent dissatisfaction and incompleteness within Dr Grofki's life and even attempts to offer comfort by quoting an uplifting Bible verse. Of course, Fabian's hypocrisy is later unmasked when he robs Dr Grofki under the shadow of darkness. Still, symbolically, this incident only serves to perpetuate the apparent emptiness of Dr Grofki's life. Another illustration of emptiness in *Men of the Hill* can be discerned through Luke's regular interaction with Nurse Rukia. The central purpose of these encounters is not for diagnosis or a prescription – but simply, and crucially, to display Luke's empty soul. In reality, and as a result of this emptiness, Luke is suffering from self-loathing, which drives him to contemplate suicide. First, however, Luke needs to compensate for his emptiness through the connection that seems to exist between him and Nurse Rukia. He quickly confesses to Nurse Rukia the state of his mind with the kind of vulnerability that exposes his emptiness, which comes from the gradual breakdown of the only identity he has ever had. The lack of close family relations shapes Luke's identity.

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Therefore, he looks to Nurse Rukia to fill the void in his soul, but when she rebuffs him, he becomes even more resentful and tries to belittle her. In the end, Luke's failure to overcome the stranglehold of emptiness spurs his suicidal ideation into action. It reinforces the inner sense of void as a thematic concern in *Men of the Hill*.

5.4.1.4 Alienation

Koutsourakis (2019: 398-400) has identified the notion of alienation as a recurrent theme in many Slow Cinema films that critique the individual's separation from the community due to neoliberalism. Koutsourakis recognises Masaki Kobayashi (Japan), Michelangelo Antonioni (Italy), and Rainer W. Fassbinder (Germany) as Slow Cinema auteurs, whose films are replete with the theme of alienation. *Men of the Hill* depicts alienation as a legitimate conceptual means to understanding Slow Cinema, which can be considered in light of what Dr Grofki and Marybeth go through individually and as a couple. In the first case, Marybeth, a vaguely dissatisfied character, wanders across the landscape adjacent to their sleek house, seemingly anxious to escape her usual trappings for a moment of contemplation (see TC 00:30:52). This image is symbolic of what Zowisło (2000: 95) calls "Jung's concept of individuation and the problem of alienation". In this respect, Marybeth continues to increase her self-alienation through attitudes prompted by the emptiness of her existence.

As such, alienation represents a confluence of worry, anger, and fear leading to the seeming brokenness in Marybeth's life. On his part, Dr Grofki is fundamentally dissatisfied with the travails of contemporary life, of which he is a direct product. He exhibits feelings of coldness and self-conscious responsibility, which is a reminder of his inability to fit into the social structure of his environment. Alienation is both more strongly sensed and portrayed in how Dr Grofki and Marybeth have become accustomed to operating from a position of escalating insecurity fueled by isolation and marginalisation. Finally, the dream vision (as discussed in Chapter Three, section 3.4) is an escalation of Dr Grofki's relentless mental and spiritual journeys modelled on the subject of the ongoing impasse between hope and despair. This instability, which occurs within Dr Grofki's self, reflects his failure to grasp, or even clearly see, the shifting demands of the physical world. In this context, Dr Grofki's dream vision of his hearing before the medical board and eventually his funeral service is meant to assuage the sense of darkness, descent, and being trapped, generally associated with alienation.

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5.4.1.5 Spiritual Malaise

Spiritualism is an essential topic in Slow Cinema. Jaffe (2014: 3) argues that spiritual grace illuminates the emptiness and desolation experienced in the lived world in most contemporary Slow Cinema films. Right from the beginning, *Men of the Hill* sets up the journey of a spiritual malaise for Dr Grofki and other protagonists in the story's universe. The opening sequence is perversely drawn out as Dr Grofki's vehicle moves from what appears to be an individual experience of spirituality to a direct one in the physical world. In most instances, *Men of the Hill* offers a sharp portrayal of how the human soul cannot fill its spiritual vacuum. Yet, this lack of capacity is not only an individual failure but is also familiar to the diminishing spiritual guidance in the contemporary world. Reverend Shanzu's encouragements and prayers carry clear connections with society's dependence on God to satisfy its physical and spiritual needs. It is evident in patients and their relatives being keen to extract spiritual sustenance from the hospital chaplain's soothing words. Of much significance, when Dr Grofki momentarily stops to observe Reverend Shanzu praying for the sick and troubled souls at the garden, his body language contaminates the solemnity of the occasion, which perhaps, coerces him to distil the essence of his spiritual malaise. It could also mean that Reverend Shanzu represents a level of sacredness and spiritual consciousness that Dr Grofki aspires to in vain (see TC 00:24:55).

Another instance that lends itself to the theme of spiritual malaise in the film involves the general ambience of the drinking joint, where Dr Grofki and other characters congregate to let off steam. The characters in the bar, and mostly Dr Grofki, are anxious to escape their usual trappings by exploring new stimuli in music, relationships, and alcohol. For Dr Grofki, Sandra's music plays a transient role of relief to avoid further anxiety and the pain of his spiritual malaise. Finally, Fabian's ironical sermon further cements the position of *Men of the Hill* as a cinema of immanence and particular concern with the spiritual.

There is also a sense of spirituality and transcendence in the scene, where Dr Grofki has a hallucinatory experience with his opposite self to the extent that he enters a realm of increasingly abstract reality. The scene further offers a vaguely existentialist narration about Dr Grofki's spiritual malaise and apparent loss of identity, which Lefebvre (1947: 16) argued enables "man to attain his reality, create himself through, within and through his opposite, his alienation: the inhuman". Later on, when Reverend Shanzu tries to bridge the gap

between Dr Grofki's spiritual malaise and the world around him, the latter finds a way of blocking it, becoming a "difficult patient" just like Luke. The culmination of this spiritual malaise occurs immediately after Luke's death, when Dr Grofki viciously attacks Reverend Shanzu, perhaps as a desperate attempt to reconnect with the spiritual. However, this brutal attack is also partly an expression of Dr Grofki's incessant and unresolved guilt over past actions, seeing that both Luke and Marybeth may have died due to his negligence. In essence, Dr Grofki profoundly desires to be cleansed of the guilt he feels about the deaths of Luke and Marybeth. However, due in considerable measure to his spiritual malaise, Dr Grofki does not think he will ever get a reprieve from his actions, therefore taking out his frustrations on the Reverend. Ultimately, Dr Grofki finds himself in a death-like stasis, in which he attends his funeral mass, ironically officiated by his perceived nemesis, Reverend Shanzu. This dream vision is indicative of his decision to ally himself with the object of his fear, treating his spiritual malaise as a troublesome travel companion rather than a dangerous enemy (Russel 1988: 11).

5.4.2 Narrative dimensions

Before I discuss the narrative dimensions in the film, I want to clarify that *Men of the Hill* uses English and Swahili in dialogue. However, it is important to note, as Brown (2016: 117) does, that the use of native language has not been "identified as one of the signifiers or characteristics of Slow Cinema". In that sense, what makes *Men of the Hill* a Kenyan Slow Cinema film in dialogue is not necessarily using Swahili, Kenya's national language, or English as the country's official language. Instead, it is the film's ability to depict another side of Kenya's slow pace of life that is evident in the characters' mundane yet vital activities of walking, working, driving, eating, and sleeping. This depiction speaks to the "political and economic" conditions in the Kenyan society, as Gott (2016: 299) alluded to earlier. Other scholars (Koutsourakis 2019: 394; Dwyer & Perkins 2018: 107) also support the above views on language. While Koutsourakis describes Slow Cinema as an "international language" that addresses universal human conditions, Dwyer and Perkins argue that Slow Cinema addresses "international, linguistically diverse audiences".

Additionally, Dwyer and Perkins (2018: 108) concluded in their groundbreaking research on "eye-tracking slow cinema" that the availability of subtitles in a Slow Cinema film "potentially over-determines how it is seen". In other words, subtitles may have the same

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effect as editing, which they argue, is primarily avoided in Slow Cinema. For this reason, I did not include subtitles for Swahili dialogue in *Men of the Hill*.

Men of the Hill uses an art-cinema narrative, which I have described in Chapter Two (see section 2.4.2.1). This type of narration, as Bordwell (1985: 205), explains, delays narrative exposition, thereby making the plot indeterminate and unfocused for purposes of achieving slowness. I referred to this narrative delay as "slow disclosure" (see section 2.4.2.2). Indeed, Willemsen and Kiss (2017: 3) further state that art-cinema operates outside the narrative. Since Slow Cinema is categorised under art-cinema (see Çağlayan (2018: 3), it rejects traditional narrative and its linearity of the plot. However, in this study's context, the goal will be to demonstrate how the slow narrative of *Men of the Hill* expresses itself in unconventional ways and in a manner that may compel the viewer to exercise alternative skills of film viewing. These skills are less widely employed in mainstream cinema experiences. In Chapter Four (see section 4.3), I called into question the dominant strategy used in Kenyan cinema, which consists of the didactic narrative technique. I advanced the notion that, to a certain degree, Kenyan cinema can afford the hybridisation of its narrative strategies with slowness. Such a strategy can enhance a sense of neorealism that would not oblige the filmmaker to tie up any loose end in the narrative or provide too much narrative information. As a Slow Cinema film, *Men of the Hill* resists any attempt to short change its layered indeterminacy, especially in instances where it seems nonrepresentational, embellished, and formalistic. This approach suggests that the film's narrative technique is much more philosophical in a way that disregards didacticism and facilitates several interpretations as much in the represented universe of the story as the lived world. The following paragraphs offer a brief description of the actual narrative dimensions in *Men of the Hill*.

Rather than wholly rejecting narrative, *Men of the Hill* relies on conventional narrative structuring, as is the case with Dr Grofki, a traditional character engaged in a daily routine that follows a predictable pattern. However, there is a minimal orientation to past experiences or events that occurred in Dr Grofki's life as the narrative unfolds. It means that the film continually subjects the viewer to the present, with minimal premises about what might happen next and without the ability to deduce the significance of particular sequences that occur beneath the film's text, thus giving a sense of slow narrative disclosure. In this

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way, *Men of the Hill* dissuades its viewers from ferreting out narrative coherence but instead urges them to conform their viewing approaches to a more philosophical engagement with the film's narrative. Still, Dr Grofki's actions or inactions serve to actuate the film's retelling as he goes through a series of banal activities, which may enable the viewer to exercise their imagination in unconventional ways. Thus, similar to the archetypal characters in other Slow Cinema films (see, for example, Kiarostami's *Taste of Cherry* 1997), Dr Grofki slowly but surely undergoes a significant change in his otherwise mundane life after his encounters with Luke, Prof Laban, Reverend Shanzu, and the Witchdoctor. Due to the apparent lack of narrative impulse and shifts in *Men of the* Hill, there is willfulness to set up a tension between the narrative image as a substance of the poem and the concept that the narrative poem will in some way be a rhetorical exposition of the Slow Cinema film itself. Luke, the poem's speaker, perhaps considers himself the subject of the poem, but paradoxically, he is the narrative image of the different versions of Dr Grofki and Marybeth. Additionally, the poem suggests slowness. It slowly discloses the binary opposition between life and death with particular reference to the foreshadowing of Luke's death and, eventually, Dr Grofki's existential threat.

Men of the Hill also exemplifies a way to realign narrative engagement by applying visual metaphor and metonym. For instance, in one image, Marybeth brings Dr Grofki some food then later walks out, metonymically implying that husband and wife have a functional relationship rather than an emotionally intimate one (see TC 01:49:11). Dr Grofki's dream visions also feature through metaphor, such as the image of himself drowning on a hospital stretcher or attending his funeral service, perhaps representing the fear that he cannot get himself out of his existential predicament (see TC 01:53:20). In both instances, the narrative does not signal the shifting status of each image. Furthermore, the evidence of visual metaphor can be seen in Marybeth's labour of carrying logs to the fireplace, representing the act of creating a sense of self-relief. Here, the narrative attempts to minimalistically elaborate seemingly inconsequential details as a means to invoke a particular structuring of indeterminacy, which is inherent in Marybeth's everyday life. In this case, the logs are a visual metaphor of Marybeth's psychological condition, prompting the viewer to register the boredom and dissatisfaction that characterise Marybeth's existence. In terms of spatial organisation and passage of time in *Men of the Hill*, the spectator is invited to seek out metaphorical or thematic deductions from the narrative in a more adaptable and imaginative

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way. For example, rather than seeking a narrative explanation of Dr Grofki's figure seemingly occupying the patio, the hospital's boardroom, and the church in relatively quick succession, the spectator might instead consider the contrast between the alienation of Dr Grofki's presence in the patio and his conflict with social order represented in the hospital's boardroom and the funeral service in the church. One could conclude that Dr Grofki explores the three spaces with the same curiosity – they are all landscapes of indeterminacy.

Another event in the film that requires an imaginative reading comes on the back of Luke's death, where Dr Grofki's figure takes a resolute flight towards the house on the hill. On arrival, the figure peers around the patio before entering the bedroom and finally settling on Marybeth's bedbound figure draped with a white sheet like Luke's dead body (see TC 02:15:53). Dr Grofki's eyes (through the camera's lens) are symbolic of an ominous look, inviting the spectator to make a symbolic meaning. This sequence characterises Dr Grofki in explicitly nuanced temporal language to suggest the passage of time, the spatial relationship between him and the setting, and fundamentally, how the narrative has been emptied to enhance slow disclosure through minimalism and indeterminacy based on the existing visual metaphor.

To conclude this section, the portrayal of Dr Grofki as a compulsive dreamer whose dreams seem to proceed from the world outside his mind takes a cue from the dream sequence in Weerasethakul's *Uncle Boonmee,* as described in Chapter Three. Likewise, Tomaselli et al. (1995: 29) note that dreams are considered significant hallmarks of folktales because they tend to give stories momentous and transcendental qualities in African ontologies. Regarding *Men of the Hill*, Dr Grofki's dreams serve as a communication channel between him and the spiritual world. Since these dreams often involve Dr Grofki flying across the landscape, the resultant feeling of transcendence over and above the existential affliction in the physical world becomes more significant. This spiritual journey, argues Treib (2005: 37), can "lead to a greater feeling of partaking in a greater harmony of all being". Therefore, it is conceivable that the seemingly special events in Dr Grofki's dream operate as narrative symbols, or instruments of retelling, to develop a story of minimalism and indeterminacy in narrative slowness. The section that follows moves on to consider some aspects of visual language in *Men of the Hill*.

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5.4.3 Visual language

Luca (2017: 336) indicates that the standard length of a contemporary Slow Cinema film is two hours. *Men of the Hill* consist of 115 shots, giving it an average shot length (ASL) of 94.56 seconds and making it slower than *Uncle Boonmee*, *The Turin Horse*, and *Skoonheid*. The film's high ASL can be attributed to its single long take shots aimed at immersing the viewer in the experiences of Dr Grofki and other protagonists as they journey through their daily lives. In that case, the viewer is not required to re-orient their attention in every new shot. The notion of immersing the viewer in the characters' experiences in a particular film, as Gabriel (2011: 198) writes, is expected in the Third World films because "the slow, leisurely pacing approximates the viewer's sense of time and rhythm of life". Significantly, the use of a single extended shot in nearly every scene is meant to express the thematic concerns of *Men of the Hill,* as discussed in the previous section. In terms of temporality and spatiality, the film's minimal manipulation of time and its observable commitment to spatial concentration suggest a coexistence of Slow Cinema with the cosmos. For instance, the aerial camera facilitates this coexistence by broadly aligning itself with Dr Grofki's existential journey while engaging in the kinetic sightseeing of Kenya's vast landscapes. It situates Dr Grofki in different spaces – alternating between the hospital and the countryside in such a way as to permit the spectator to amend their viewing strategies, especially in cases where they are unable to unpack narrative meaning or thematic components. Likewise, when Luke is contemplating at the pool area, the camera lavishes attention on the temporal and spatial elements of the night in a deep focus single long take shot, thereby portraying the relationship between subject and object, similar to form and narrative (see TC 00:58:10). The slow image of Dr Grofki contemplating in the patio at night is rendered within a single frame to represent the connection between time and Dr Grofki's dark sense of existentialism (see TC 02:41:49). In this case, the dark background takes up most space, thus subtly reinforcing the expected association between temporality and spatiality in Slow Cinema.

In concrete terms, the camera in *Men of the Hill* contributes to its slow disclosure effects by unobtrusively observing the characters. At the same time, the actions, sounds, and other elements of mise-en-scène around them carry significance, hence enriching the expressiveness of the single long take shot. For example, in the scene where Marybeth is engaged in the labour of carrying logs to the fireplace, the camera presents a single long

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take static shot that translates into an objective image, which according to Deleuze (1986: 42), is "formed through becoming mental, and going into a strange, invisible subjectivity". Here, the camera allows the viewer to gaze upon the human body in and of the cosmos so that Marybeth's psychological state is revealed for all its oscillation of minimalism and indeterminacy. Another evidence of the camera's unobtrusiveness is revealed in Dr Grofki's assault on Reverend Shanzu. Initially, there is a solemn line of isolation that runs straight from the camera to Reverend Shanzu as he engages in spiritual devotion. Later, the camera becomes more contemplative as it declines the invitation to witness the physical violence meted out on the Reverend. This reflective image frees both space and time from the dictates of narrative movement to emphasise minimalism and indeterminacy.

The temporal and spatial articulation of visual language in *Men of the Hill* has also emphasised in the sense that the camera observes the synchronous flow of action inside and outside Dr Grofki's car. Fundamentally, the camera does not venture into complex movements or coverage in an attempt to present an indeterminable image of Dr Grofki's character. Instead, it bids to instill interest in the viewer by preoccupying itself with details of the immediate surroundings and random inhabitance because of the minimal narrative explanation offered in the car sequences. For example, the POV shot inside Dr Grofki's car keeps the viewer fixated on alternative details instead of the protagonist. As a result, the viewer incurs the feeling of being pulled into Dr Grofki's car and taking part in his existential journey (see TC 01:18:35). The image described above is not qualitatively different from that of Marybeth walking towards the hilltop. However, the aerial moving camera enhances the transcendental force present in the film and subjects the viewer to insignificance and alienation dominant in Marybeth. Further, the frame is nearly empty to project a kind of visual minimalism to the spectator, which essentially puts the narrative aside to make Marybeth's image look like a moving painting. Nevertheless, the camera in *Men of the Hill* does not entirely ignore the conventional principles of visual language. In the drinking joint, for example, the camera visualises Dr Grofki and other protagonists in quadrants. Fabian and the female patrons are positioned in the background and almost on the top left quadrant of the camera's frame, while the entertainers are placed towards the top right quadrant. When Dr Grofki enters the frame, he occupies the bottom left quadrant in the foreground to underscore his importance in the scene (see TC 00:48:15). Therefore, the quadrant technique keeps the viewer's eyes moving around the frame to enhance visual storytelling

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and intrigue. In the scene involving Dr Grofki and the witch doctor, the camera predominantly features medium shots of both characters in a shot-reverse-shot sequence. As such, the camera is humanised to the degree that it acts in harmony with the Witchdoctor's perception of Dr Grofki's existing vicissitudes and precarious reality.

5.4 Chapter Conclusion

This exegesis has traced the performative and reflective journey of producing an experimental Slow Cinema film in the context of Kenyan cinema. I have shown that the creative production of a Kenyan Slow Cinema film makes it possible for me to validate the PaR approach in film studies, which is often underappreciated. At the outset of the experimental film, I sought to address how Slow Cinema can facilitate an alternative narrative-formal expressiveness for Kenyan cinema. The exegesis concludes that first, a film director can exert his vision of slowness in recognisable and recurring ways that compel the viewer to read beyond the film's surface. In this sense, *Men of the Hill* may influence the Kenyan film author to dialogue with Slow Cinema in ways that could invoke some of the country's problems. Fundamentally, the narrative strategy of a Slow Cinema film spurns didacticism and facilitates philosophical readings both in the represented universe of the story and the lived world. Second, Slow Cinema can coexist with the traditional cinematic tendencies in Kenyan cinema since it does not wholly reject narrative structuring. In any case, Slow Cinema invites the spectator to amend their viewing strategies by seeking out metaphorical or thematic deductions from its narrative in adaptable and imaginative ways that are less widely employed in mainstream cinema. Generally, the close reading of *Men of the Hill* in this chapter has demonstrated how Slow Cinema can promote its narrative and aesthetic qualities given the cultural, social, and political environment in Kenya.

Lastly, it would also be appropriate to state that the creative production of a Slow Cinema film requires more flexibility and a collaborative form of auteurism. The director has to exert his artistic vision while relying on the cast and crew to create the visual universe of the story. Finally, this exegesis will show that *Men of the Hill* is a new creation of slowness within Kenyan cinema. It positions it as a contribution to the area of scholarship that deals with cinematic minimalism and indeterminacy, leading to a better understanding of how a Slow Cinema film is made in context and situatedness. The next chapter presents the principle findings obtained from the selected viewers of *Men of the Hill*.

CHAPTER SIX:

VIEWERS' RESPONSES TO *MEN OF THE HILL*

6.1 Chapter Introduction

In Chapter Four, I presented a comprehensive justification for considering and using Slow Cinema in Kenyan cinema. Overall, I argued that Kenya's film culture plays a crucial part in promoting experimental filmmaking, and in particular, attending to a body of Slow Cinema films. In Chapter Five, I explained the creative process of making a Slow Cinema film in the context of Kenya's national cinema framework. In the end, I demonstrated how *Men of the Hill* contributes to the area of Slow Cinema scholarship that deals with narrative, minimalism, and indeterminacy. Based on the analyses presented in the preceding chapters (Three, Four and Five), this chapter reports on the findings from the analysis of both the quantitative (web survey) and qualitative (semi-structured interviews) databases obtained from selected Kenyan film viewers, following the successful screening of *Men of the Hill* as a Kenyan Slow Cinema film. Also included in the report is a discussion of the research findings comparing the two databases in keeping with the mixed-methods design. This design allows for the sequential integration of two forms of data, even if such a comparison may yield some differences in concepts, themes, or scales (see Creswell 2014: 692).

In that case, I will first report the web survey results and then present the interview findings. I will conclude with a discussion of the findings to determine the convergence or divergence amongst the multiple sources of information captured in this research. Fundamentally, the specific objective of this chapter is to investigate how the selected Kenyan film viewers and experts would visualise and interpret the narrative and aesthetic conventions of Slow Cinema deployed in *Men of the Hill* as a Kenyan Slow Cinema film. Overall, this objective addresses the study's main research question: How can a Kenyan Slow Cinema film convey the form and style of Slow Cinema while retaining a sense of geo-cultural specificity?

6.2 Selection Procedure for the Kenyan Film Viewers

As explained in Chapter One (section 1.4.1.3), the snowball recruitment strategy yielded an adequate final sample of (n=188) Kenyan film viewers. The preselected participants were then asked for their consent to gather demographic information through *Google Forms* to determine if they met specific criteria for responding to the web survey. The data collected included level of education, hours spent online per week on average, and Internet access. Figure 6.1 represents the highest education level that the participants had obtained.
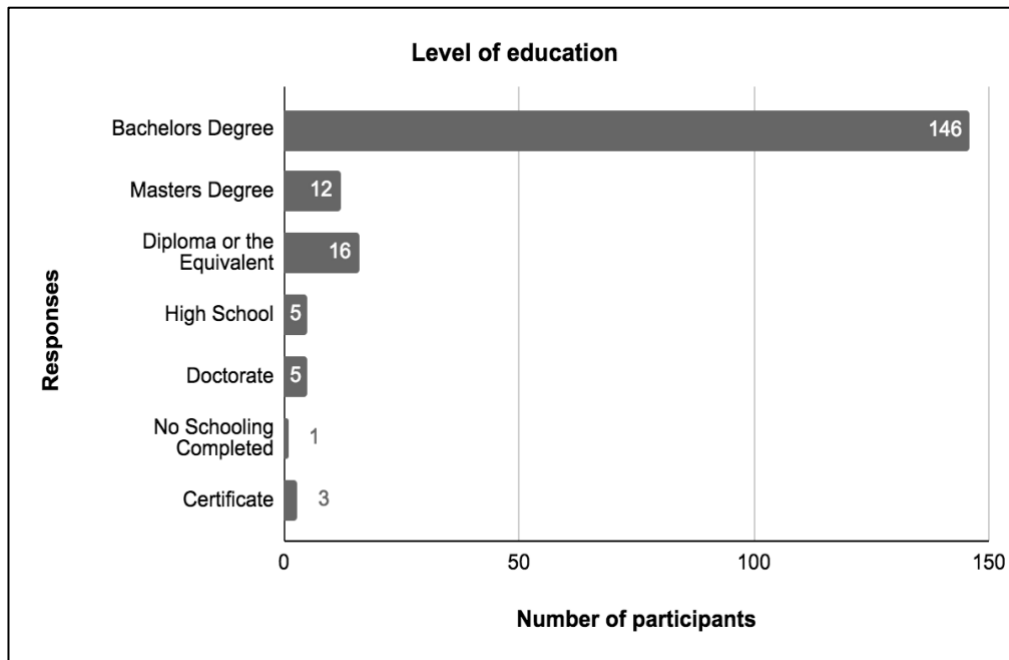
Figure 6.1: Recruited participants' level of education

Of the 188 participants, most 146 (78%) had completed an undergraduate degree, while 17 (9%) had completed their post-graduate studies. The remaining participants, 19 (10%), had post-secondary qualifications (Diploma or Certificate), whereas five (2.7%) had high school qualifications, and only one (0.5%) had not attained any form of education whatsoever. These results suggested that participants with education levels that ranged from Diploma to post-graduate qualifications were more likely to watch a Slow Cinema film. These participants, even more significantly, engage in web-based activities, which was crucial for the success of the film's YouTube screening and web survey. In that connection,

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it was also essential to find out how many hours, on average, the participants spent in online activities per week, as represented in Figure 6.2.

Hours spent online per week on average
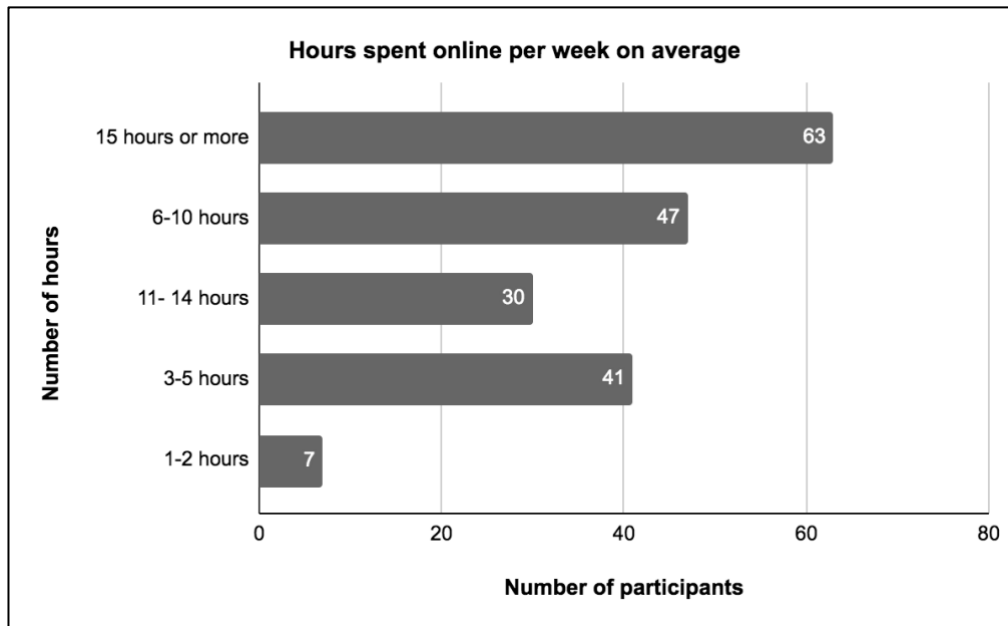
Figure 6.2: Hours spent online per week on average by recruited participants

The results showed that on average, 63 (34%) of the participants were online 15 hours or more per week, with another 47 (25%) being online for 6-10 hours per week. Further, 41 (22%) spent between three and five hours online on average, while 30 (16%) spent a considerable time of 11-14 hours online per week on average. Only 7 (4%) participants spent between one and two hours online per week on average. A large amount of time spent online by the majority of the participants was significant for the research because it meant that most of them would spend at least three hours watching *Men of the Hill* and completing the online questionnaire. It also signalled a relatively high participation rate in viewing the film and responding to the web survey, better than the designated sample (n=100). Finally, the participants were asked to indicate their Internet access methods, as shown in Figure 6.3.

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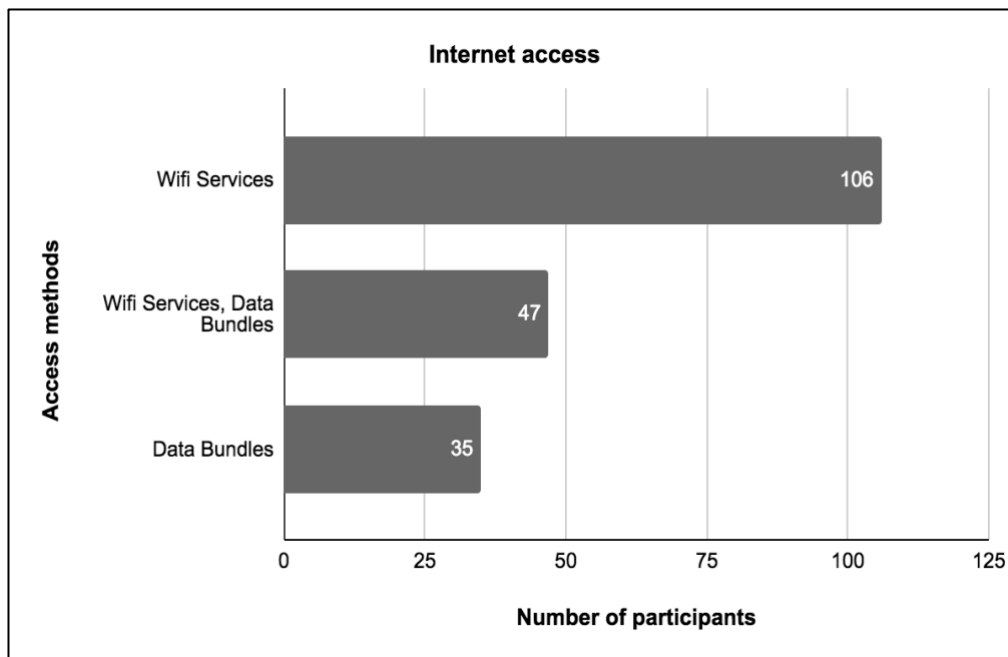
Figure 6.3: Participants' methods of Internet access

The results revealed that majority 106 (56%) of the participants entirely depended on Wi-Fi services for their online activities, 47 (25%) relying on both Wi-Fi and data bundles, and 35 (19%) fully accessing the Internet through data bundles purchased directly from the various mobile service providers in the country. Internet access was a crucial factor in this study because of the Internet-mediated research approaches used. Additionally, it was important for all the participants to have stable Internet access options since no funding was available to purchase data bundles. Though not central to the study, the initial set of data was necessary to formulate appropriate mechanisms for conducting the research and contextualising it in reference to how a Kenyan Slow Cinema film would be received by the selected Kenyan film viewers, as exhibited in the above charts. What follows is a presentation of the main results from analysed data obtained from web questionnaires.

6.3 Presentation of Web Survey Results

At the end of the YouTube screening of *Men of the* Hill, the web survey was sent to 188 selected respondents via their emails and the cross-platform messaging service *WhatsApp*. Out of the 188 selected respondents, 129 completed the questionnaire, representing a 69% response rate. Many researchers for example, Nulty (2008: 301-314)) have argued that the

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average response rate in academic studies is 60%. Therefore, a response rate of 69% for this research was relatively high, reducing the non-response bias considerably while supporting the generalisability of the results. Furthermore, all the completed questionnaires met the required inclusion criteria for use. Fifty-nine non-respondents of the 188 selected participants did not provide any reasons for their refusal to participate in the study even though they may have watched the film.

6.3.1 Demographic characteristics of the respondents

A section of the questionnaire consisted of demographic data such as gender, age, and place of residence. This section provided the background information for all the participants who completed the survey and enabled discovering meaningful and actionable insights in analysing the data. In addition, the respondents were required to tick the gender appropriate to them, as captured in Figure 6.4. Of the participants, 127 (98%) responded to the question. 69% of the respondents were female, hence constituting most of the sample, while 33% represented the male respondents. Of the respondents, 3% preferred not to reveal their gender.
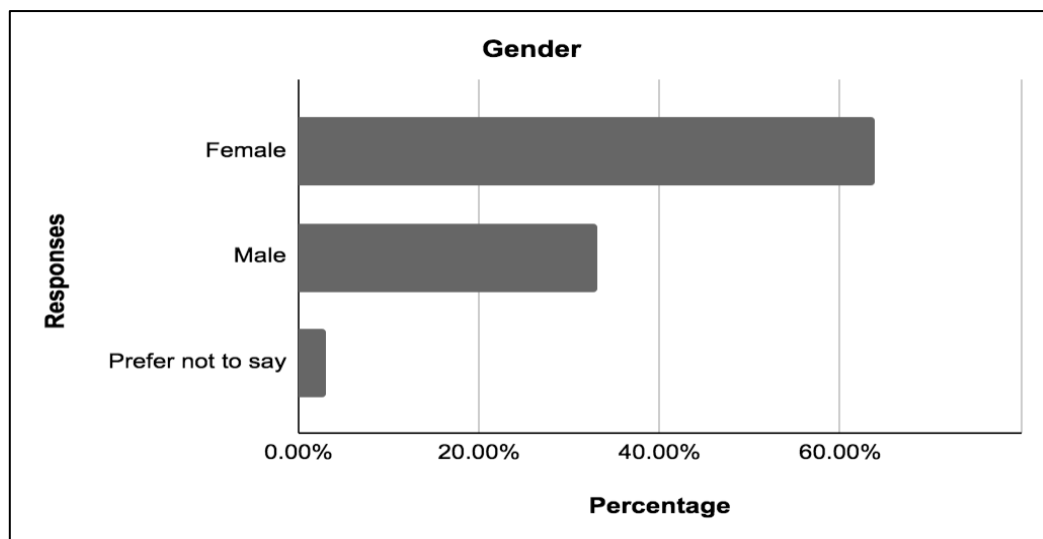
Figure 6.4: Gender of respondents

As for age, the respondents were asked to tick the age groups to which they belonged. Again, 126 (98%) participants responded to this question. Figure 6.5 depicts the results.

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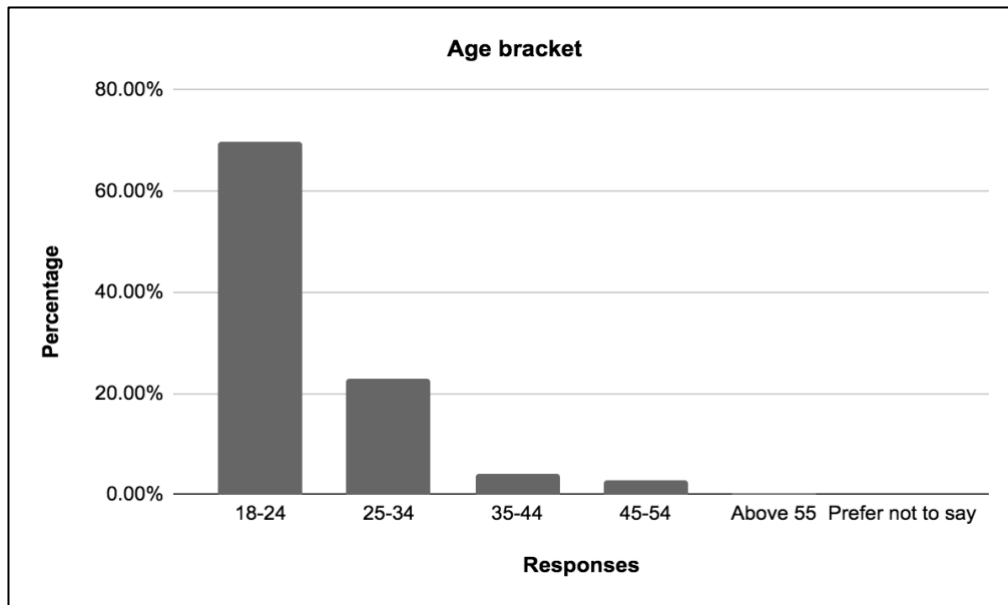
Figure 6.5: Age of respondents

A significant majority of the respondents (70%) ranged between 18 and 24 years, (23%) between 25 and 34, (4%) between 35 to 44 years and (3%) between 45 and 54 years. Those aged 55 and above were only (0.2%), while a similar percentage did not disclose their age bracket. Overall, the results reveal that young adults (18-24) were more likely to appreciate new cinematic art forms because they are primarily attracted to images and sounds. In addition, this age group is also expected to explore open opportunities and multiple experiences on different platforms, especially on the Internet. Lastly, Kenya's film culture is driven mainly by the younger population, making them the obvious target for new film releases. The last bit of demographic information involved the respondents' place of residence at the time of data collection. The respondents were asked whether they lived in Nairobi and surrounding areas. The question attracted 125 responses, representing (97%) of the sample. Figure 6.6 confirms the results.

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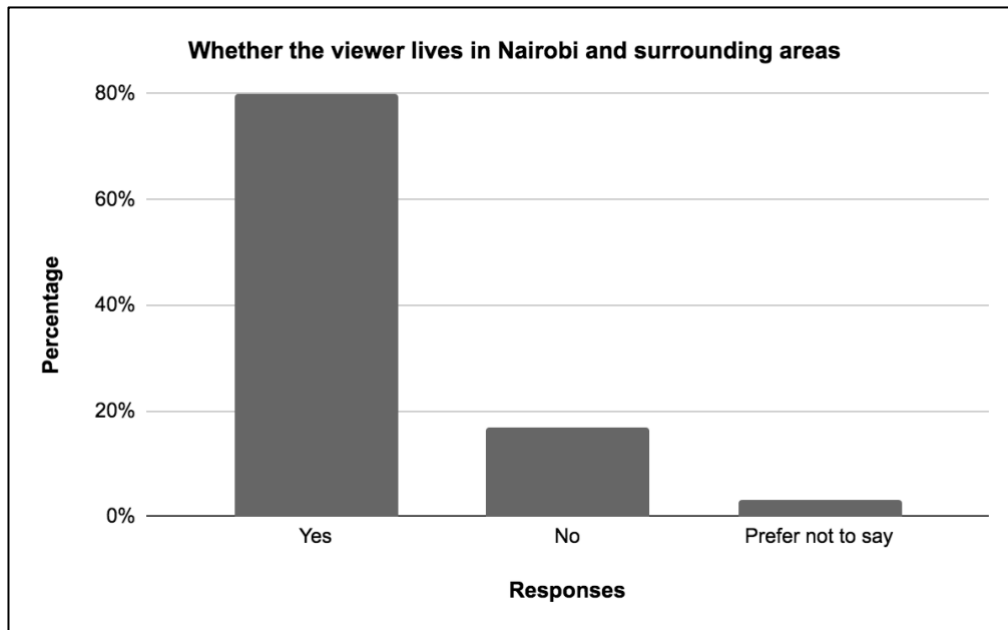
Figure 6.6: Place of residence of the respondents

Respondents from Nairobi and surrounding areas were overrepresented at 80%, while 16.8% indicated they were not residing in Nairobi or surrounding areas at the time of the film's screening. Furthermore, 3.2% declined to reveal their places of residence. The results imply that people living in Nairobi and its outskirts were more exposed to the film culture in the city. In addition, they enjoy faster Internet connectivity and advanced technology, thus allowing them to participate in online activities. Lastly, they also tend to be more responsive to research activities. Therefore, the demographic information lays the groundwork for presenting viewers' responses to *Men of the Hill* as a Kenyan Slow Cinema film. The results are organised in a logical sequence without bias.

6.3.2 Participants' viewing of local Kenyan films in a typical year

The respondents were explicitly required to indicate approximately how many times in a typical year they watch local Kenyan films in a theatre or via streaming services such as Netflix (see Figure 6.7). There were 126 (98%) responses to this question. Of the respondents, (50%) watched once or twice in a typical year, followed by those who watched three to five times (19%), six or more (13%) and curiously, (18%) indicated that they did not watch a local Kenyan film at all in a typical year. Thus, the results demonstrated that most of the sampled film viewers preferred to watch foreign films more often than not. This result

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may point to the fact that many local Kenyan films are either inaccessible or distributed in the personal networks of the individual Kenyan filmmakers.

Viewing of local Kenyan films in a theatre or via streaming services (Netflix)
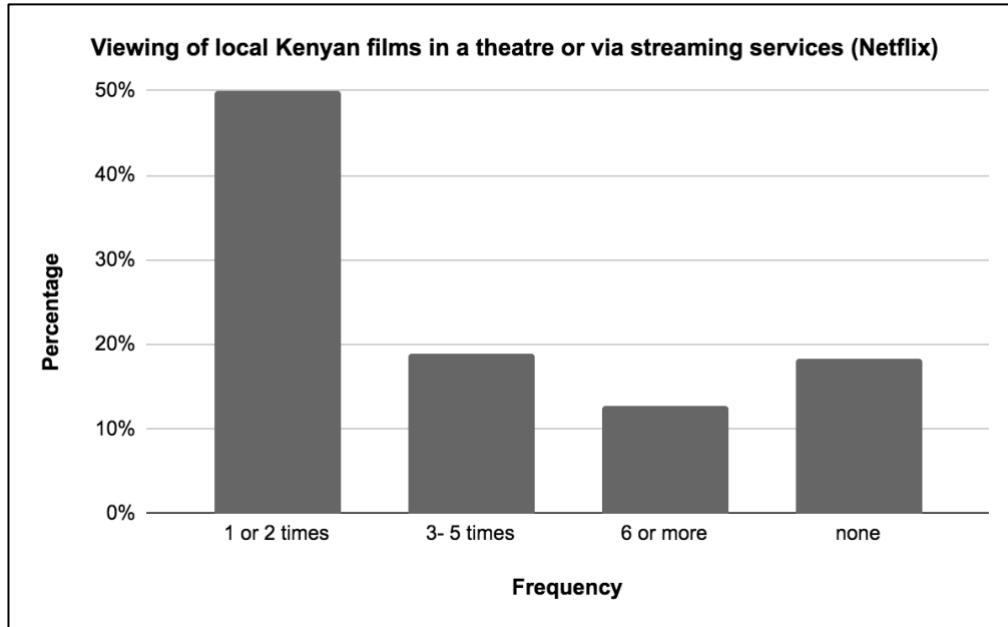
Figure 6.7: Viewing of local Kenyan films in a typical year

6.3.3 Decision to attend the screening of Men of the Hill

An essential aspect of this study was to determine whether the respondents had a personal curiosity to watch a Slow Cinema film within the context of Kenyan cinema. In responding to the question of whose decision it was to attend the screening, the respondents were required to tick the appropriate answer. Of the respondents, 125 (97%) answered this question. As shown in Figure 6.8, there was a clear distinction in their decision-making process, with (74%) confirming that it was their personal decision, while 26% indicated that the decision was made for them to attend.

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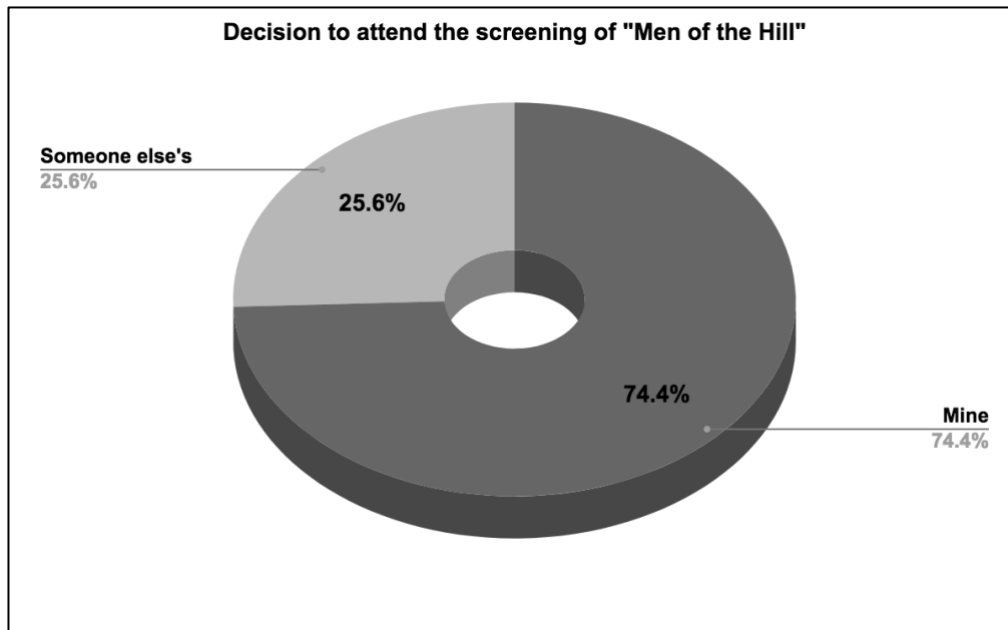
Figure 6.8: Decision to attend the film's YouTube premiere

The above results give credence to the effectiveness of the snowball recruitment strategy deployed for the study and prove that a significant majority of the respondents had a personal curiosity to watch a Kenyan Slow Cinema film. This result is substantial because Slow Cinema is known to attract small niche audiences.

6.3.4 Reasons for attending the screening of Men of the Hill

Given the preceding question, the respondents were then required to select the three most important reasons for attending the film's screening. As a result, 126 (98%) responses were captured for this question, as revealed in Figure 6.9. The top three most important reasons selected by the respondents were as follows. More than half (64%) of the respondents claimed that they wanted to see the work of the film director, followed by 55% who wanted to support the local film industry, while 43% hinted that they attended the screening for work or educational purposes. A sizeable majority of those sampled were enthusiastic about the screening and were deliberate about their intentions about watching the film.

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Reasons for attending the screening of "Men of the Hill"
126 responses

Reason	Value
Because someone invited you	26 (20.6%)
To spend quality time with family or fr…	4 (3.2%)
To energize your own creativity	47 (37.3%)
To see the work of the film director	80 (63.5%)
	12 (9.5%)
For work or educational purposes	54 (42.9%)
To support the local film industry	69 (54.8%)
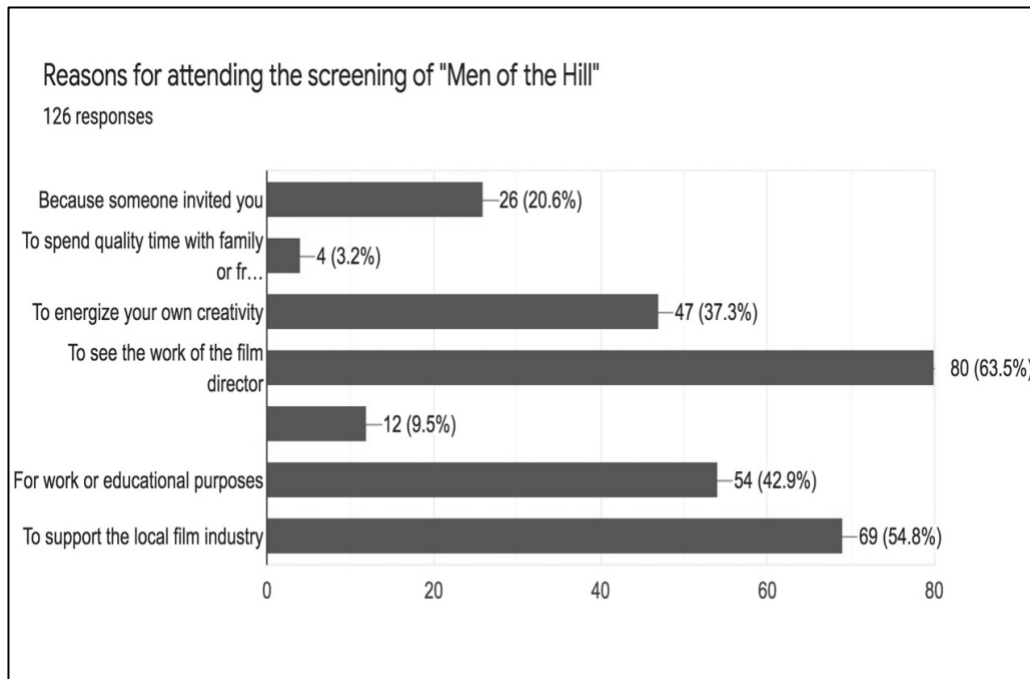
Figure 6.9: Reasons for attending the film's YouTube premiere

6.3.5 Viewers' anticipation towards the screening of Men of the Hill

With regards to how much the respondents were looking forward to the film's screening, results from 127 (98%) participants who responded to the question (see Figure 6.10) showed that a substantial majority of the respondents (52%) stated that they were highly anticipating the film's screening. This anticipation might have been because they had never watched a Slow Cinema film before. They were followed distantly by 24% of respondents who were not sure whether they anticipated the screening or not. This result is not surprising because a Slow Cinema film may come across as unusually long and tedious, especially for respondents who may have past inclinations to fast films. Furthermore, 20% of the respondents asserted that they were anticipating the screening albeit cautiously, perhaps because they did not know what to expect or had some reservations about the film's apparent slow style. None of the respondents indicated that they were not anticipating the film's screening, which suggested that all the respondents were still curious about the Slow Cinema film to a certain degree.

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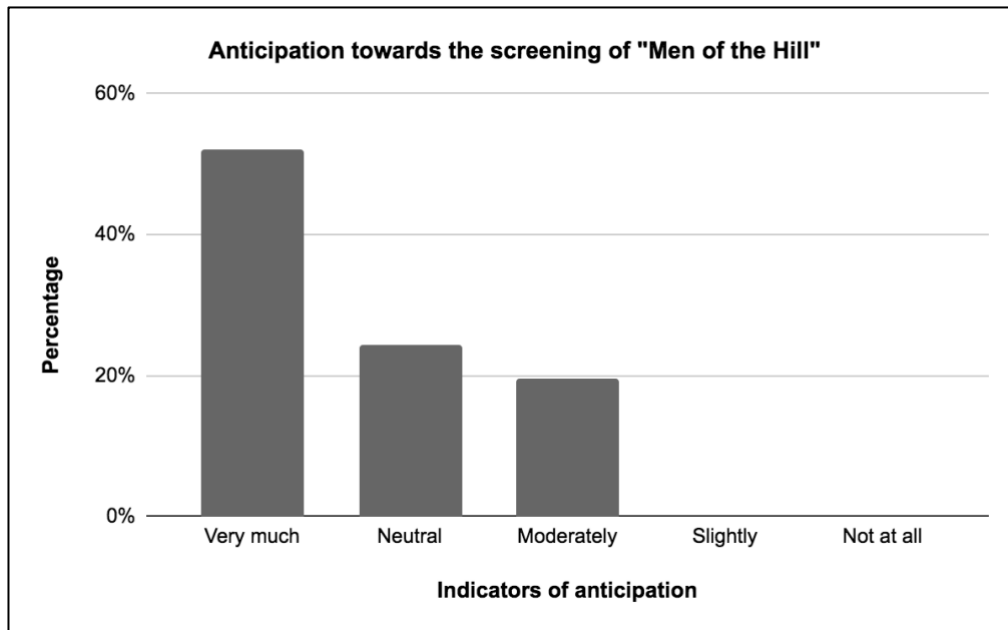
Figure 6.10: Respondents' anticipation towards the film's YouTube premiere

6.3.6 Viewers' engagement with the narrative in Men of the Hill

One of the most important objectives of this study was to establish how the selected Kenyan film viewers would respond to the narrative strategies employed in a Slow Cinema film. Narrative engagement is understood to mean the degree to which the respondents found the characters, the story, and the plot emotionally compelling. Of those sampled, 125 (97%) responded to the query put forward, as revealed in Figure 6.11. According to the results, 34% of the respondents claimed that they were very much engaged in the film's narrative, whereas a slim majority (36%) were moderately engaged. In addition, a considerable number (22%) remained neutral to the research question, 5% were slightly engaged, while only 2% were not engaged with the narrative at all. These results revealed significant variations in the way the respondents perceived a Slow Cinema narrative. Important to note that there was a considerable degree of engagement with the film's narrative from the perspective of a much lower percentage of respondents not engaged with the film. Overall, the results showed that a significant majority of the respondents (70%) could identify the narrative strategies used while making sense of the film's content in various ways. Likewise, it can be suggested that those who remained neutral might have had the potential of engaging with the film's narrative to a certain degree.

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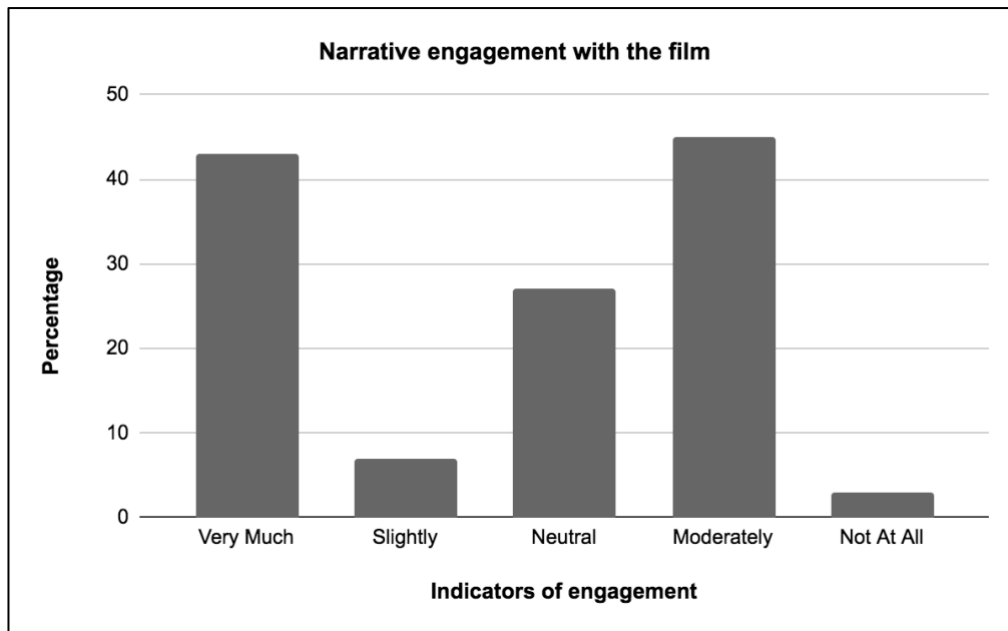
Figure 6.11: Respondents' narrative engagement with the film

6.3.7 Cinematography's contribution to the story in Men of the Hill

Similarly, it was imperative to determine to what degree the viewers thought cinematography contributed to the film's narrative through camera shots, angles, movement, and lighting. A total of 126 (98%) responses were received in that regard. As Figure 6.12 illustrates, the survey found that a sizeable majority (66%) of the respondents affirmed that cinematography significantly influenced the film's narrative, whilst 27% thought it was moderate. The remaining participants included those who remained neutral (5%) and those who believed that cinematography contributed only slightly to the film's narrative (2%). None of the respondents reported that cinematography did not affect the story at all. The higher percentage of respondents who had a favourable view of cinematography, in this case, was surprising because *Men of the Hill* comprised of many long-takes shots from a fixed-camera position and angle as well as low-key lighting. Even under these circumstances, the moving camera provided some eventful transitions during the critical moments in the film.

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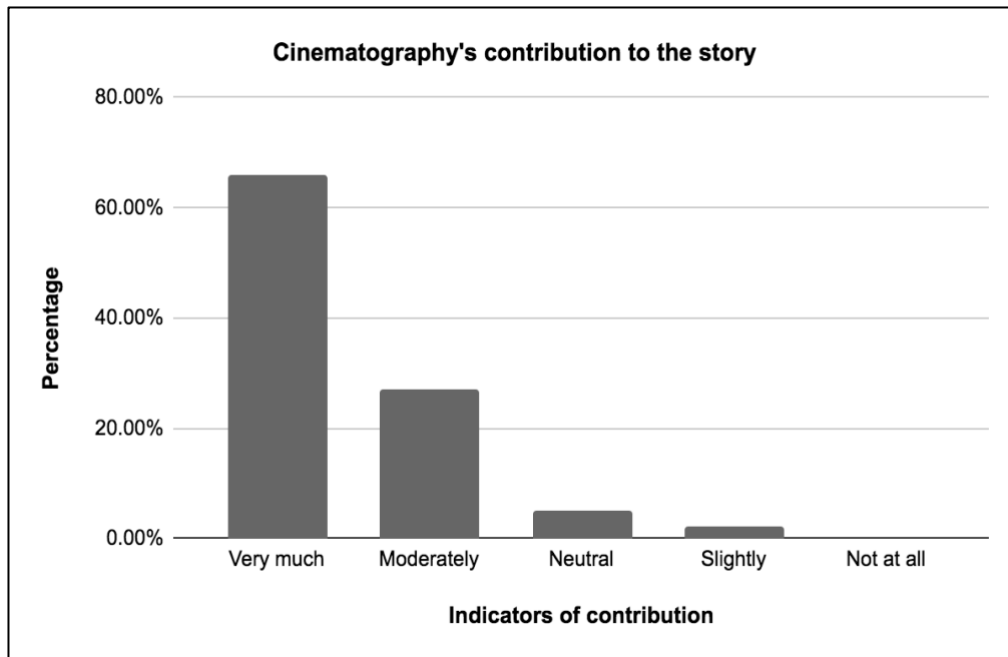
Figure 6.12: Respondents' views on the film's cinematography

6.3.8 Viewers' comprehension of the plot in Men of the Hill

124 (96%) participants responded to the question, which sought to determine the degree to which they had understood the film's plot (minimal as it is). Of the respondents, 26% reported that they had understood the plot to a high degree compared to (43%) who had somewhat understood it. The number of participants who remained neutral to the query put forward was marginally higher (19%), while few respondents claimed that they had a much lower comprehension of the plot (10%) or none at all (2%), as shown in Figure 6.13. These results were expected considering how minimalism and indeterminacy of plot were used as narrative strategies of Slow Cinema. Furthermore, the film's emphasis on the quotidian existence may have created a sense of ambiguity, which de-emphasised the plot altogether, making it relatively incomprehensible to some of the respondents.

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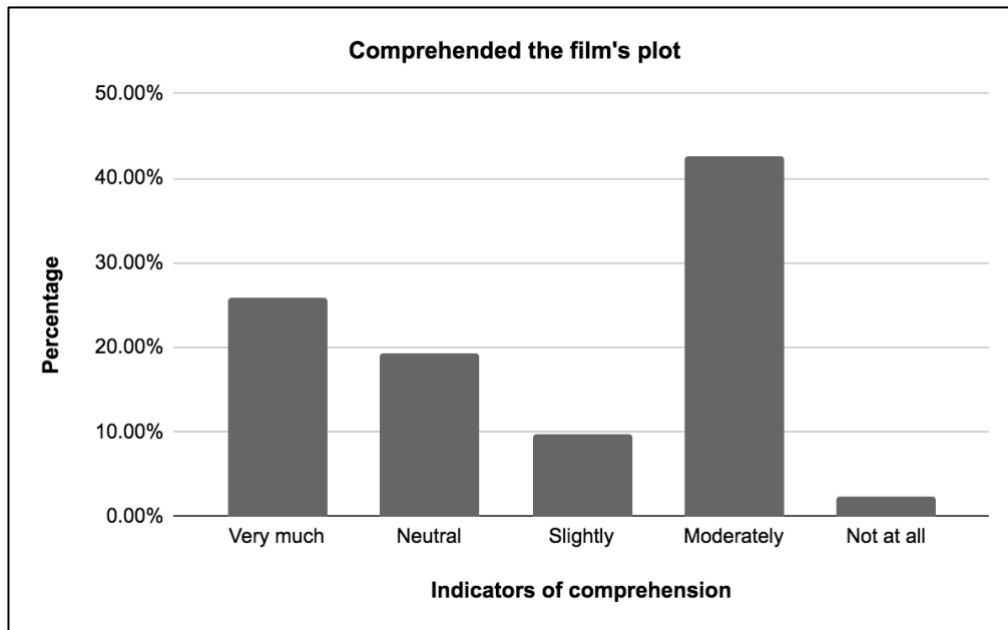
Figure 6.13: Respondents' comprehension of the film's plot

6.3.9 Characters' contribution to narrative comprehension in Men of the Hill

Overall, the participants had to indicate how much they thought the characters contributed to their narrative comprehension of the film. This question attracted 127 (98%) responses. As illustrated in Figure 6.14, most of the respondents (48%) believed that the characters had substantially contributed to their narrative comprehension of the film. Far less than that, (29%) acknowledged the characters' contribution, albeit with some reservations. Yet, 13% of the respondents were indifferent to the research question, while 8% marginally attributed their comprehension of the film's narrative to the characters. The percentage of those who did not at all recognise the characters' contribution was negligible. The results suggested that a significant majority of the respondents affirmed the importance of the characters in contributing to their narrative comprehension of a Slow Cinema film to varying degrees. These results were surprising because the characters in a Slow Cinema film tend to be opaque, thus inhibiting narrative comprehension.
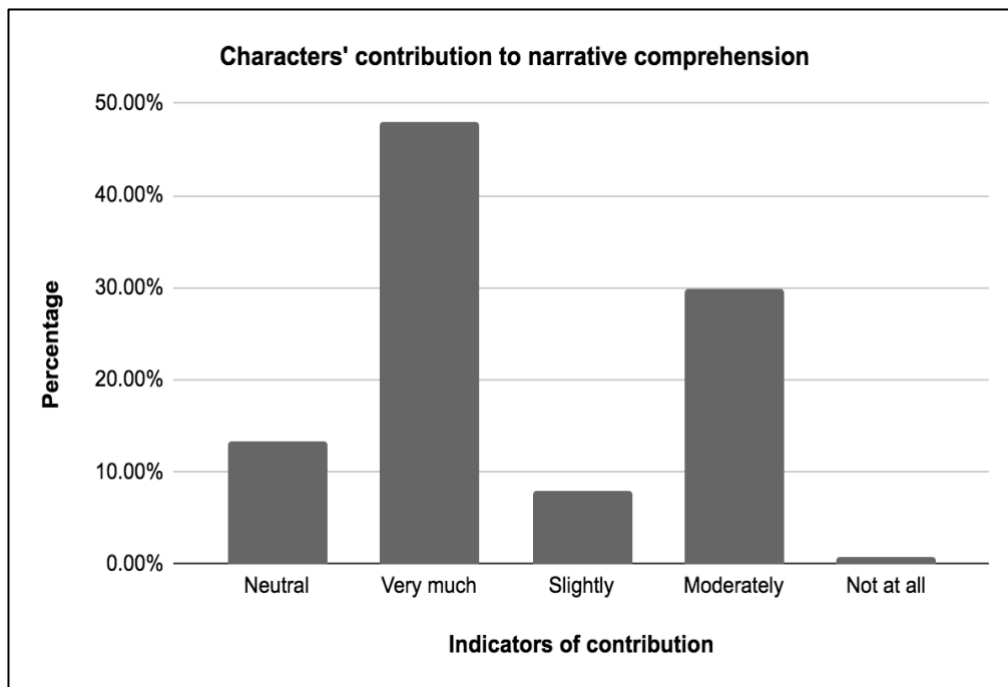
Figure 6.14: Characters' contribution to the film's narrative comprehension

6.3.10 Viewers' likelihood of watching films that are similar to Men of the Hill

Concerning the viewers' likelihood to watch films similar to *Men of the Hill* in terms of style, plot, character or any other pertinent factor, 127 (98%) of the respondents answered the question. The results (see Figure 6.15) revealed that the respondents were not sharply divided in their views. A slight majority (30%) were cautiously optimistic about the possibilities of watching another Slow Cinema film as a result of their viewing experiences of *Men of the Hill*. Still, 22% of the respondents were very optimistic about the likelihood of watching another film similar to *Men of the Hill*. Almost the same number of respondents (23%) were neutral about such prospects. Some of the respondents (18%) vaguely admitted that they would consider watching similar films. In comparison, there was virtually no indication (0.8%) of participants who would reject outright the invitation to watch another Slow Cinema film. Overall, the results implied that Slow Cinema films often demand a different kind of viewing experience to which most respondents were not willing to commit long term.

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Figure 6.15: Viewers' likelihood of watching films similar to Men of the Hill

6.3.11 Viewers' emotional response to Men of the Hill

Emotional response referred to whether the viewers' feelings were stimulated by the film. The results shown in Figure 6.16 were derived from 125 (97%) participants who responded to how strong their emotional response was to the film.
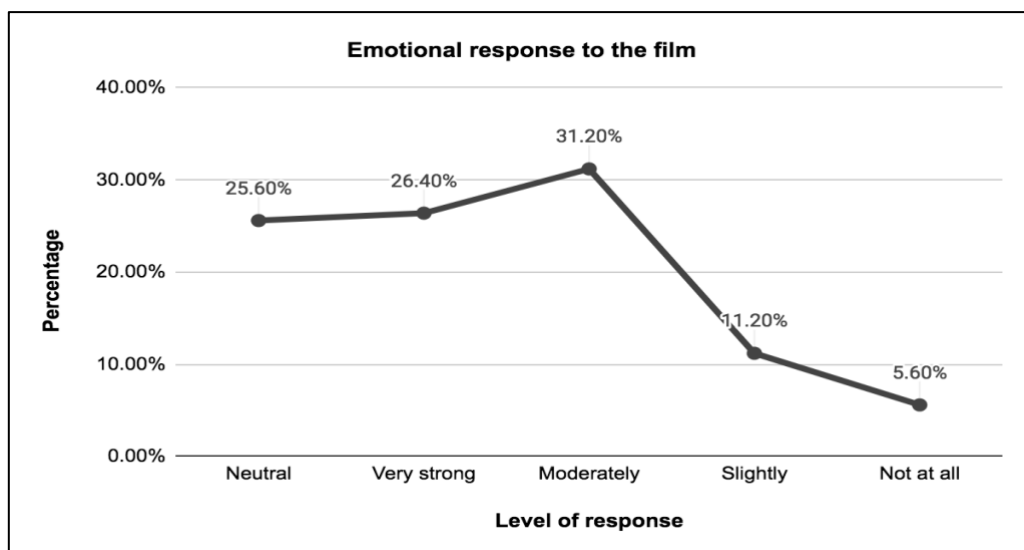
Figure 6.16: Viewers' emotional response to Men of the Hill

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Of the respondents, 26% acknowledged that their emotional response was very strong, 31% somewhat strong, 26% maintained an undecided response to the question raised, 11% were only slightly engaged emotionally, and 6% registered no emotional response at all to the film. So, it was observed that overall, the viewers found a way to respond to the film emotionally. This result confirmed the effective employment of emotional minimalism as a narrative strategy in the Slow Cinema film. Slow Cinema.

6.3.12 Viewers' intellectual response to Men of the Hill

Considering that Slow Cinema films tends to highlight the characters' propensity to self-reflect and to evoke similar self-reflection in the viewer, it was essential to find out how strong the viewers' intellectual response to the film was. The intellectual response was understood to mean concentrated reasoning and deep thinking, particularly concerning the philosophical themes addressed in the film's narrative. The question attracted the views of 127 (98%) participants. A large majority of the respondents were near evenly split, with 37.80% expressing a very strong intellectual response to the film and 38.60% indicating a relatively strong response. In addition, 15% remained neutral to the research question, 8% reported a faint intellectual response to the film. In contrast, the percentage of those who did not register any intellectual response was insignificant, as depicted in Figure 6.17.
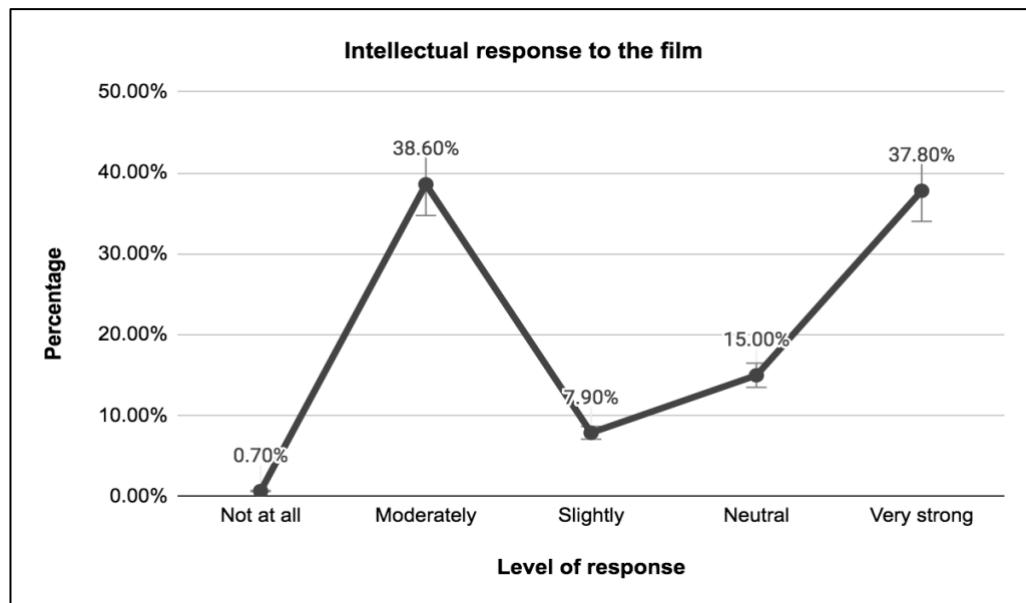
Figure 6.17: Viewers' intellectual response to Men of the Hill

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6.3.13 Viewers' description of their emotional response to Men of the Hill

To gain a meaningful understanding of the viewers' emotional response to *Men of the Hill*, there was a need to probe deep into their answers (refer to 6.3.11) by measuring an explanation-specific question, which sought to determine the respondents' emotions as the film came to an end. The respondents were required to provide their answers in open text format. 99 (77%) participants respondent to the question. The responses were analysed thematically to identify patterns within the data, enabling a deeper understanding of the subject at hand. As Figure 6.18 demonstrates, a slight majority (34%) of the respondents reported being sad at the end of the film, followed by 21% who expressed curiosity. Of the respondents, 14% stated that they felt confused, and 12% experienced mixed emotions. Additionally, 11% were empathetic, while 8% felt captivated at the end of the film. These results do not vary significantly from the participants' responses in section 6.3.11 and still point to the impact of emotional minimalism and indeterminacy in the film's narrative.
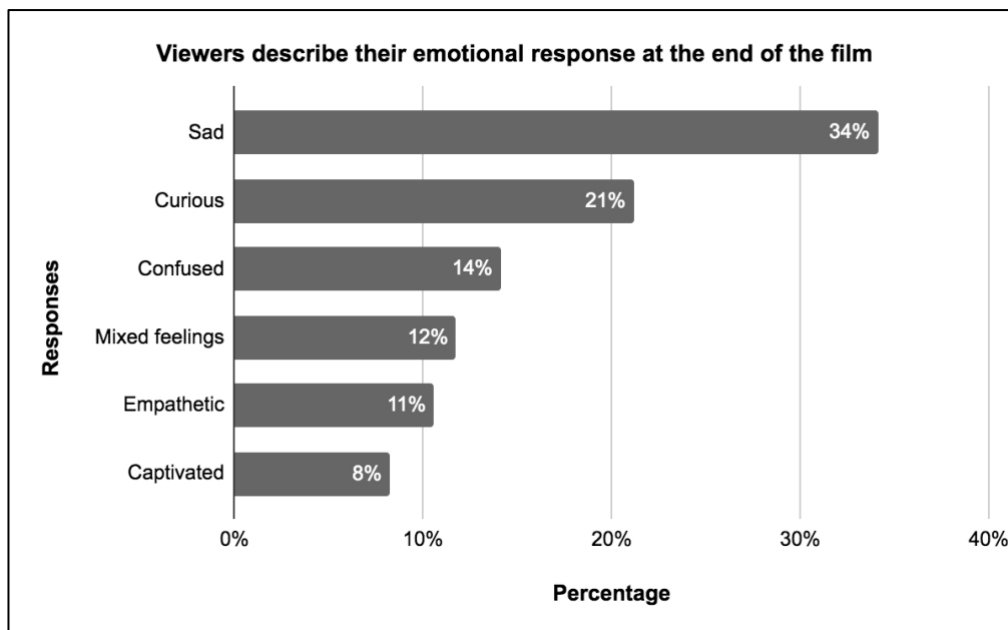
Figure 6.18: Viewers describe their emotional response to the film

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6.3.14 Viewers' description of their intellectual response to Men of the Hill

Similarly, the respondents were required to describe their intellectual response to the film in open text format. 92 (71%) of the participants responded to the explanation-specific question, and the responses were analysed thematically. As shown in Figure 6.19, a slight majority (42%) of the respondents described their intellectual response to the film as analytical. This reaction suggests that a Slow Cinema film has a high degree of interiority as depicted by the characters' internal conflicts. The viewer is therefore required to be analytical to understand the characters and the plot.

Furthermore, 28% of the respondents stated that the film inspired knowledge and creativity in them, 17% found the film difficult to understand, due to the film's indeterminate plot, while 13% held the notion that they were led to understand the logic in the film in the end. These results corroborate the previous results in section 6.3.12 regarding the respondents' overall intellectual response to the film. Therefore, it was clear that a considerable number of the respondents found various ways to connect with the film intellectually, including those who expressed difficulty in doing so.
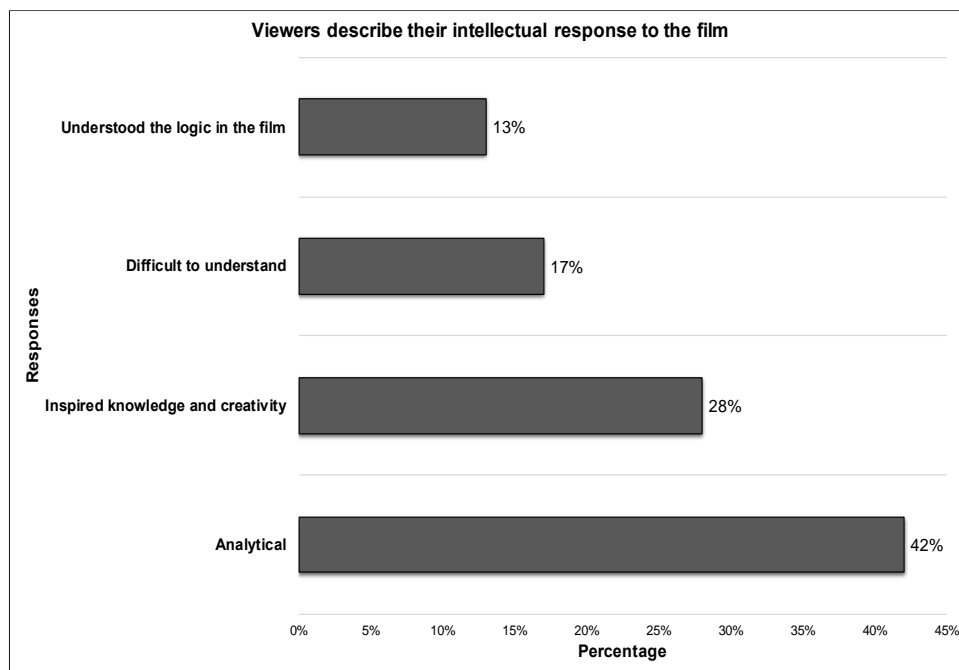
Figure 6.19: Viewers describe their intellectual response to the film

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6.3.15 Men of the Hill's ability to expand the viewers' thinking on new issues

"Contemplative cinema" is a term often associated with Slow Cinema (Çağlayan 2014; Flanagan 2008; Hamblin 2019; Jaffe 2014). This research question was designed to measure how much *Men of the Hill* as a Kenyan Slow Cinema film can expand the viewers' thinking on an issue or idea that they had not contemplated upon previously. In the end, 126 (98%) responses were obtained in regards to the question. The results (see Figure 6.20) revealed that a significant majority of the respondents were roughly evenly split. Of those sampled, 37.3% asserted that the film had expanded their thinking on new issues of concern to a great extent, and 36.5% indicated that the film somewhat expanded their thinking on new issues. On the other hand, approximately 12% remained undecided, while the rest (10%) felt that the film had slightly expanded their thinking on new issues of concern. Overall, it can be suggested that the Slow Cinema film encouraged a majority of the respondents to contemplate issues they deemed necessary around them.
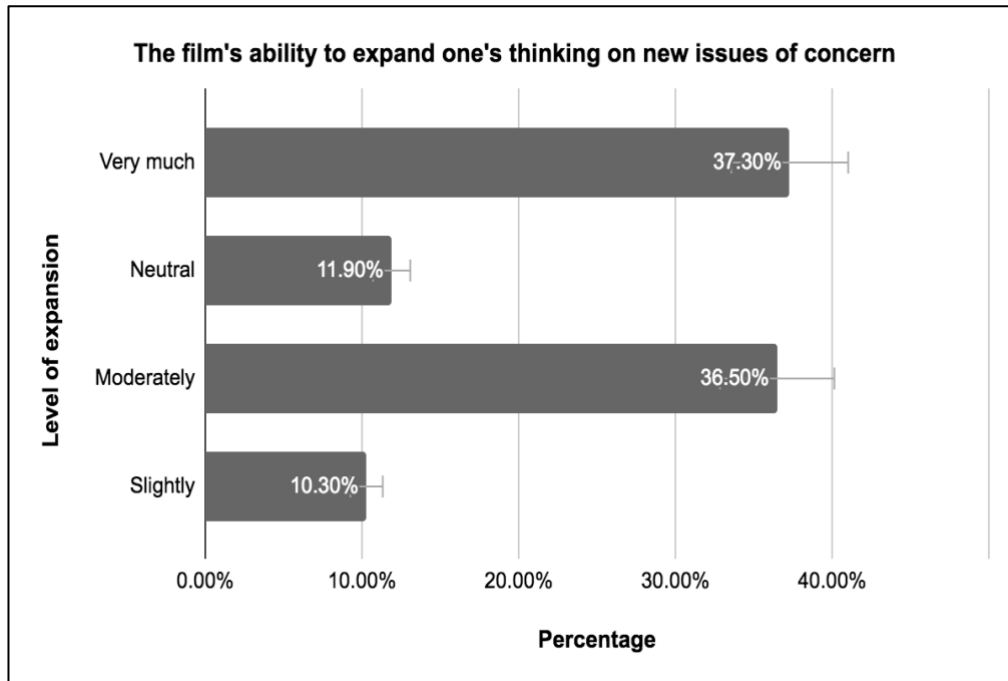
Figure 6.20: The film's ability to encourage contemplation amongst the viewers

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6.3.16 Viewers' responses on Men of the Hill as a new style of filmmaking

To determine whether the viewers considered *Men of the Hill* as a new style of filmmaking in Kenya, the respondents were asked the extent to which the film exposed them to a style of filmmaking previously not encountered. Of the participants, 126 (98%) responded to the question. A substantial majority (66%) averred that the film exposed them to a style of filmmaking they had not previously experienced. However, 14% had been once exposed to the slow kind. There was an even split between those who remained neutral (9.5%) and those slightly exposed (9.5%). The remaining (0.8%) did not acclaim the film for exposing them to a new style of filmmaking. Of importance, this result supports the notion that *Men of the Hill* is the first-ever Kenyan Slow Cinema film and has the potential of being situated within Kenyan cinema in various ways. Figure 6.21 summarises the above results.
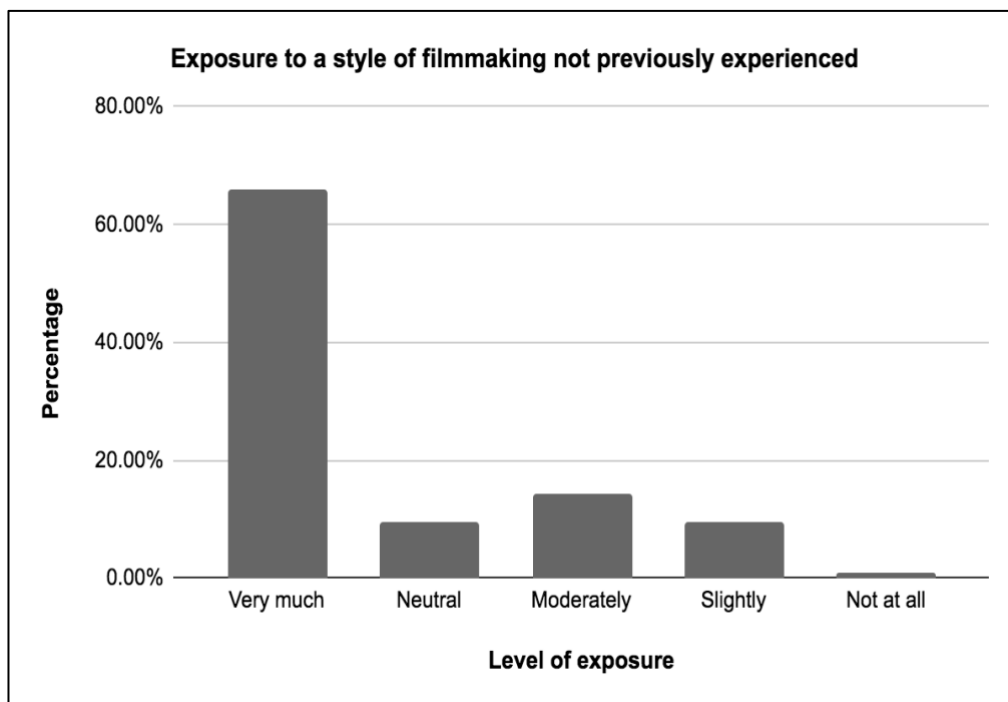
Figure 6.21: Men of the Hill *as a new style of filmmaking amongst the viewers*

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6.3.17 Viewers' thoughts on the film's plot structure during the screening

To measure the level of indeterminacy in the film's plot, the participants were required to indicate how much they were thinking about the plot structure during the screening. Figure 6.22 reports the results. Of the 127 (98%) participants who responded to the question, 38% claimed that they were keenly thinking about the film's plot structure. In comparison, 39% mentioned that they were thinking about it somehow actively, representing a near-split between the two sides. Conversely, 18% of the respondents were uncommitted to the question put forward, while 6% were vaguely thinking about the film's plot structure during the screening. None of the respondents reported they were not thinking about the plot structure at all. The result suggested that most of the respondents, keenly or somehow actively thinking about the plot structure during the screening, believed there was a deliberate attempt to complicate the plot for a deeper comprehension of the narrative. In other words, a certain level of indeterminacy had been built into the narrative for that purpose. Correspondingly, a minority representing the undecided respondents and those who slightly thought otherwise could imply that the film's plot structure may still have been at the back of their minds. Still, they decided not to focus on it. In that case, the indeterminacy of plot in the Slow Cinema film was achieved.
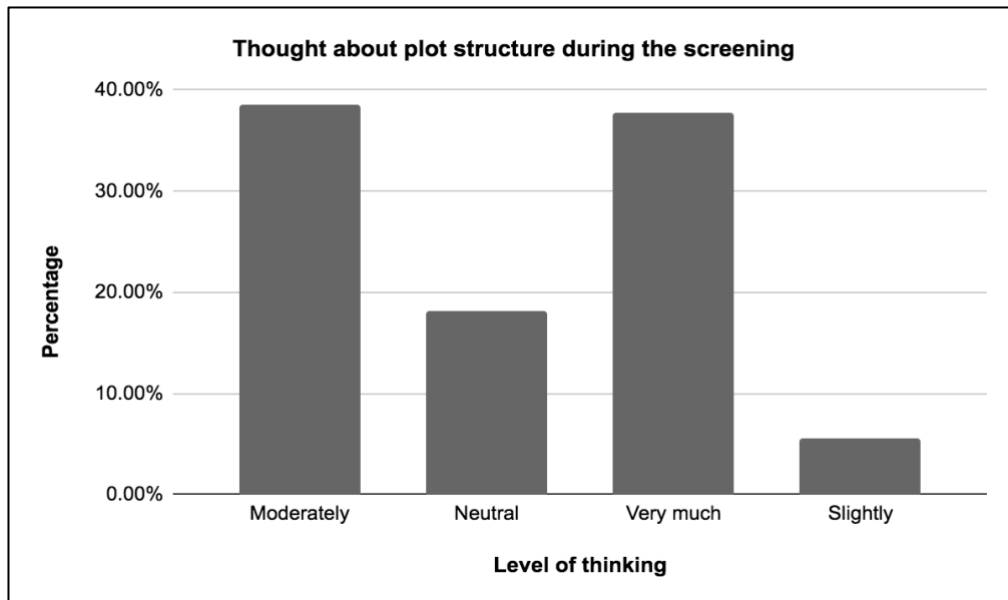
Figure 6.22: Viewers' thoughts on the plot structure during the screening

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6.3.18 Whether the viewers' minds wandered during the screening

Due to Slow Cinema's narrative focus on the more mundane aspects of life, it was necessary to determine whether the viewers' minds wandered to matters outside of the film itself during the screening (Figure 6.23). The research question elicited 127 (98%) responses, with a slim majority (32%) admitting that their minds wandered slightly to matters outside of the film, closely followed by 26% of the respondents who remained neutral. "Neutral" in this context suggests that the respondents' were unsure about their minds wandering during the film's screening. Furthermore, 24% reported that their minds wandered to some extent, 16% wandered quite frequently, and for the remaining 3%, their minds did not wander at all to matters outside of the film itself. Similarly, this result points to the indeterminacy of the plot in *Men of the Hill*. Hence, overall, it was ascertained that the minds of a significant majority of the respondents wandered to matters outside of the film itself, supporting the view that a Slow Cinema film induces contemplation in and outside of the film itself.
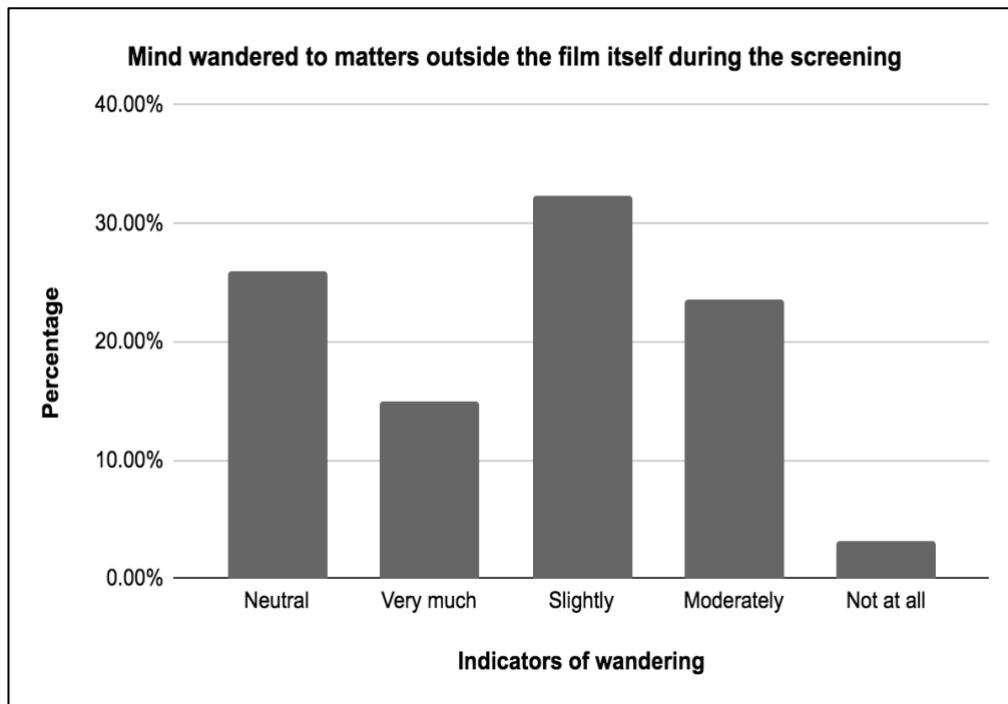
Figure 6.23: Determining the wandering minds for the viewers of Men of the Hill

6.3.19 Whether the film's content or style made the viewers uncomfortable

To situate Slow Cinema in Kenyan cinema, the participants were asked whether anything about the film in its content or style made them uncomfortable. Of the 127 (98%) participants who responded to the question, a slight majority (46%) asserted that there was nothing at all about the film that made them uncomfortable. However, 20% noted certain aspects of the film's content or style that made them slightly uncomfortable. An almost equal number (19.7%) of respondents were undecided, 9% indicated they were somewhat uncomfortable, and 5% reported that the film's content or style made them feel very uncomfortable. These participants and their responses are represented by Figure 6.24. Generally, the result confirmed that the film's content or style made the viewers relatively uncomfortable. This result may be attributed to Slow Cinema's tendency to focus on themes of despair, isolation, suicide, death, and grief, just to name a few, as with the films of Béla Tarr, Sharunas Bartas, Lav Diaz, and Tsai Ming-liang.
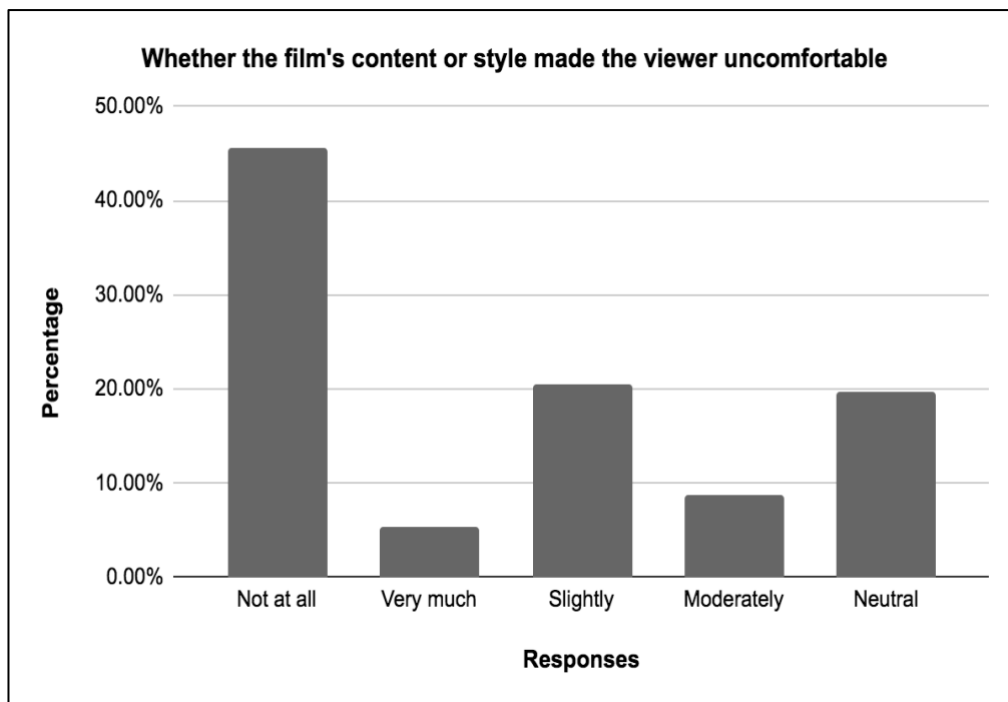
Figure 6.24: Viewers' responses on whether the film made them uncomfortable

6.3.20 Viewers' recommendation of Men of the Hill

The research question sought to establish whether the participants would recommend someone else watch the film. 127 (98%) participants submitted their responses. As summarised in Figure 6.25, half (50%) of the respondents strongly maintained that they would recommend someone else to watch *Men of the Hill*. Another 27% indicated that they would do so to some extent, while 16% were non-committal and 7% hinted that they were far less likely to recommend the film to someone else. The number of respondents who would not recommend the film at all was insignificant (0.9%). The result confirmed that *Men of the Hill* generated a sense of enthusiasm and curiosity among the majority of the respondents, enough for them to recommend someone else to watch. This inference is supported by the fact that one week after its YouTube premiere, the film had attracted at least 1,000 views.
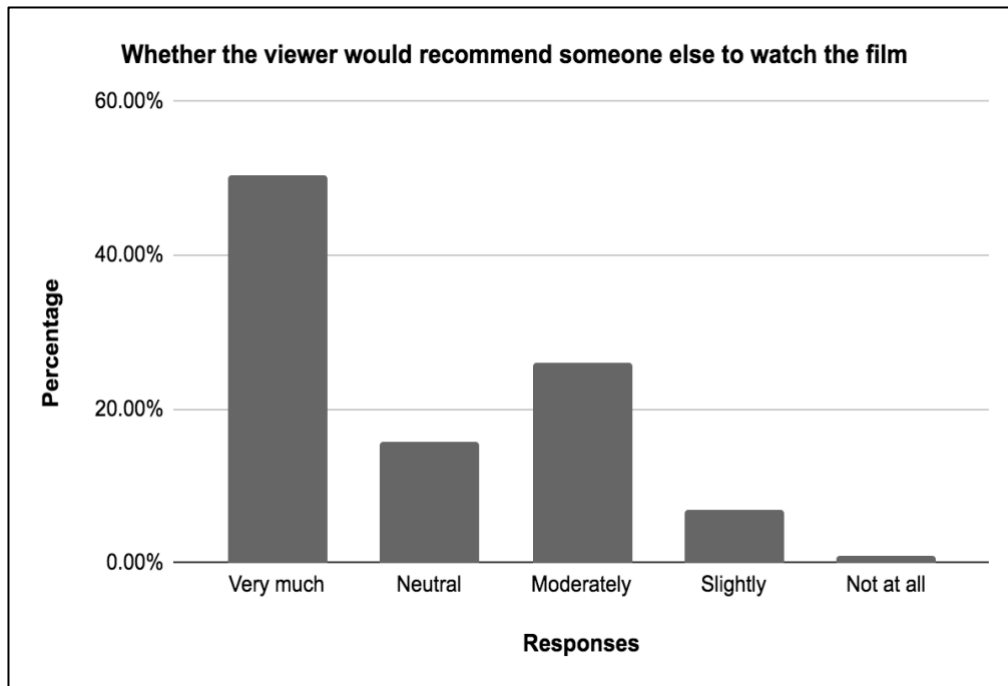
Figure 6.25: Viewers' recommendation of the film to someone else

6.3.21 Viewers' responses on Men of the Hill's ability to showcase Kenya

To explore the film's potential to influence Kenya's promising film culture, the participants were required to indicate the extent to which *Men of the Hill* showcased anything about Kenya that they had already valued before the screening. Results from 127 (98%) participants who responded to the question (see Figure 6.26) showed that a narrow majority (38%) strongly believed that the film showcased issues about Kenya that they had already valued before the screening. Likewise, 34% held the view that the film had reasonably showcased Kenya in ways that they valued, while 20% remained uncommitted to the question raised. The remaining participants were evenly split between respondents vaguely impressed with the film's showcasing of Kenya (4%) and those who maintained the film had not showcased anything at all about Kenya that they had already valued before the screening (4%). In reference to most of the respondents, the result implied that Slow Cinema could be considered an alternative cinema to the Hollywood style that dominates the country. For that very reason, *Men of the Hill* can be regarded as a Kenyan Slow Cinema film.
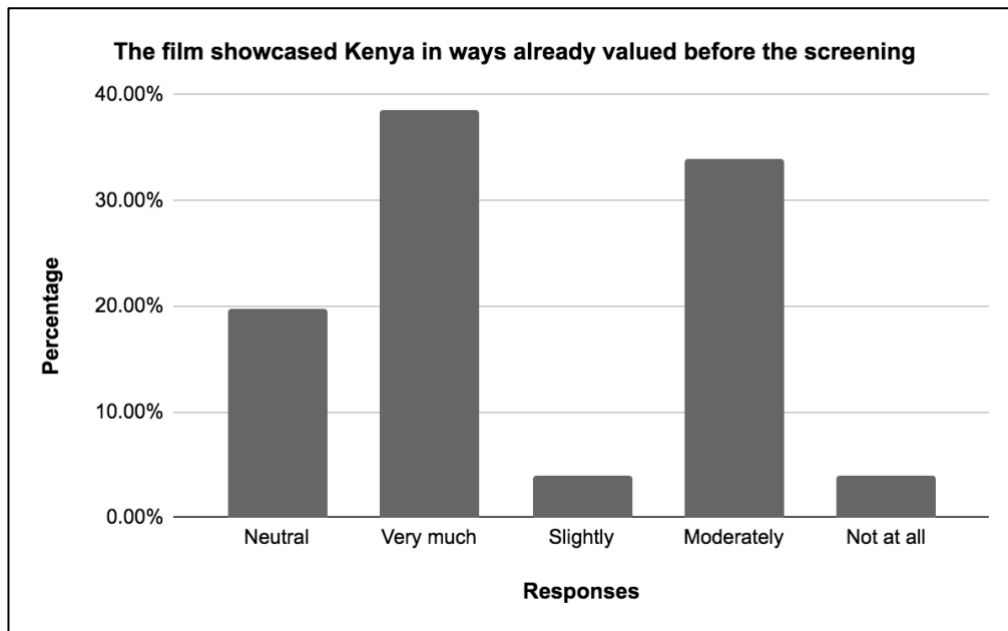
Figure 6.26: Men of the Hill*'s ability to showcase Kenya positively*

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6.3.22 Viewers' responses on whether Kenyan filmmakers should be making Slow Cinema films

Of the 127 (98%) participants who submitted their responses to the query whether Kenyan filmmakers should make Slow Cinema films (Figure 6.26), 40% (a small majority) affirmed that Kenyan filmmakers should endeavour to make films similar to the style and content demonstrated by *Men of the Hill*. In the same way, 36% moderately agreed with their counterparts on the notion that such similar films should be made in Kenya. Contrastingly, 16% remained neutral, 5% were reluctant to make such a recommendation, and 3% thought that such films should not be made in Kenya at all. As a result, it was observed that a significant majority of the respondents were open-minded about the prospects of Kenyan filmmakers producing Slow Cinema films. In this way, Kenyan filmmakers experimenting with Slow Cinema may experience greater artistic freedom and vision beyond the limitations of Kenyan cinema. This artistic freedom may also increase the possibility of a rise in auteur cinema.
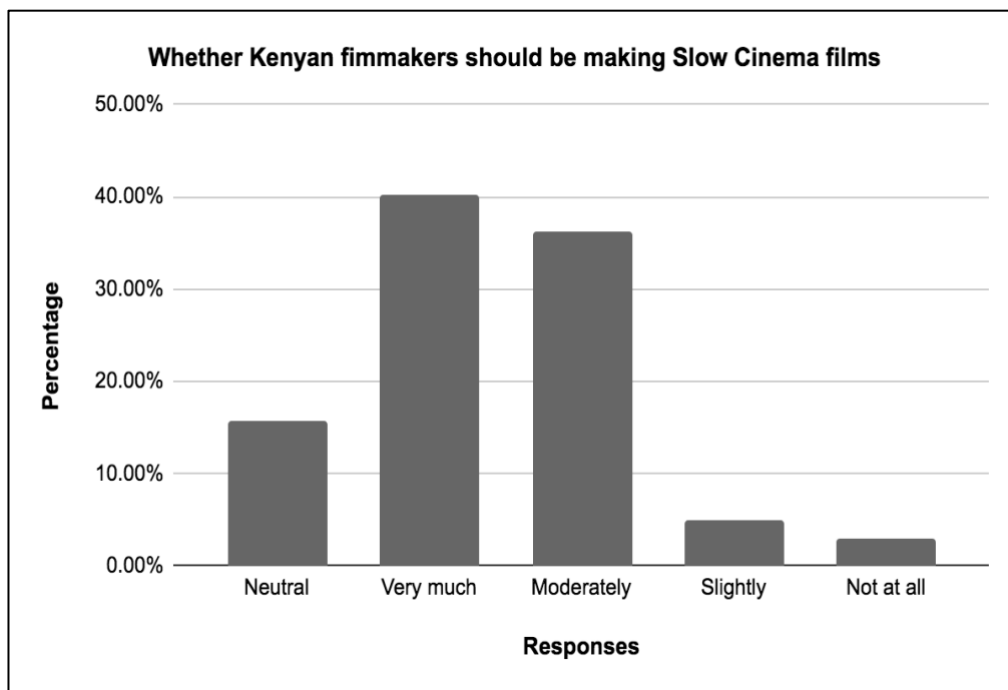
Figure 6.27: Kenyan filmmakers making Slow Cinema films

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6.3.23 Viewers' responses on what they planned to do after the screening

To determine the kind of impression that *Men of the Hill* as a Kenyan Slow Cinema film had left on the viewers, the respondents were required to select all the activities they planned to undertake after the screening. Of the 125 (97%) participants who responded, a sizeable majority (52.8%) claimed that they would reflect privately about the film's meaning. Similarly, the same number (52%) affirmed that they would research such a film online. They were joined by 48% of other respondents who indicated that they would discuss the film with other audience members and 34% who confirmed that they would react to the film online or on social media. Finally, 27% of the respondents opted to speak with a family member about the film after the screening. First, and of significance, the results suggest that *Men of the Hill* led many of the respondents to contemplation, which is the ultimate goal of Slow Cinema. Second, the film elicited a relatively high intellectual response, as evidenced by over half of the respondents who wanted to gain more knowledge on Slow Cinema after the screening. Equally important, a sizeable majority confirmed that they would be willing to share information about the film with their families and friends, promoting Slow Cinema among Kenyan film viewers. Figure 6.27 summarises the above results.
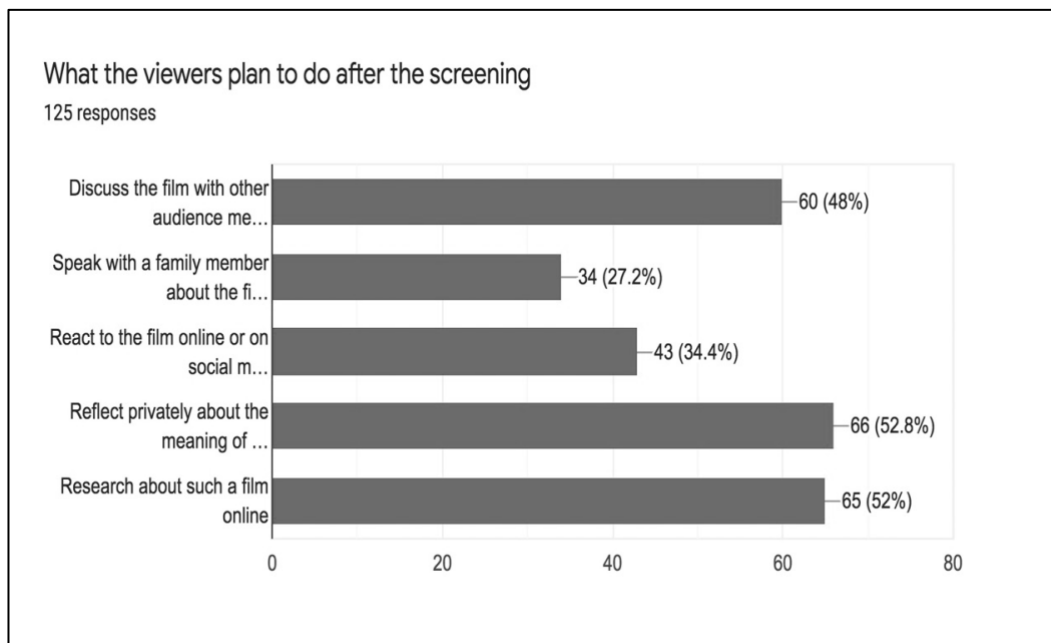
Figure 6.28: Viewers' undertaking after the film's screening

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6.3.24 Participants' views on how their experience of the film could have been improved

In the end, it was necessary to find out from the participants, how in their personal opinion, the experience of *Men of the Hill* could have been improved. The respondents were asked to provide their answers in open text format, and the data obtained was analysed thematically. Among the 90 (70%) participants who responded to the question put forward, a narrow majority (28%) maintained that no improvement of any kind was required. Contrastingly, 18% held that the film's plot structure needed more improvement, and 11% were unhappy about flat acting in the film. At the same time, equally the same number, felt that character engagement (11%) and technical elements such as lighting and sound (11%) should have been better. Additionally, 8% of the respondents wanted the long takes to be reduced, while a similar number (8%) thought they should have been given more information on Slow Cinema before the screening. Interestingly, just 7% would have preferred a theatrical screening of the film (see Figure 6.28). Overall, a significant majority of the respondents felt there was a need for improvement in their experience of the film. These responses could point to the possibility of hybridising Slow Cinema with other film styles, as discussed in Chapter Four (see section 4.3.1).

Viewers describe how their experience of the film could have been improved

- No improvement required: 28%
- Plot development: 18%
- Flat acting: 11%
- Character engagement: 11%
- Technical improvement: 11%
- Reduce long takes: 8%
- More information on Slow Cinema: 8%
- Prefer theatrical screening: 7%
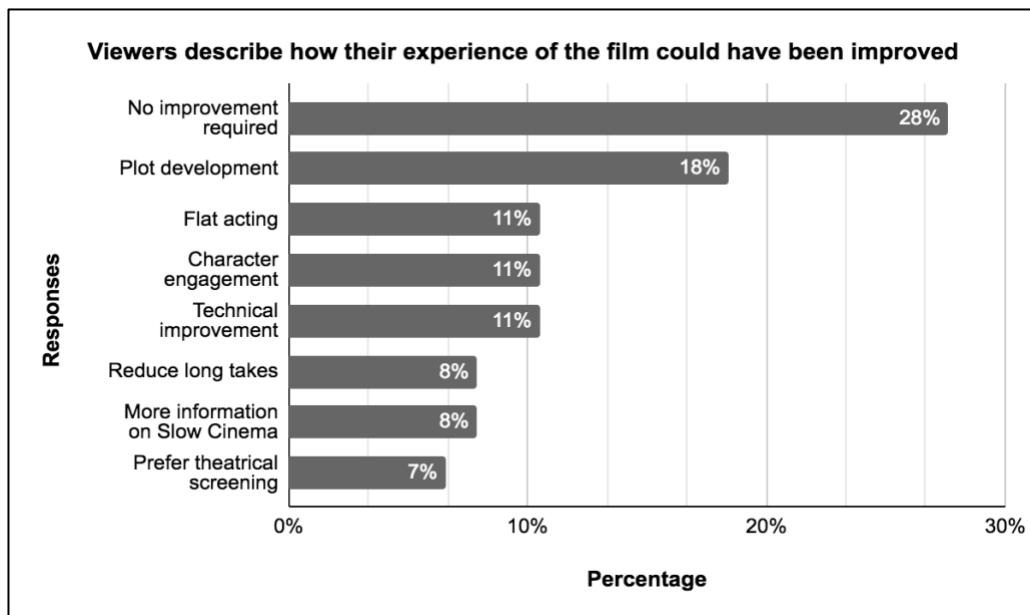
Figure 6.29: Viewers on how their experience of the film could have been improved

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6.4 Presentation of Interview Findings

This section contains the findings of semi-structured interviews analysed thematically. The aim was to determine how a number of Kenyan film experts would visualise and interpret the narrative and aesthetic conventions of Slow Cinema deployed in *Men of the Hill* as a Kenyan Slow Cinema film to ultimately answer the main research question.[168] As indicated in Chapter One (section 1.4.1.4), thirteen interview participants were purposively sampled from a target population of Kenyan filmmakers, film scholars, film critics, and film policy-makers. All interviews were manually coded to identify potentially interesting information. Transcripts from individual interviews conducted were analysed in sets of four participants to allow analysis time before proceeding to the next batch. Each set was coded and assessed for repeated statements, phrases, and words to the point of saturation (see Firmin 2008: 868). The process specifically involved a continuous distillation of data until a list of known themes related to the main research question emerged, as shown in Appendix D. Similarly, this process was consistent with Ayres (2008: 867), who argued that in thematic analysis, some themes would be anticipated in the data set because the concepts were openly integrated into data collection. Included in this section are tables used to summarise the data and quotes from the individual interviews used to emphasise the key themes.

6.4.1 Demographic information

Eleven participants were interviewed for this study based on the demographics that represent minimum requirements described in Chapter One (section 1.4.1.4). Of those sampled, two experts declined to participate. The eleven experts are represented in the sample, with five (45%) filmmakers, three (27%) film critics, two (18%) film scholars, and one (9%) film policy-maker. In terms of their education level, five (45%) of the 11 participants had attained a Bachelor's degree at the time of the interview, four (36%) had a Master's degree, while two (18%) were PhD holders. The total years of work experience in Kenya's film industry varied among the 11 participants. Of those sampled, participants with over ten years of experience represented 55% (6), those with 1-5 years represented 27% (3), and the group having 6-10 years of work experience representing 18% (2). It is imperative to note that all the 11 participants possessed hands-on filmmaking experience at specific

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[168] See section 6.1 of this chapter.

points in their careers. The ages of the participants also varied, with those 50 years or older and the 40-49 years age group evenly split at 18% (2 each) of those sampled. 27% (3) were between 30 and 39 years, while a slight majority, 36% (4), represented the 20-29 age group. Lastly, the gender composition of the participants was 73% (8) male and 27% (3) female. The above demographic information suggests that all the participants sampled were representative of Kenya's film industry and knowledgeable and skilled enough to provide the richest and most complex information relevant to understanding Slow Cinema within the national framework of Kenyan cinema. Table 6.1 provides a summary of demographics on education, work experience, age, and gender.

Table 6.1: Demographic profiles distribution

Demographic	Value	Frequency	%
Education	Bachelor's degree	5	45.45
	Master's degree	4	36.36
	Doctorate	2	18.18
Work experience	Over 10 years	6	54.54
	6-10 years	2	18.18
	1-5 years	3	27.27
Age	50 years or older	2	18.18
	40-49 years old	2	18.18
	30-39 years old	3	27.27
	20-29 years old	4	36.36
Gender	Male	8	72.72
	Female	3	27.27

The 11 participants were asked the same questions (see sections 6.4.2 to 6.4.9) regarding their visualisation and interpretation of *Men of the Hill* as a Kenyan Slow Cinema film and the prospects of situating the slow tendency in Kenyan cinema. The thematic coding results included 44 codes. The sections that follow present the themes that emerged from the interviews and the participants' subsequent responses to the research questions put forward.

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6.4.2 Previous exposure to Slow Cinema

Have you previously watched another film, similar in style and narrative to Men of the Hill*? If so, describe how narrative and aesthetic strategies have been deployed in the film.*

The argument I have laid out in this study demonstrates that Slow Cinema is new to Kenyan cinema. As such, it was crucial to determine whether the experts had been exposed to a Slow Cinema film before watching *Men of the Hill*. Three codes were assigned to the thematic category of 'previous exposure to Slow Cinema'. Table 6.2 summarises the findings.

Table 6.2: Previous exposure to Slow Cinema

Category	Thematic category	Codes	Frequency	%
Slow Cinema genre	Focus on previous exposure	No exposure	6	54.54
		Actual exposure	4	36.36
		Slight exposure	1	9.09

The finding suggests that a slight majority of the participants (55%) had not watched a Slow Cinema film at the time of being exposed to *Men of the Hill*. Two experts remarkably capture the views of those participants who had no previous exposure to Slow Cinema. One who is particularly enthusiastic about African cinema shared her thoughts.

> *So, I realized I've never watched a Slow Cinema film before. When I watched Men of the Hill, it was different because I've not seen a film of its kind, especially in Africa. I love African films a lot. I prefer African films to Hollywood, but I haven't seen anything like Men of the Hill.* (Participant 2)

Another participant specifically considers *Men of the Hill* as a new genre, thus emphasising the lack of exposure to Slow Cinema in Kenyan cinema.

> *I wouldn't say I have watched any Slow Cinema film before Men of the Hill. This is a new genre to me. The style in which it was shot and the subtle narrative is very different from what I have experienced. So, Men of the Hill is my first ever Slow Cinema film to watch from start to finish.* (Participant 5)

Of the 11 participants, four (36%) had actual exposure to Slow Cinema before watching *Men of the Hill*. In addition, some participants shared more details about their previous

experiences with Slow Cinema. An example of a Slow Cinema film follows for each of the participants quoted below.

> *Let me put it this way, the Slow Cinema film that I have experienced is by the Iranian film director, Abbas Kiarostami. What I like about Kiarostami is his different way of seeing the world or what I would call his cultural interpretation of Slow Cinema, particularly in his film, Five: Dedicated to Ozu. So, you ask yourself, what's the story and what's beautiful about this story? Is there a story in the first place? Then you come to realize that this is a form of resistance by the Iranian people. The film makes a powerful political statement. The story is allegorical. An ordinary person may not be able to understand it, but there is a deeper meaning.* (Participant 4)

Another participant provided an example of a film, which in this case, inspired Kiarostami to pay homage to Ozu as indicated above.

> *One of the films that I have watched that adheres to the Slow Cinema style is Tokyo Story (Ozu 1953). It's shot in black and white, in very tight spaces. Shooting in black and white brings the feeling of drabness to a story. In Tokyo Story, I got the sense that there was nothing exciting happening in the story's world. It's just the day to day living.* (Participant 8)

One participant (9%), who indicated that she was slightly exposed to Slow Cinema films before watching *Men of the Hill*, demonstrated a clear understanding of Slow Cinema's definition in relation to other films that employ the technique of slowness, but may not be subsumed under the Slow Cinema banner.

> *Honestly, most of the movies I have watched may not be precisely Slow Cinema films, but they have employed the long take as a technique, and that does not necessarily qualify a film to be called a Slow Cinema film. But there's one interesting classic I watched a few years back, and when I was watching Men of the Hill, it brought it back into mind. And this one was called Ordinary People (Redford 1980).[169] It is not necessarily a Slow Cinema film, but it had many aspects of the Slow Cinema film because it delves very deep into the character. It has got those long pauses, very little dialogue, just character movements, and very many long takes where we are forced to just immerse ourselves into the setting, the plotline and the character with little or no dialogue. So that was one of them.* (Participant 3)

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[169] *Ordinary People* is psychological drama revolving around the strained relationship between two characters (Conrad and Beth) struggling with feelings of guilt and depression, and their conflicting ways of dealing with these emotions. Conrad later attempts suicide. Participant 3 saw a strong connection between Conrad and Luke (in *Men of the Hill*). Additionally, Participant 3 associated Redford's film with Slow Cinema due to its contemplative moments similar to *Men of the Hill*.

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It was clear from the interviews that Slow Cinema was perceived as a new genre in Kenyan cinema, particularly in practice, even though some filmmakers may have been exposed to Slow Cinema films in the past.

6.4.3 Conventions of Slow Cinema

What did you identify as the noticeable features of Men of the Hill *compared to a typical Hollywood film?*

In Chapters One, Two, and Three, I described the conventions of Slow Cinema as deployed in the films of notable directors in Slow Cinema and based on the writings of Slow Cinema authors. This particular finding answers explicitly the main research question in terms of how the production of context-centred knowledge of Slow Cinema and the situatedness of its conventions within Kenyan cinema can contribute to the notion of contextualising slowness in diverse historical and cultural backgrounds. Eight codes were allocated to this thematic category. As a result, 100% of the participants identified at least three noticeable features of *Men of the Hill* compared to a typical Hollywood film, as shown in Table 6.3.

Table 6.3: Conventions of Slow Cinema in Men of the Hill

Category	Thematic category	Codes	Frequency
Conventions of Slow Cinema	Focus on the noticeable features of *Men of the Hill*	Narrative elements	15
		Visual elements	12
		Sound	7
		Thematic concerns	5
		Neorealism	3
		Locations	3
		Acting	2
		Spatio-temporal elements	2

Ten (90%) participants identified various narrative elements associated with slowness, including minimalist narrative and dialogue that lead to contemplation, slow and indeterminate plot, and complex characterisation. One participant was categorical about the value of narrative in a particular art form. She aptly describes her experience of the narrative elements in *Men of the Hill*.

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*For me, a film is all about narrative. It doesn't matter if the aesthetics are magical. Now, it takes a while to sit through the length of the film (*Men of the Hill*), and you keep asking yourself, what exactly is this film all about? For a typical Hollywood film, you already understand the conflict within the first five minutes. In Men of the Hill, you have to go through the motions and then, at the end of it all, ask yourself, what is this filmmaker trying to tell us? So, Men of the Hill uses the reverse narrative style. It reminds me of The Shawshank Redemption (Darabont 1994). The film sort of unfolds in chapters with very many symbols. It was quite confusing.* (Participant 11)

Another participant shared several narrative elements of Slow Cinema as deployed in *Men of the Hill* by providing a clear example.

I loved the fact that there was very little dialogue because that's one thing I tell my students. That scriptwriting is not so much about dialogue but the structure. So, in the scenes between Dr Grofki (lead character) *and his wife, I felt they brought that out very clearly. They were very strong in that. It was very minimalist and contemplative, you know, little or no narrative. All the elements that you require for Slow Cinema, especially if students are to come back years later from now to study this as a Slow Cinema film.* (Participant 3)

Participant 9 describes the film's narrative expressiveness through the plot structure and how the viewer can experience it thus alluding to the "slow disclosure" discussed in Chapter Two (section 2.4.2.2) and Chapter Five (section 5.4).

Slow Cinema is a style that allows the narrative to express itself and take time to unfold. So, as a viewer, you need to give it time and let the whole magic unfold. It is not a type of narrative that moves from point A to B to point C. It is not a hotchpotch kind of cinema if I can use that word. It is pretty much an experience, where you experience the narrative, experience the conflict in the character, and experience the locations. You absorb all that as a viewer, and at the end of the film, whatever you have experienced will stay with you. So, there is a more prolonged impact of Slow Cinema, staying on people's minds. However, Slow Cinema must have a compelling narrative because it can tend to bore people. I do feel that kind of cinema is very exclusive because it would only appeal to a certain audience looking to go beyond entertainment. (Participant 9)

Nine (82%) participants spoke of visual elements of Slow Cinema based on their visualisation of *Men of the Hill*. Some of the visual elements identified by the participants comprise of a fixed camera, the panchromatic view, average shot length (ASL), and the long take. A quote follows for each of the visual elements identified above. The first participant recounts the significance of using a fixed camera in the film.

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In terms of cinematography, the patient, Luke, I thought it was very interesting and thought-provoking when the camera would stay on him. There was also a pattern where the camera focused on an empty chair, especially when Doctor Grofki attacked the Reverend during his devotion. I expect to see blood and punches in a typical Hollywood film, but there's none of that in the scene. You're left to imagine what's happening as the camera focuses on the chair. That's Slow Cinema. (Participant 3)

The second participant offers a close reading of the visual geometry depicted in *Men of the Hill*, which he argues, is consistent with the works of notable Slow Cinema directors.

An important feature I picked was the panchromatic view evident in the feeling cultures of Africa, Asia and Latin America. It's the 2D perspective. I think the predominant perspective in Men of the Hill is two-dimensional. Even the characters are two-dimensional. I don't know whether it is a cultural view, but I have seen the same view in Kiarostami's films and much of Slow Cinema. The two-dimensional nature of these films could be interpreted as a rebellion against the western perspective. (Participant 4)

In Chapter Three, for example, I discussed the ASL of three selected Slow Cinema films and the implications of ASL on slowness. Participant 5 noticed this critical feature in *Men of the Hill*.

Let me talk from a more technical point of view. As the name suggests, you can't help but notice that everything in the film is slow. Considering that the normal length of a Hollywood film plays on human psychology with three to four seconds per shot, I noticed that in Men of the Hill, the average shot length is 40 seconds and even in some cases, a minute or two. You see, that's the first thing which was most noticeable in the film. (Participant 5)

Another participant describes how the long take contributed to his visualisation of the film.

I noticed very long takes with slow cuts in the Men of the Hill. In a fast-paced movie, you experience a very quick succession of shots, moving very quickly into a character or action taken from different angles. For Men of the Hill, it's pretty much looking at it from a very sedentary position. Just looking at things happening in front of you and not really being part of the action as it goes along. (Participant 6)

Participant 8 provides a scholarly view of the static shots used in *Men of the Hill,* clearly portraying Slow Cinema as an art form that requires a cerebral engagement.

The static shots seemed to convey a deeper meaning and a sense of calmness, which is consistent with Slow Cinema. As Siegfried Kraucer argued, it is like trying to help us

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see things from a psychological perspective before we look at it from the intellectual perspective, where it feels uncomfortable to us, you know, in the sense of being static. So, we have to sit there and take it all in. For example, in Men of the Hill, Dr Grofki comes home, has dinner with his wife amid silence, and the static shot takes too long, but I guess that's the whole point of Slow Cinema the audience to feel uncomfortable. So, the viewer's mind starts wandering to other things, but in the end, the film gives them more time to internalize everything that's happening on screen. (Participant 8)

As for sound, six (55%) of those sampled expressed excitement about the use of diegetic sound in *Men of the Hill*. Participant 7, for example, discussed the intentional use of ambient sound in the film and how it revealed to him important insights about Kenya's cultural and religious realities.

I noticed that the use of ambient sound was also quite intentional. Hollywood films tend to ignore that. They give you perfect sound, and I think that's not fair for an audience who understands the scene. For example, in Men of the Hill, I could hear the background sound of the Muezzin summoning Muslim worshippers for prayers at dawn. So, for me, it brought out that sense of diversity. The Christians were there, but the Muslims were also praying in the background. The ambient sound helped me connect to the story in a real sense, unlike the perfectly designed sound in a Hollywood film. In Men of the Hill, I could hear everything in the environment. I experienced the mood, the emotion and the action. (Participant 7)

Participant 4, for his part, emphasised the significance of ambient sound in reinforcing the theme of emptiness or barrenness in the film.

It's a beautiful story and what is beautiful about it is the expansive view of the empty space. That space is so empty until you get killed, and you hear the sounds of nature. Actually, nature is celebrating what man is not celebrating in the film, and that's the most beautiful aspect. You listen to the sounds of birds, crickets, and wind seemingly celebrating life and yet in this celebration; there is barrenness. It's a barren world because human beings have chosen to live a barren life. (Participant 4)

Three (27%) of the participants identified the major themes in *Men of the Hill*. This identification was a significant development because I have adequately discussed the thematic concerns of Slow Cinema in Chapter Three. First, Participant 1 characterises the relationship between the film and the viewer regarding how the thematic concerns are addressed.

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There are philosophical themes in Men of the Hill, which in my view, offer a sense of introspection. It is about thinking you are watching a film, only to realize you are making a film in your mind. So, as the viewer, you become part of the film, part of the characters. It is an effective way of communicating themes. (Participant 1)

Participant 3 and Participant 4 identified some of the key themes associated with Slow Cinema in their reading of *Men of the Hill*. They emphasise the theme of existentialism, which I have also discussed extensively in Chapters Three and Five. Participant 3 offers her analytical perspective by describing different scenes in the film within the African context.

The themes were brought out very well. You know, we can see the theme of a dying marriage. Loss of love. There's no communication between Dr Grofki and his wife. I thought every scene in that was compelling — for example, how the food was served. The wife goes off and sits outside. Then by the end of the film, when the doctor brought her flowers, she had already exited the scene. There was no preparation. She just disappeared. We waited for her, but she never came back. Then the doctor himself goes and sits on the balcony, in the same place where his wife used to sit. I felt that scene did justice to Men of the Hill. There was also existential dialogue in the film, which we don't talk about. I saw that aspect of existentialism in the film. Especially in Africa, we don't see existentialism and philosophical thought coming forth in films because people consider the film to be entertainment. For many Kenyans, all they want is entertainment, where people are going to clubs, dancing, and having relationships. In Men of the Hill, Luke was very philosophical. He brought up that existential element that the characters are grappling with the idea of God and faith against their reality. These elements cannot come out very well in a film with jump cuts and hard cuts, especially in Hollywood cinema. (Participant 3)

Participant 4 provides an insightful account of the film's thematic concern by emphasising the notions of existentialism and death in line with Slow Cinema.

When I watched Men of the Hill, I noticed this kind of cynicism in the story. It's like I am rereading North and South (Elizabeth Gaskell 1854) or even rereading Miguel Street (Naipaul 1959), and those fall under what you call existentialism. It's vanity. I would call it structural cynicism in the whole story, where the author laughs at his characters, the author laughs at his world and the idiocy of the whole system. So, when you look at the story in Men of the Hill, it's as if everybody is sick. Very few characters are sober. According to my interpretation, Luke is the only sane person in the world of the story. Everyone else is sick, whether it's the nurse treating Luke, the doctors discussing a movie about a sick doctor, or the workers cleaning the corridors. The sickness of Luke is his inability to fit into a sick system. That's why when he gets killed, or he kills himself, it is because he is trying to escape from a sick system. I

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would also say Men of the Hill is a story of a dying doctor. Dr Grofki is a purveyor of death, whether it is physical or psychological. He has this blight in his hand that everything he touches dies, and that is brought about by the medical board and the witch doctor. This is a doctor who left his calling many years ago, and the fact that he chose to go down that road made him sick. That is the source of his panic attacks. If the doctor can't help himself, then he can't help anybody. That makes him a conveyor of death, whether physical or psychological. See what he does to the hospital chaplain at the end of the film. He beats him to a pulp. Now, going by what Slow Cinema is, the narrative is open to interpretation if you ask me. (Participant 4)

In Chapter Two, I explained neorealism as an essential feature of Slow Cinema, first theorised by Bazin and later advanced by Deleuze. Two (18%) participants highlight the significance of neorealism in *Men of the Hill*. Participant 2 sought to delineate the film's neorealist tendency against the notion of accelerationism often depicted in Hollywood films.

The characters were just being themselves in Men of the Hill. You expect it to be slow, but the film is too catchy even to realize time is running out. Especially the scene where Dr Grofki and the Professor were talking in the car, discussing philosophy. You wouldn't realize they were driving. You're just listening to them. In fact, I felt as if I was arguing with them. It feels real. Slow is reality. It dawned on me that's exactly how life is. In Hollywood movies, life is too fast. (Participant 2)

Participant 3 described what she enjoyed in *Men of the Hill* as far as neorealism is concerned. She specifically discusses the mundane aspects of life portrayed in the film.

One of the things I enjoyed about Men of the Hill is that it brings out that sense of reality because you get the sense that if you're really in the field, you're in the field. You feel that you are actually on the road driving. The film also focuses on the mundane aspects of life, which is good for a Slow Cinema film. You know, just appreciating how people mingle at work, how people relate to each other at work, at home, in marriage, how people drive to work, how you give someone a lift in your car, the conversation you have with that person, you know. The bar scenes, I felt they were very natural and unstaged. You know, people just sitting there doing nothing. It added to that sense of reality, which is very important in Slow Cinema. (Participant 3)

As discussed in Chapters Three and Five, for example, Slow Cinema films tend to place value in the choice of setting, with rural areas and expansive landscapes playing a pivotal role. The rural setting, for instance, stresses how we perceive rural spaces in relation to urban environments. Two (18%) participants describe the relevance of the locations used

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in *Men of the Hill*. One participant offers an interesting perspective of locational attributes in the film.

> *What struck me about Men of the Hill from the beginning was the location where it was shot. It really reinforced what we already know – Kenya is a beautiful country. The imagery in Men of the Hill stays with you even as you go into the narrative. In fact, at some point, the location became a character in the film. The location itself was speaking to us in the absence of dialogue. That was so beautiful.* (Participant 9)

While discussing how the various locations used in *Men of the Hill* contributed to his understanding of the film's narrative, another participant noticed an element of juxtaposition in how the characters interacted with the settings.

> *The setting or the locations were also quite relevant, going by the film's title, Men of the Hill. The hospital, for example, feels like a very secluded place that no one wants to go to, as evidenced by Luke, who didn't want to be there. There was also a very nice juxtaposition between the bar and Dr Grofki's house. While the bar was a very soothing place for Dr Grofki, his house was anything but.* (Participant 8)

Another noticeable feature of *Men of the Hill,* also identified by two (18%) participants, was the acting performances. One participant particularly acknowledges the strong performances of the lead characters in the film.

> *The acting was very strong in the film. The lady that was acting as the doctor's wife, I think she was very outstanding. Joel, who played Dr Grofki, is already a very strong actor. I felt he carried the film and held it very well. You know, when actors are doing acting classes, that's what they study. The hardest part of acting is acting without dialogue.* (Participant 3)

Lastly, a Slow Cinema film is often recognised for its Spatio-temporal qualities. A noticeable characteristic that Participant 3 and Participant 4 observed. For Participant 3, the use of off-screen space enriched the characters in the film, thus expanding the notion of minimalism.

> *I also felt that there was a lot of richness of character. For example, before a particular character enters the scene, we hear the shuffling of feet, even before seeing her. That's a technique you were using a lot in the Slow Cinema film. We were not always seeing the character but hearing the sounds. In Men of the Hill, we are forced to enter deep into the character's mind, and we are drawn into his thoughts. Some characters are grappling with small issues, others with huge issues. Those are two considerable contrasts. One dealing with just the everyday, your wife serving you food, and there's no conversation. Then the next minute, you are having a very high philosophical*

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conversation in the car with a stranger. As in, you're moving between high art and low art or minimalism. (Participant 3)

Similarly, Participant 4 emphasises how time and space merge in the film to enhance characterisation.

Time and space also come together very well in Men of the Hill. It is the physical journey of a medical doctor, going to the hospital, walking around, doing what he is supposed to do, but there's no bridging space or breaking time. That is the beauty of Slow Cinema. This merging of time and space, or what I call dynamic composition, is not broken. So, time and space stretch together instead of having shot after shot or change of location to bridge them. This stretching together of time and space is what gives the film its beauty. (Participant 4)

It was necessary to highlight all the noticeable features of *Men of the Hill* in this section as identified by the Kenyan film experts to demonstrate a contextual understanding of Slow Cinema's conventions. Furthermore, the participants' visualisation of these noticeable features also helps to situate Slow Cinema's narrative and aesthetic strategies within Kenyan cinema while underscoring my position as a researcher-practitioner.

6.4.4 Aims of Slow Cinema

What would you say is the main aim of Slow Cinema either based on your reading of the narrative structure and aesthetic construction of Men of the Hill *or another similar film you have watched?*

To demonstrate how the conventions of Slow Cinema can be situated in Kenyan cinema, it was important to establish whether the participants understood the aims of Slow Cinema with specific reference to *Men of the Hill*. 11 (100%) participants adequately responded to the question. Table 6.4 depicts the six codes ascribed to the thematic category based on the participants' responses. The most recurring response in the interviews was related to the delicate relationship between Slow Cinema and its audience. Additionally, the ability of Slow Cinema to convey a particular message and encourage contemplation among audiences also featured regularly in the participants' responses. Other aims were related to the creative license that Slow Cinema affords to the artist and the simplicity of storytelling freed from commercial influences.

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Table 6.4: Aims of Slow Cinema with reference to Men of the Hill

Category	Thematic category	Codes	Frequency
Aims of Slow Cinema	Focus on narrative structure and aesthetic construction of *Men of the Hill*	Complicate our viewing habits	7
		Conveying a particular message	4
		Contemplation	4
		Celebrates the artists	3
		Offers simplicity of storytelling	2
		Non-commercial cinema	2

Based on his reading of the film, Participant 6 narrates his frustration with the fundamental aim of Slow Cinema, which he says has nothing to do with the audience.

> *For me, the main aim of Slow Cinema is to beat the audience into submission. The film has almost nothing to do with the audience. It comes from a very personal perspective of the director's worldview. The director chooses to put it out there for you. Whether you like it or not, well and good. It's what it is. That makes a Slow Cinema film increasingly abstract. I had to have a conversation with someone to try and make sense of what was happening at the very beginning to piece the narrative elements together. It was not entertaining, apart from the shots that looked great.* (Participant 6)

Participant 1, Participant 2, and Participant 10 noted that the main aim of Slow Cinema was to convey a particular message to the audience. Participant 1 captures the essence of what the other two participants shared.

> *I think the message is the most important aspect of Slow Cinema because it is hard to fall in love with the characters. It feels the characters are small in their world. It rejects everything that is expected of conventional cinema so that what remains is the message.* (Participant 1)

For Participant 3, Participant 5, and Participant 8, it was clear that Slow Cinema's main aim is to invite the viewer to contemplate personal and shared issues. As such, participant 3 enthusiastically gives a detailed analysis of the phenomenon.

> *The main aim of Slow Cinema is for us to contemplate. We're grappling with everyday life issues. We're taking in the environment and the scenery. Everything is significant. We're disconnecting from the noise of the world. Too much noise and brouhaha. That is one of the aspects that came out clearly in Men of the Hill. Very soothing and relaxing. It's like we're sipping our coffee quietly and just enjoying the sounds. We're taking in the mountains, every herb, and every tree. We can see the deer. The camera moves forward, then it pans right and left, and through that, we can see the forest and*

the skittishness of the deer when they see movement and start running instantly. So, you don't feel like they're moving because of the camera, but that's how they react in nature if they see anything in the bushes. (Participant 3)

Three participants concluded that the main aim of Slow Cinema is to celebrate the artists and allow them to express themselves without yielding to the demands of financial gain. Finally, participant 4 offers an explanation that resonates with the views of Participant 6 and Participant 11.

I would say that the main aim of Slow Cinema is to celebrate the artists. I think for the first time; the artist gets a chance to do what he wants. It is about the artist seeing the world from his perspective and communicating to the world how he sees it. You're not making the film for financial gain. Ideally, the artist tells the viewer, I don't want your money. Just your thoughts and time. Just sit down and watch, and if it is garbage, call it so, but let's have fun. It's like living your fantasy, and I think that's the beauty of Slow Cinema. You can do what nobody else can do in this world of cinema. (Participant 4)

It can be inferred that the participants had a clear understanding of the aims of Slow Cinema, consistent with the arguments laid out in the preceding chapters.

6.4.5 Spectatorial address in Slow Cinema

How in your expert opinion would the average Kenyan film viewer visualize, interpret or react, to Men of the Hill?

Slow Cinema complicates the relationship between cinematic duration and viewing by thwarting the spectators' expectation of narrative exposition. The participants' responses in this section reveal how the average Kenyan film viewer would generally react to the conventions of Slow Cinema used in *Men of the Hill*. There were seven codes within this thematic category, which attracted varied responses, as portrayed in Table 6.5.

Table 6.5: Spectatorial address in Men of the Hill

Category	Thematic category	Codes	Frequency
Slow Cinema and spectatorship	Focus on the spectatorial address in *Men of the Hill*	Resist Slow Cinema	8
		There is an audience for Slow Cinema	6
		Difficult to watch but appreciable	5
		Requires time to embrace Slow Cinema	5
		React negatively due to Hollywood	4
		A new experience	2

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According to the participants, the average Kenyan viewer would resist Slow Cinema. However, all the participants added that such a reaction could be temporary. Some of the reasons given are as follows.

> *The average Kenyan viewer would be lost in terms of the Slow Cinema style. Some of my peers who watched the film complained that they felt they were being made to sit down and read the film like a book instead of being entertained. It felt like the film was cracking their brains. In the end, you have to sit through it to understand how the film ends, which is a tough thing to do for the average viewer.* (Participant 11)

> *The average Kenyan viewer is very lazy and uninformed, and yet, Slow Cinema is not for the average person. It is a cinema of opposition. If there's no thrill in the film, it will be tough for them to appreciate it. However, I am making that argument from my ivory tower. I have seen that the film has already received over 1000 views on YouTube, and it is barely two to three weeks later, and at the end of the day, it will probably have more.* (Participant 4)

> *Just the average Kenyan viewer. I don't think they'll give time to this kind of film. I think there will be a lot of backlash to it because we are a society that has been fed and bred on Hollywood. So, I think the average Kenyan viewer will find Men of the Hill very painful to watch, especially if you have to put them through three hours of watching it.* (Participant 6)

Other participants gave varied responses acknowledging the difficulty of watching a Slow Cinema film while hinting that it would take more time and knowledge for the average Kenyan viewer to appreciate cinematic slowness.

> *Since the average Kenyan viewer is used to fast cinema, I think they would react negatively to the film. However, that would only be the first reaction. With time, they are going to get used to it. We can introduce Slow Cinema at much lower levels through education. That way, it will be easy to integrate Slow Cinema in Kenyan cinema.* (Participant 10)

> *In the wake of Netflix, where Kenyan audiences are drawn more to drama, crime and action genres, will Slow Cinema be received? Well, I would want to see how Kenyans would welcome something different and new. Since many people don't know anything about Slow Cinema, it would be a new experience. I also want to know if Kenyans will sit through a three-hour film. So, the duration could probably hinder the film's viewership in light of typical Hollywood films stretching to 90-minutes at most. Nonetheless, I think there is a scope to tell Slow Cinema stories for the experience and narrative.* (Participant 9)

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I think most of them would say it is long and boring. Couldn't all these be compressed into one hour? That's the average film viewer who is used to watching Hollywood films. I think it will be very challenging for them to understand, slow down, and watch the whole film. A small percentage of cinema lovers might enjoy the film. The good thing, though, is that Slow Cinema is now available through Men of the Hill. We have to educate our audiences about how to watch cinema and show them that there are different forms of cinema aside from Hollywood. Yes, it may be slow and long and may be boring, but then it also has a strong message to communicate, which other forms don't. (Participant 8)

Lastly, three participants indicated that there might be a small audience for Slow Cinema in Kenya. Participant 4 said that there is a growing middle class in Kenya that might appreciate Slow Cinema. At the same time, Participant 6 spoke of screening the film to a creative audience, who may appreciate it for art's sake. Finally, participant 3 explained her views on the scholarly appreciation of Slow Cinema in more detail.

So, at the onset, the average Kenyan film viewer may not quite understand what this is. It may take some education, some push, and some time. However, film scholars and students who watch it may appreciate it. It's what you call an acquired taste. But if many filmmakers made such films, especially in Africa, where it is even more real, more people would start taking it up. For Kenyans, this is something that they would appreciate if they were exposed to it over time. Although sometimes we end up misjudging audiences and thinking they would not like this, and yet they haven't been given a choice. (Participant 3)

In light of the above assertions, it would be reasonable to conclude that despite the resistance that is commonly associated with the mode of spectatorial address in Slow Cinema, the average Kenyan viewer may still appreciate other unique features in the Slow Cinema genre.

6.4.6 Challenges in Kenyan cinema

What, in your view, are the main challenges in Kenyan cinema in terms of narrative and aesthetic styles used?

In Chapter Four, I discussed how Slow Cinema could be situated in Kenyan cinema in light of historical, cultural, and socio-economic issues. I specifically examined the significant challenges in Kenyan cinema regarding thematic representations, the didactic narrative technique, and aesthetic features while theorising how Slow Cinema can negotiate with the local to respond to these challenges. Hence, it was crucial to gain insight into the

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experiences and perspectives of Kenyan film experts concerning the difficulties in Kenyan cinema. There were seven codes in this thematic category, as shown in Table 6.6.

Table 6.6: Challenges in Kenyan cinema

Category	Thematic category	Codes	Frequency
Challenges in Kenyan cinema	Focus on narrative and aesthetic styles used	Poor storytelling	9
		Negative influence from Hollywood	5
		Inadequate research	4
		Resistance to change	4
		Poor infrastructure	4
		Budgetary constraints	3
		Poor education and training	3

The participants identified poor storytelling techniques as the major challenge in Kenyan cinema. Participant 3 was more concerned about characterisation, plot lines and action sequences in Kenyan stories.

> *In terms of narrative, scriptwriters are unwilling to delve much into the character because that requires a lot of preparation and analysis. So, sometimes you find that the plot lines are very broad. Sometimes I find we have too many scenes, which are just moving from action to action. We just need to allow the scene to breathe. We're not giving our audiences time to breathe, and yet we're trying to teach them about everyday family life compared to a high art movie full of special effects. These are some of the discussions or even arguments you'll be having with Kenyan film producers. That poses a challenge when it comes to narrative and aesthetics.* (Participant 3)

Participant 4 noted that Kenyan stories tend to focus more on urban life, yet stories set in rural and peri-urban areas are well suited to Kenyan reality. Participant 2 expressed her disappointment in the way Kenyan stories are generally crafted.

> *In Kenyan cinema, we don't want to change, and that's our problem. We just want to have a small thing going in our stories, you know, make people laugh here and there. Secondly, our stories tend to glorify poverty and make fun of our poor lives and yet, not everyone in Kenya is poor. The reason why we're not watched globally is that we are self-defeating. Thirdly, the stories are too localised in our mother tongues. It is good to make films that anyone in the world can appreciate.* (Participant 2)

Participant 6 shared the same sentiments as Participant 2, but he was more concerned about the technical aspects of storytelling.

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I am thinking about the quality of our stories and how they're crafted. They are more about telling rather than showing. This weakness ultimately robs the audience of the experience of seeing the film and understanding it. So, lots of Kenyan movies fall short in that particular aspect. Secondly, our stories are very pedestrian. They are not very well thought out. They lack what I might call technical finesse. I think that has made it very difficult for the works of local filmmakers to be accepted. (Participant 6)

Another major challenge identified by the participants was adopting negative storytelling tendencies from Hollywood by Kenyan screenwriters. Participant 4 was categorical about this perceived weakness.

I think it is unfortunate that we're learning from Hollywood, especially how we tell our stories. That's the most disheartening aspect. Hollywood depicts gun violence, and sex and these are the worst ideas we are picking from the west. (Participant 4)

For Participant 7, the negative influence from Hollywood can be attributed to the erosion of the Kenyan culture.

We have not embraced the Kenyan culture, and that's worrying. We want to get so close to Western productions and Netflix, and we forget that Netflix is not the goal. The majority of our audience is not the Netflix audience. Our audience is the people that we see every day. For example, if you look at Nigeria, their productions are unique, but the same cannot be said of Kenyan productions. We need to change that and not feel that we must use English for our productions to be successful. Even if we have to use English, the character nuances should be Kenyan. (Participant 7)

Participant 8 agrees with the above assertion and advocates for indigenous Kenyan stories.

There's a lot of Hollywood in us, which has watered down our cultural views and who we are. So, I think it would be good, in a sense, to go back and to try and look for stories that depict who we are as a people and have more of those stories. I'd also say that we need to open up our minds to different kinds of stories in terms of narratives. It can be stories about our ancestors or independence heroes to inspire and inform young children. (Participant 8)

Other participants discussed the issue of insufficient research in the process of developing Kenyan stories. Participant 5 and Participant 11 provided clear examples to emphasise this challenge.

Usually, most film narratives in Kenya are not well-researched. The ideas are half-baked, and they lack depth. They like to play it safe with dialogue. This is a major shortcoming. For example, I was talking to a police officer recently, and he told me

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that most of the crime dramas we have on Kenyan TV are not based on facts from a security point of view, which can be very misleading to the public. It is always good to take more time in research before you write a script. (Participant 5)

Your average Kenyan screenwriter is very individualistic in the manner of storytelling. They don't engage in serious research to understand characterization and plot. I remember in 2018, Netflix made a call for scripts across Africa, and it was such a shame that not a single script from Kenya was selected. The most successful scripts were from Nigeria. (Participant 11)

Another key challenge was poor infrastructure, where for instance, Participant 9 raised several critical issues while giving a sense of optimism for the future.

I think Kenyan filmmakers are talented, but the film industry itself is not at par, for example, with Nigerian cinema and South African cinema. Kenyan cinema is also a far cry from European, Hollywood and Bollywood cinemas. We have good actors and great performances. Our stories and characters are beautiful. However, we have major challenges in terms of infrastructure. We're limited in terms of aesthetics and cinematography in particular. We can't much up to Hollywood standards. Otherwise, there's a lot of promise for Kenyan films, and I know that Netflix has started opening up to Kenyan markets, where they are accepting more Kenyan films. Now is the time to come up with more content. (Participant 9)

In summary, it was observed that Kenyan filmmakers are resistant to change when it comes to experimenting with new ideas, and they would rather imitate what has already been done (Participant 3; Participant 5; Participant 10). Participant 1 noted that budget constraints hamper Kenyan filmmakers, and therefore "they cannot go big with their stories". He also pointed out the poor standards of education and training amongst Kenyan filmmakers, which ultimately affects their productions both narratively and aesthetically. Participant 11 characterised this challenge in clear terms.

First of all, the majority of our filmmakers have no formal training in filmmaking. These are people who are simply trying to earn a living through film. At the <agency>, we have tried to assess the skillset of our filmmakers, and it wasn't very pleasant to learn that most of them simply learned on the job. Some of them are former journalists who think journalistic experience is enough to make a film, and yet, most of them need to be taught how to write good scripts. (Participant 11)

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In conclusion, it is clear from the above responses that there is an opportunity to explore various ways of addressing the existing challenges in Kenyan cinema through Slow Cinema, as proposed in the next section.

6.4.7 Addressing challenges in Kenyan cinema

In your view, how would the narrative and aesthetic conventions of Slow Cinema be used to address the above challenges?

Chapter Four (section 4.5.2) proposed a preliminary model for mapping Slow Cinema in Kenyan cinema. I specifically suggested four essential strategies that can be employed to ensure that Slow Cinema and its conventions take hold in Kenyan cinema. The strategies include promoting the experimental film culture, adopting Slow Cinema themes in Kenyan stories, using Slow Cinema to tell personal narratives, and creating a spontaneous dialogue between the film and the viewer through slowness. Expert thinking in this section offers an opportunity to explore further how Slow Cinema can be mapped in Kenyan cinema while addressing the challenges discussed in the preceding section. Table 6.7 indicates the three codes within the category of *addressing challenges in Kenyan cinema*.

Table 6.7: Addressing challenges in Kenyan cinema through slowness

Category	Thematic category	Codes	Frequency
Addressing challenges in Kenyan cinema	Focus on narrative and aesthetic conventions of Slow Cinema	Applying the aesthetic of slowness within our stories and filmmaking practices (hybridity)	9
		Capture the reality in our country	6
		Rethinking our policies, infrastructure, and strategies	5

The participants suggested various ways of applying the aesthetic of slowness in addressing Kenyan cinema's narrative and aesthetic challenges. Participant 11 thinks Slow Cinema presents an opportunity to narrate some untold stories in Kenya.

> *We have many stories that haven't been explored from a filmmaking point of view. For example, many British nationals from the British army settled down in Laikipia* (a region in Kenya's Rift-valley)*. The area is picturesque, and we have very beautiful stories about these British Kenyans that tend to crop up in the news now and then. I think the Slow Cinema style would be the most appropriate to tell such stories. In other words, we could include Slow Cinema within our style of filmmaking to tell nice and authentic stories that have not been told yet.* (Participant 11)

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Likewise, Participant 8 talked about the relevance of slowness in depicting the Kenyan way of life aesthetically and narratively.

> *Some Slow Cinema techniques, such as the long-take, can be easily infused within our filmmaking practices. Slow narrative devices can also allow us to see the slower parts of Kenyan life, for example, the process of a woman going to fetch water because that's our Kenyan reality. You will not find that in a Hollywood film.* (Participant 8)

For Participant 6, Slow Cinema can provide real solutions to some of Kenyan cinema's narrative and aesthetic problems.

> *I particularly enjoyed the beautiful shots in Men of the Hill, showcasing many places that are completely out of the ordinary from what we're used to. I think these are aspects of Slow Cinema that could add value to Kenyan cinema. Slow Cinema can be used to showcase our great countryside and the environment. Another challenge that we find in Kenyan cinema has to do with budgetary constraints. In that regard, Slow Cinema allows the filmmaker to creatively develop a single shot that can do most of what is required effortlessly and directly. We can employ some of these techniques in our local stories. It can be a fusion between whatever we have borrowed from the west and whatever we can borrow from Slow Cinema, not to mention our very traditional way of storytelling.* (Participant 6)

The participants also described how Slow Cinema could be used to capture the Kenyan reality. Finally, participant 10 offers his thoughts on how the slow realism depicted in *Men of the Hill* can speak to some of the challenges discussed.

> *I really enjoyed the beautiful sceneries in Men of the Hill. The aerial shots were very good. We don't usually get to see such good sceneries in typical films. Kenyan filmmakers can borrow that aspect from Slow Cinema to learn how to spend a little more time portraying the settings. This way, the audience can be able to see reality. Let me use the analogy of football, where sometimes the referee needs to watch the action in slow motion through VAR to understand if a foul was committed or take a penalty decision. It means that sometimes you have to slow down everything in life to understand the issues affecting us and how they can be addressed. So, in the cinema, we can do the same. It is a question of how we can use slowness to the advantage of story-telling.* (Participant 10)

Another participant describes how Slow Cinema can be used to address pressing socio-economic and historical challenges in Kenya.

> *Slow Cinema can help filmmakers concentrate on getting the key challenges that we're facing in Kenyan society addressed. For instance, we have a problem with corruption.*

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I think there's an opportunity to use the Slow Cinema narrative style to show how the problem of corruption started in Kenya from the days of Jomo Kenyatta (Kenya's first president) to the present. If such a film is shown to audiences countrywide, it might be the first step. Many other historical events in Kenya can be depicted through Slow Cinema. Kenyan filmmakers should not be afraid of starting something new. (Participant 7)

Finally, the participants proposed a radical shift in policy-making, infrastructural development and filmmaking strategies for Slow Cinema to thrive in Kenya. Participant 4 captures the essence of what other participants shared.

Slow Cinema is a luxury that poor people can ill afford. What do I mean by that? It is something that we must consciously invest in. We have time, and we have money to spend. So, for Slow Cinema to catch on, we need to develop an infrastructure that supports innovation in film. I can tell you for a fact that very few people are going to pour money into Slow Cinema. But if you have an intelligent mind who understands film, they would be able to say, oh my God, this is a beautiful script which is slow, and we need to develop this type of cinema. They're going to set some money aside and do it. The Kenya Film Commission can do that. So, unless we're consciously thinking about policy and building knowledge and capacity to understand what Slow Cinema is about, it will be difficult. (Participant 4)

Participant 9 suggests practical ways that can help to situate slowness in Kenyan cinema.

There is potential for Slow Cinema films to be explored within the Kenyan context. However, I do feel that there is a need to create awareness around the concept. If good marketing is done, that would be key in driving the audience to embrace this new art form that we are trying to present. While I understand that we might not be watching a Slow Cinema film every week, there is may be a chance that we can showcase one Slow Cinema film every month. I think Slow Cinema is the type of film that relates to our audience, especially the elites or the intellectuals, if not the older audiences. There is a demographic issue to consider. (Participant 9)

Expert thinking in this section demonstrates that there are solid prospects for Slow Cinema to be situated in Kenyan cinema as an art form and as a tool for addressing the existing challenges in Kenyan cinema and the country.

6.4.8 Expert interpretation of web survey results

What is your interpretation of the results obtained from the survey of selected Kenyan viewers regarding Men of the Hill*?*

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In line with the integrative data analysis proposed in the mixed methods design, it was necessary to generate expert explanations for the web survey results. Accordingly, I asked the participants to deduce from the results provided and infer the selected viewers' visualisation and interpretation of *Men of the Hill*. Some of the expert explanations captured in this section are propositions that are not necessarily dictated by the web survey results themselves. Additionally, some statements are speculative and having no logical connection with the results. This section may also be relevant to the participant's responses in section 6.3.4, where they were asked to speculate on the average Kenyan film viewer's response to *Men of the Hill*. Two codes were assigned to the thematic category depicted in Table 6.8.

Table 6.8: Expert interpretation of selected viewers' responses to Men of the Hill

Category	Thematic category	Codes	Frequency
Expert explanations	Focus on the interpretation of web survey results	Did not find the selected viewers' responses surprising at all	7
		Found the selected viewers' responses somewhat surprising	4

Seven (64%) participants, representing a significant majority of those sampled, did not find the results of the viewers' visualisation and interpretation of *Men of the Hill* surprising at all. Participant 3, for example, analysed the viewers' emotional response to the film.

> *Regarding the viewers' emotional response to the film and how only 26% thought it was very strong, I think it is accurate with Slow Cinema, which provokes more of the mind than your emotions. So, compared to Hollywood films, which are directly connected to how you feel, Slow Cinema forces you to enter more into the thought process because your emotional feelings are suppressed. You don't come out thinking I totally hate the characters or I totally love them, just like those respondents (26%) who remained neutral on the question. It is something that the audience is still processing. It's something you'd have to watch with an informed mindset. You have to be a bit of an informed viewer.* (Participant 3)

Participant 7 enthusiastically agrees with the viewers' suggestions that Kenyan filmmakers should be making Slow Cinema films regularly.

> *I am excited to see that many (40%) of the respondents think that Kenyan filmmakers should be making these types of films (Slow Cinema). It shows that as much as our audiences like to watch Hollywood films, they still appreciate new content produced locally. So, I think I am going to make a Slow Cinema film in future.* (Participant 7)

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Participant 10 commented on the viewers' general enthusiasm for the film, which in his interpretation, suggests that the Slow Cinema techniques used in *Men of the Hill* may not have hindered the viewers' comprehension of the plot, characters, and themes.

> *I am not surprised that the respondents thought Kenyan filmmakers should be making Slow Cinema films. For me, Men of the Hill was not that slow. You can call it a Slow Cinema movie, but I don't think it was that slow. It depends on the viewer. We have fast thinkers and slow thinkers. For example, if a teacher introduces a new topic to students, he needs to talk slowly so that they can understand. So, maybe the viewers of Men of the Hill were eager to watch this new cinema-style that they may not have found it to be that slow. That's my argument.* (Participant 10)

Another participant agreed with the results when asked to interpret the viewers' responses to the plot of *Men of the Hill*. While he did not find the results surprising, he describes the interplay between plot and character and how the viewer reacts to them.

> *Regarding only 26% of the respondents understanding the film's plot and the even distribution of other viewers' responses to the question, I would use an onion to describe the situation. You have to peel the layers to get to the crux of the storyline or the plot. That's what makes the Slow Cinema narrative unique and exceptional. If the viewer is not paying attention to the story, there is a chance that they would not be able to understand the plot. However, for me, it goes beyond the plot. I think if you understand the character, you're likely going to understand the plot. The plot should be character-driven. The filmmaker wants the viewer to move with the character and, by doing so, understand the plot.* (Participant 9)

Participant 2 agreed with the viewers' stamp of approval for *Men of the Hill*. She shares a personal experience in regards to the viewers' recommendation of the film to others.

> *I am not surprised that a significant majority of the respondents would recommend somebody else to watch Men of the Hill, and yet, Slow Cinema is not your usual cup of tea. It is very interesting. I told my Mum to watch the film, and she really liked it. My Dad is 60 years old. He enjoyed it too. In fact, he watched it to the end. I think that alone speaks volumes. I think these are the types of films we need in Kenya currently.* (Participant 2)

Four (36%) of the participants found some of the web survey results surprising and seemed to slightly disagree with the viewers' visualisation or interpretation of the film. In section 6.3.4, for example, Participant 6 had speculated that the average Kenyan film viewer would find *Men of the Hill* very painful to watch. Consequently, he did not hide his dismay when asked to deduce the viewers' responses from the data.

I am surprised that a sizeable majority of the survey respondents were actually engaged in the film's narrative because it's not a very easy film to watch in a way that you can say you were engaged from the very beginning to the end. I know I struggled with the film. So, I am very surprised that the respondents would find it engaging. (Participant 6)

Participant 1 was also surprised by the results and proceeds to raise demographical issues among the factors that should be considered when interpreting the viewers' responses.

Initially, I thought that Kenyans would find it difficult to watch Men of the Hill because of its slow style. Still, I am surprised that 70% actually enjoyed watching the film, just extrapolating from the data. My only issue would be the demographic that was watching. These are people who had Internet access, which is an indicator of social class, especially if someone has to stream a three-hour film on YouTube. (Participant 1)

Similarly, Participant 11 was surprised, but she offers a reasonable explanation with specific reference to the viewers who remained neutral to the questions put forward.

Analysing the viewers' reactions in terms of whether they will want to watch another film similar to Men of the Hill, I would say that if somebody understands the narrative or plot, they would not mind watching again. However, if they were just watching for curiosity's sake, they may want to retain the old format because man is a creature of habit. So, it may take a long time for someone to develop a new habit of watching Slow Cinema films, and that's why from the results, we can see that 30% of the respondents remained neutral. They may not have been enthusiastic about watching another Slow Cinema film, but at the same time, they kept their options open, so to speak. (Participant 11)

Lastly, Participant 4 may have been surprised by the results pointing to a significant understanding of the film's plot by the survey respondents. Still, he appreciates the impact of Slow Cinema going forward.

About the plot of Men of the Hill, as extrapolated from the results, it seems that a significant majority of the respondents understood the plot if we're to include those who moderately understood it. If they were actually truthful, it means we're talking about a very intelligent audience here because Men of the Hill has a very complex plot structure. This result, then, dispels the myth that Slow Cinema is elitist. It means that they could appreciate the cinematography, the story and also understand the plot. (Participant 4)

In conclusion, it can be suggested that the viewers' visualisation and interpretations of *Men of the Hill* were largely accurate, as acknowledged by a significant majority of the experts. However, the experts who seemed to disagree with the results slightly may have raised valid arguments that should be considered in the overall analysis of the data.

6.4.9 Men of the Hill as a successful Kenyan Slow Cinema film

Would you say that Men of the Hill is a successful Kenyan Slow Cinema film, considering what each of these words means – narrative, minimalism, and indeterminacy as indicative of meaningful artistic expression? Successful in this context implies whether the film suits the primary definition of Slow Cinema and its implications for Kenyan cinema.

This study is primarily concerned with producing context-centred knowledge of Slow Cinema in conformity with the main research question. Consequently, it was meaningful to deduce from the responses provided if *Men of the Hill* can be considered a successful Slow Cinema film in the context of Kenyan cinema and based on the situatedness of its conventions. Five codes were assigned to the thematic category shown in Table 6.9.

Table 6.9: Expert opinions on Men of the Hill *as a successful Kenyan Slow Cinema film*

Category	Thematic category	Codes	Frequency
The impact of Slow Cinema	Focus on *Men of the Hill* as a successful Kenyan Slow Cinema film	Yes, it adheres to the style	5
		Yes, for academic purposes	3
		Yes, it reflects our current society and value systems	1
		Yes, it should be submitted to festivals	1
		May be, cautiously optimistic	1

A large majority (91%), representing 10 out of the 11 experts sampled, said that they would consider *Men of the Hill* a successful film indicative of meaningful artistic expression in Slow Cinema, and based on such key indicators as narrative, minimalism, and indeterminacy. Of the 10 participants who considered the film a success, five (45%) said their verdict was based on the film's adherence to the Slow Cinema style. Participant 8 was enthusiastic about the film's success.

Outright, yes! It is a success. This is the first-ever Kenyan Slow Cinema film. It's an amazing Slow Cinema film in terms of cinematography, aesthetics and narrative. I would call it a textbook definition of Slow Cinema. (Participant 8)

Another participant credited the film for introducing him to the Slow Cinema genre, even though he initially struggled to understand the style.

Yes, I would say that it is very successful. I think from my end; it has also been a moment of education. I have learned a thing or two about the aims of Slow Cinema. When you look at the film's aesthetic and technical elements, I think it really stands out and will be a benchmark for many others to come in the foreseeable future. (Participant 6)

Three (27%) considered the film a success because of its scholarly attributes and potential. Participant 3 represents the views of other like-minded experts.

I would definitely say it's very successful. Even future students who are doing their Master's degree would actually want to study the film and for anyone else who is interested in making a Slow Cinema film and not just in Kenya but the rest of Africa. (Participant 3)

Participant 4 stated three reasons for considering *Men of the Hill* as a successful Kenyan Slow Cinema film.

Yeah, I would say yes because of the following reasons. One, the film reflects our current society. Two, the idea reflects part of traditional storytelling, which is slow, and yet it is very engaging. Three, it is also interesting because we can appreciate ourselves in Slow Cinema. We are cutting a niche. It helps to trailblaze. (Participant 4)

Another participant was thrilled by the narrative and aesthetic constructions in *Men of the Hill* and suggested ways to popularise the film.

I think Men of the Hill should be shown out there to as many people as possible. I think you should send it to festivals. It is a gripping and engaging film with strong social messages. It has brilliant cinematography, brilliant characterisation and a great plot. (Participant 9)

Participant 11 was cautiously optimistic about *Men of the Hill* being deemed a success, suggesting that success needs to be measured in financial returns and critics' reviews.

I would be cautious about saying that Men of the Hill is a successful Kenyan Slow Cinema film. First, the study only sampled Kenyan viewers who had Internet access. Then secondly, a film's success is dependent on returns and ratings. It may take a

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long time for Men of the Hill to meet these particular requirements for success. However, going by the results from the sampled participants, it seems there was a certain level of success. Still, if the film was screened among diverse people living in different communities in Kenya, we may begin to know whether the film is a success or not, even in terms of narrative and aesthetics. (Participant 11).

The suggestion to screen *Men of the Hill* to various communities in Nairobi, for instance, is a valuable one. While such a screening strategy was not possible and remains impossible due to COVID-19 protocols in Kenya, I appreciate the point that communities beyond those individuals who can be present online can offer valuable feedback on the film.

Overall, it would be practical to suggest that *Men of the Hill* was well received by the Kenyan film experts sampled in the study. The following section discusses the findings from the two databases with specific reference to the concepts and themes presented in the previous chapters.

6.5 Discussion of Findings

This research aimed to establish how a Kenyan Slow Cinema film can convey the form and style of Slow Cinema while retaining a sense of geo-cultural specificity. Central to this purpose was how Kenyan film viewers and experts might receive and make sense of a Kenyan Slow Cinema film based on their understanding of narrative, minimalism, and indeterminacy of plot as the main conventions of Slow Cinema. The purpose was consistent with Dixson's (2008: 123) assertion that the unique nature or "distinctiveness of the results, because of the locale, can provide insights into how to approach an answer to a problem". Similarly, the research was informed by the writings of Schrader (2018: 11) and Çağlayan (2018: 16), who argued that Slow Cinema could not be generalised "because not all filmmakers belonging to the tradition of slowness share an identical, standardised or universal purpose". Therefore, the findings of the web survey and expert interviews have provided insights into the much-debated question of Slow Cinema's context and situatedness concerning the study's main research question. The section includes a discussion of significant findings related to the literature on Slow Cinema, its narrative and aesthetic elements, and its functions. Also contained in the discussion is a comparison of research findings between the web survey and interview to allow for the sequential integration of two forms of data, consistent with the mixed-methods design. The chapter

concludes with a discussion on the relevance of auteur theory to the significant findings presented in this chapter.

6.5.1 Summary of significant findings

The summary of significant research findings discussed here are comprised of seven themes:

- The context of Slow Cinema,
- Narrative and formal elements of Slow Cinema,
- Cinematic minimalism and indeterminacy,
- Appreciation of Slow Cinema,
- Kenyan cinema, and
- The implications of Slow Cinema for Kenya's film culture.

Some conclusions relate primarily to the web survey results, some to the expert interviews, and some are a product of the successful integration of both databases. All of these conclusions help contribute to the production of context-centred knowledge of Slow Cinema in Kenya, which would be informative to the debated question of Slow Cinema's appeal to diverse historical, cultural and socio-economic contexts.

6.5.1.1 The context of Slow Cinema

A substantial majority (66%) of the surveyed respondents indicated no previous exposure to Slow Cinema. In comparison, a slight majority (55%) of the interviewed experts similarly affirmed their lack of exposure to the genre. This study's results emphasised that Slow Cinema is a predominantly new genre in Kenya, giving credence to the supposition that *Men of the Hill* is the first-ever Kenyan Slow Cinema film. Further, the results of participants who had actual exposure (14%) for the surveyed respondents and (36%) for the interviewed experts confirmed my earlier assertion (see section 1.1) that much less is known about Slow Cinema in Kenya. Nonetheless, the results support earlier claims by (Brady 2016; Çağlayan 2018; Luca & Jorge 2016; Jaffe 2014, Lim 2016) that Slow Cinema can be expanded geographically and historically despite its Eurocentric identity. This study's conclusion emphasises the importance of systematic research into the deployment of Slow Cinema within an African (Kenyan) context.

6.5.1.2 Narrative-formal expressiveness of Men of the Hill

Slow Cinema, as I have shown in Chapter One (section 1.2.1), is often perceived to be resistant to narrative development (James 2010: 5; Shaviro 2010: 1) based on its dedramatised narrative structures (Luca & Jorge 2016: 9). This perception has raised questions of how the spectator can read the Slow Cinema narrative. As the results of the web survey showed, 34% of the respondents claimed that they were very much engaged in the narrative of *Men of the Hill*, while 36% were moderately engaged. Combined, this represents a significant majority (70%) of survey respondents who had a considerably high engagement with the film's narrative. Furthermore, a far greater majority (90%) of interviewed experts accurately identified the narrative elements in the film that are associated with Slow Cinema. The study, therefore, concludes that despite Slow Cinema's perceived resistance to narrative development, the viewer can still identify the narrative strategies used while making sense of the film's storyline in various ways. This conclusion is consistent with Taberham's (2018: 26) deduction that when the viewer's comprehension of the narrative is frustrated, they are called upon to make bolder inferences to discern the story presented obliquely on the screen or even abandon the idea of trying to understand the film in its conventional sense. In the end, Taberham argues, the slow narrative may expand the viewer's understandings and scope of engagement with the film. To this end, the results provide insight into the relationship between a Slow Cinema film and the spectator regarding narrative exposition.

Additionally, a sizeable majority (48%) of the surveyed respondents believed that the characters had substantially contributed to their narrative comprehension of the film, while 29% were moderately inclined to think so. Hence, the study found that, to a large extent, the characters in *Men of the Hill* played a crucial role in shaping the film's overall narrative structure. The emphasis on characterisation in a Slow Cinema film agrees with the literature regarding art-cinema narratives.[170] Bordwell (1985: 208) referred to the characters in art-cinema narratives as lacking distinct traits and motives. Thus, the focus shifted to psychological realism, allowing the character to reveal the self to other characters and the viewers inadvertently. This mode of character revelation consequently increases narrative comprehension. Bordwell also insists that the art-cinema narrative develops mise-en-scène

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[170] Slow Cinema films are often associated with art-cinema narratives (see Çağlayan 2018: 3)

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cues to enhance the character's mood: static postures, hidden glances, aimless walks, and emotion-filled landscape, which may lead the viewer to a higher engagement with the character as with *Men of the Hill*. In a similar reference, Speidel (2007: 66) notes that characters in art-cinema narration are less active or even psychotic, with the story progressing more slowly than in classical narration. Speidel's assertion explains why the viewers of *Men of the Hill* thought that characters contributed to their narrative engagement with the film.

Recent work in Slow Cinema has also shown that themes are significant in narrative engagement (Çağlayan 2014: 27; Jaffe 2014: 680). As such, 27% of the interviewed experts identified the major themes in *Men of the Hill*. Participant 3 and Participant 4, for instance, emphasised the theme of existentialism, which I have discussed extensively in my analysis of Béla Tarr's *The Turin Horse* (See Chapter Three). The study's findings, in turn, indicate that philosophical themes also play an essential role in the narrative engagement of a Slow Cinema film. In considering of the expert responses presented in the previous section, it is noteworthy that the themes of loneliness, incommunicability, existentialism, emptiness, and spiritual malaise were accurately identified by the participants, similar to my close reading of the thematic concerns of *Men of the Hill* in Chapter Five (section 5.4.1). Another element contributing to narrative engagement in the film identified by the participants was neorealism, which I have discussed in Chapter Two. The result offers empirical support for previous and most recent claims (Deleuze 1986: 212; Luca & Jorge 2016: 7) that neorealism is a trademark of Slow Cinema films. As Participant 3 noted, *Men of the Hill*'s emphasis on the mundane aspects of life as a portrayal of reality contributed to the narrative engagement in the film, particularly in Dr Grofki's travelling sequences, hospital workers engaging in daily routines, and patrons passing the time in the bar. This observation confirms Cardullo's (2011: 19) conclusion that neorealist filmmakers work with minimal resources in real locations to strongly convey the plight of ordinary people oppressed by social or political conditions beyond their control, hence neorealism.

Looking at *Men of the Hill*'s formal and aesthetic expressiveness more closely, the role of cinematography in a Slow Cinema film appears particularly interesting. As the results suggest, a sizeable majority (66%) of the surveyed respondents thought that cinematography significantly influenced their engagement with the film's narrative. In this

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regard, 27% of the respondents made a similar observation, although they indicated that their engagement with the film's narrative due to cinematography was moderate. On the other hand, a more significant majority (82%) of the interviewed experts believed cinematography had much more influence on their engagement with the film's narrative. Of significance, the participants identified the fixed camera, the average shot length, and the long-take as the critical formal elements that influenced the film's narrative. The study concludes that the formal elements of Slow Cinema can be used to achieve a pleasing aesthetic experience for the film viewer. This outcome is contrary to Schrader (2018: 21), who found that the Slow Cinema aesthetic lacks a functional reason and an intellectual justification. It merely insists on delaying cuts, employing the fixed camera, avoiding shot coverage, and intensifying the mundane more than necessary. However, the result is in line with Grønstad's (2016: 279) finding that Slow Cinema is a visualisation of presence rather than the mere framing of empty time and empty shots.

Lastly, 55% of interviewed experts were excited about using diegetic sound in *Men of the Hill*. Participant 7, for example, described his engagement with the film's narrative based on how ambient sound was used to enhance narrative engagement (see section 6.4.3). This result suggests that the viewer's engagement with narrative also involves the intentional use of ambient sound, emphasising the quotidian life. In related work, Çağlayan (2018: 4) found that Slow Cinema sound comprises of synchronised multi-layered elements designed in harmony to highlight the significance and believability of a diegetic world. In light of this, it can be concluded that using ambient sound in Slow Cinema can increase the viewer's emotional and intellectual engagement with the film's narrative and, by doing so, enable the viewer to determine the ambient sound's purpose and significance.

6.5.1.3 Minimalism and indeterminacy in Men of the Hill

The study found a relatively low emotional engagement with the film's narrative, with 26% of the surveyed respondents indicating that their emotional response to the film was very high and 31% suggesting it was moderate. Thus, as Participant 3 has explained, a Slow Cinema film suppresses the viewer's emotional feelings favouring an intellectual response to the narrative. Meanwhile, throughout this study, I have upheld the significance of situating the conventions of Slow Cinema within the context of Kenyan cinema. In Chapter Two (2.4.2.1), I have discussed how minimalism and indeterminacy can shape the narrative of a

Slow Cinema film and, consequently, how the viewer would experience a minimalist and indeterminate narrative. These results reflect those of Jaffe (2014: 9), who also found that since the operations of the plot in Slow Cinema tend to be indeterminate, thereby rejecting the classical formulaic approach to storytelling, the film's protagonists become flat with minimal or no emotional output (emotional minimalism).

On the other hand, the fact that 38% (very much) and 39% (moderately) of the surveyed respondents indicated that they were keenly thinking about the plot structure of *Men of the Hill* suggests that there was a sense of indeterminacy in the plot. This result is further characterised by most respondents (see 6.3.18) who indicated that their minds wandered to matters outside of the film during the screening. Some interviewed experts, specifically Participant 6, corroborated the selected film viewers' responses regarding their engagement with the plot (see 6.3.4). Overall, the study concludes that in as much as minimalism and indeterminacy complicate the comprehension of the Slow Cinema narrative, they create a new reality of unknowability for the viewer, thus facilitating different viewing strategies leading to contemplation. The finding offers support for a study conducted by Dwyer and Perkins (2018: 124) on eye-tracking tests involving long-take sequences in some selected films. Dwyer and Perkins found that viewers bring slowness to a Slow Cinema film rather than the film itself slowing down their viewing processes.

6.5.1.4 Appreciation of Slow Cinema

Results across the web survey and the interview show that a significant majority of the participants appreciated Slow Cinema. For example, 50% (very much) and 27% (moderately) of the surveyed respondents maintained that they would recommend someone else to watch *Men of the Hill*, 40% (very much) and 36% (moderately) thought Kenyan filmmakers should endeavour to make Slow Cinema films in future. In addition, over 50% in total said they were likely to watch another film similar in style to *Men of the Hill*. However, while acknowledging the positive results, a significant majority of interviewed experts (see 6.4.5) warned that it would take more time and increased knowledge for the average Kenyan viewer to appreciate Slow Cinema in the long run. These results mirror an earlier finding by Kunda (2018: 4) that the increased visibility and appreciation of Slow Cinema as an art form respond to the mischaracterisation of audiences in Asia, South America or Africa by Hollywood films. Further, Kunda notes that this mischaracterisation is mainly to the point

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where they (the audiences) cannot recognise the regularity of their lives and human experiences. Consequently, my attempt in Chapter Two to position Slow Cinema as alternative cinema (see section 2.3.3) is consistent with the participants' appreciation of the slow aesthetic and Kunda's above finding.

6.5.1.5 Challenges in Kenyan cinema

I discussed at length in Chapter Four the successes and failures of Kenyan cinema. I specifically noted that the noninstitutionalised film culture in the country had undermined the growth and development of Kenyan cinema (see section 4.4.3). Of significance, this study concludes that a substantial majority of the surveyed respondents watch foreign films, with 50% watching locally made Kenyan films once or twice in a typical year and 18% not watching a local Kenyan film at all in a typical year (see section 6.3.2). The findings agree with the only survey conducted so far on the film-going trends in Kenya by *Strategic Research* (2010) for the Kenya Film Commission. In addition, the survey found that Kenyan audiences are not accessing films in the more than 20 licensed cinema theatres around the country, thus contributing to the dwindling numbers of filmgoers in Kenya.

Interestingly, the survey attributed the decline to cheap pirated Hollywood films in informal video halls distributed across the country or in video shops along the city streets and dwelling estates. However, the interviewed participants in my study attributed the declining fortunes of the Kenyan film industry to the adoption of negative storytelling tendencies from Hollywood by Kenyan screenwriters. Others include insufficient research in the development of Kenyan stories, poor infrastructure, and resistance to change by Kenyan filmmakers, especially when experimenting with new filmic ideas. Consequently, the results suggest that there is an opportunity in the Kenyan context to experiment with new genres, including Slow Cinema, in hopes of addressing the existing challenges in Kenyan cinema.

6.5.1.6 The situatedness of Slow Cinema conventions in Kenyan cinema

In Chapter Four (see 4.5.2), I conducted a preliminary mapping of Slow Cinema in Kenyan cinema. I argued that the situatedness of slowness could be achieved through experimentation with narrative and formal elements in Kenyan stories. For example, Kenyan filmmakers could use Slow Cinema's narrative style to highlight personal narratives and socio-political issues in the country and redefine the relationship between film and viewer

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through minimalism and indeterminacy of plot as main conventions of Slow Cinema. In response to the above suggestions, the results of the web survey and interview indicate that Slow Cinema's conventions could highlight new issues of concern in Kenya. These conventions can showcase the country's cultural tendencies and socio-physical reality, convey important messages to Kenyan audiences, and address the existing historical and socio-economic challenges (see 6.4.7). The results support Koutsourakis's (2019: 401-405) claim that "contemporary Slow Cinema may be seen as a response to existing social truths" whose visualisation has been repressed. This repression justifies such themes as alienation, economic changes, egotism, and community dysfunctions in most Slow Cinema films.

6.5.1.7 Implications of Slow Cinema for Kenya's film culture

Through the conceptual framework diagram in Chapter Two (see 2.4.3), I have illustrated how the conventions of Slow Cinema can be conceptualised within the Kenyan context to impact the country's film culture. I have argued that if applied meticulously, the concepts of narrative, minimalism, and indeterminacy can lead to Kenyan cinema adopting alternative modes of expression consistent with the country's transnational culture. This study concludes that Slow Cinema's context and situatedness in Kenyan cinema have significant implications for the country's film culture. As the results indicate, a sizeable majority of the surveyed respondents (53%) claimed that they would reflect privately about *Men of the Hill*, 52% would research about Slow Cinema online, and 48% of other respondents would discuss the film with other audience members. On the other hand, an overwhelming majority (91%) of interviewed experts (see section 6.4.9) affirmed that they considered *Men of the Hill* a successful Slow Cinema film.[171] The experts specifically noted that Slow Cinema would significantly impact film scholarship, training and practice (see section 6.3.9). The results are consistent with the long-held view that Slow Cinema has become a critical discourse in academic circles and film festivals and a source of inspiration for many filmmakers in Asia, South America, and recently, Africa seeking to react against the dominance of Hollywood cinema (Brady 2016: 71; Çağlayan 2018: 5; Luca & Jorge 2015; Grønstad 2016: 274; Jaffe 2014: 2; Lim 2016: 92).

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[171] 'Experts' here refers to filmmakers, film scholars, film critics, and film policy-makers interviewed for this study.

6.5.2 The role of auteur theory in the situatedness of Slow Cinema

The results revealed significant insight into how the auteur theory applies to the film director, manifests, transmits, and alters itself through Slow Cinema in the Kenyan context. When asked to select the three most important reasons for attending the screening of *Men of the Hill*, a significant majority (64%) of the surveyed respondents claimed that they wanted to see the work of the film director, among other reasons. Additionally, a sizeable majority (40%) of the respondents asserted that Kenyan filmmakers should endeavour to make Slow Cinema films, while 36% believed that the films should be made in moderation. Indeed, the results speak to the desire of the Kenyan viewers to see local film directors exhibiting specific recurrent characteristics of style as their signature (see Braudy & Cohen 2009: 451-453). The results further suggest that the auteur theory expressed itself in how I captured the local social realities through the first-ever Kenyan Slow Cinema film, and which the selected film viewers were eager to experience. This finding is contrary to the long-held view in the African continent that the auteurist approach to filmmaking is retrogressive to the development of African cinema and the audience of African films (Gabara 2016: 47). Finally, the results permit this study to conclude that in the context of Kenyan cinema and the making of *Men of the Hill* as a Kenyan Slow Cinema film, the auteur theory "reveals authors where none had been seen before" (see Wollen 2009: 456).

6.6 Chapter Conclusion

The notion of a vibrant Kenyan film industry that exhibits new ideas in narrative strategies and formal elements has received little attention in research. The study is the first to examine how Kenyan film viewers would visualise and interpret the narrative and stylistic conventions of Slow Cinema used in a Kenyan Slow Cinema film. The results have clearly shown that Slow Cinema is a new genre in Kenyan cinema, suggesting that expansion opportunities still exist. There is no data in this study or others suggesting that Kenyan cinema is institutionalised within the political economy of Kenya's media industry for the benefit of local filmmakers and their audiences. Therefore, if Kenyan cinema is not consistently creating a setting where film authors are motivated to experiment with new ideas, there is still work to situate Slow Cinema within the country's film culture. The results of this study suggested that there are seven themes related to the visualisation and interpretation of the narrative and stylistic conventions used in a Kenyan Slow Cinema film. These themes include the

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context of Slow Cinema, narrative-formal expressiveness of *Men of the* Hill, minimalism and indeterminacy in *Men of the* Hill, appreciation of Slow Cinema, challenges in Kenyan cinema, the situatedness of Slow Cinema conventions within the Kenyan context, and the implications of Slow Cinema for Kenya's film culture. The results also confirmed the role of auteur theory in situating Slow Cinema conventions within Kenyan cinema. While the attitudes that the selected film viewers and experts expressed as they shared their viewing experiences of *Men of the Hill* were positive, it was worrying to learn that a significant majority of the selected viewers rarely watched local films made by Kenyan filmmakers.

Nevertheless, the participants in this study presented themselves as enthusiastic, competent and experienced individuals, who were genuinely interested in cinematic adventure, and who wanted to support the local film industry. Hopefully, the Kenyan film industry will soon start to recognise new ideas through a non-biased lens. As Deleuze (1986: 206) once stated about the instability of the crisis of Hollywood and its old genres, the new consciousness of the minorities, and the influence on the cinema of the new modes of narrative:

> The soul of the cinema demands increasing thought, even if thought begins by undoing the system of actions, perceptions and affections on which the cinema had fed up to that point.

Deleuze spoke of a radical transformation of cinema that would create a new kind of image that one can attempt to identify outside Hollywood. To a large extent, this chapter has taken its cue from Deleuze's assertion by presenting empirical evidence from selected Kenyan viewers and experts. The chapter confirms that Slow Cinema can increase thought among Kenyan filmmakers and audiences and undo the old and rigid modes of narrative and stylistic devices on which Kenyan cinema has moulded itself. In other words, as I have demonstrated throughout this chapter, to bring attention to Slow Cinema within the Kenyan context, Kenya's film culture will have to undergo a radical transformation.

CHAPTER SEVEN:

CONCLUSION

7.1 Chapter Introduction

This chapter concludes the study of Slow Cinema and the situatedness of its conventions in Kenyan cinema. First, the chapter summarises the concepts and themes discussed in the preceding chapters concerning the study's aims. Secondly, it considers the study's strengths and limitations, then thirdly, it explains the implications for theory and practice. Finally, it offers suggestions for further research.

The present research aimed to establish how a Kenyan Slow Cinema film can convey the form and style of Slow Cinema while retaining a sense of geo-cultural specificity. The study takes its cue from one of the most significant current discussions in Slow Cinema. For instance, Luca and Jorge (2015) sought to find out how Slow Cinema can appeal to filmmakers' historical and cultural sensibilities drawn from different geographical backgrounds. My study began with the question of whether or not Slow Cinema can be transposed into Kenyan cinema. This intellectual curiosity expanded to include the critical conventions of Slow Cinema with specific reference to the de-dramatised narrative, minimalism and indeterminacy of plot. To undertake this research, it was necessary to select an appropriate research design that endeavours to (a) analyse the oeuvres of renowned Slow Cinema film directors from different geographical backgrounds, (b) produce a Kenyan experimental Slow Cinema film with the self-reflexivity of a researcher-practitioner, and (c) show the results of how selected Kenyan film viewers and experts visualised and interpreted the first-ever Kenyan Slow Cinema film (*Men of the Hill*). Hence, I employed the mixed-methods research design, which incorporated textual analysis, Practice-as-Research (PaR), quantitative web survey, and qualitative interviews consistent with relevant literature.

The context of the entire study was framed in Chapter One. I questioned why Slow Cinema research to date had not determined the status of Slow Cinema within the context of African cinemas. Yet, African film directors such as Abderrahmane Sissako and Oliver

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Hermanus have been closely associated with the aesthetic of slowness.[172] I asserted that there was no evidence of Slow Cinema in Kenya, hence a need for research that combines theory and practice in a field experience. The creative production of a Kenyan experimental Slow Cinema film drew on the claim that Slow Cinema cannot be generalised. This argument is supported by such Slow Cinema film directors as Béla Tarr, Lav Diaz, and Tsai Ming-liang, who employ the aesthetic of slowness for different reasons, while their styles of slowness may not necessarily be homogenous (Çağlayan 2018: 16; Schrader 2018: 11). Therefore, I argued that producing context-centred knowledge of Slow Cinema in the context of Kenyan cinema was needed to determine how selected Kenyan film viewers and experts would receive and make sense of a Kenyan Slow Cinema film. Seeking to make *Men of the Hill* led to the deliberation of what constituted a Kenyan Slow Cinema film, thereby narrowing down to narrative, minimalism, and indeterminacy as the fundamental conventions used to experiment with Slow Cinema. From this perspective, the study explored, for the first time, the context of Slow Cinema and the situatedness of its conventions within the context of Kenyan cinema. The concepts, theory, and methods used throughout this thesis draw on what is summarised above to gain insights into the slow viewing experiences of Kenyan film spectators. The thesis proposes a new way of making films in Kenyan cinema and insists on Slow Cinema negotiating with the local, historical and cultural sensibilities. What follows is an overview of Chapters One to Six regarding the context and situatedness of Slow Cinema in Kenyan cinema.

7.2 Summary of the Study

Chapter One introduced the scope of the entire study in response to the main research question stated in the preceding section (see 7.1). Chapter One (section 1.1) noted the growing interest in Slow Cinema in the last two decades. I questioned why existing literature in Slow Cinema has failed to discuss the aesthetic of slowness in African cinemas despite Slow Cinema films that can be subsumed under the category. As I demonstrated, this inadequacy may have resulted from divisions among scholars in terms of how Slow Cinema should be defined. This gap allowed me to adopt a definition of Slow Cinema that denotes the kind of cinema that emphasises temporality, an undramatic narrative, and aesthetic features of slowness to elicit contemplation among the spectators (Boczkowska 2016: 229;

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[172] *Heremakono* (Sissako 2002), *Timbuktu* (Sissako 2014) and *Skoonheid* (Hermanus 2011)

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Çağlayan 2018: 16). As such, the stage was set for a discussion of the historical development of Slow Cinema, where I traced the aesthetic of slowness back to the earlier waves in film history such as the French Impressionism (1918-1930), German Expressionism (1919-1926), Soviet Montage (1924-1935), Poetic Realism (1930-1939), and Italian Neorealism (1942-1951). I further discussed the considerable critical attention that Slow Cinema has received in film studies (Brady 2016: 71; Çağlayan 2018: 3) and the nature of Slow Cinema's circulation in recent history (Luca & Jorge 2016: 11; Jaffe 2014: 2; Lim 2016: 92; Dwyer & Perkins 2018: 107). Drawing specifically on the notion of how Slow Cinema films are circulated, it was possible to problematise Slow Cinema's context and situatedness in Kenyan cinema (see section 1.2.3). After that, formulate the main research question and aims of the study (section 1.3), and select the appropriate research design, research instruments and data analysis plan (section 1.4). Finally, I outlined the phases of the research process (section 1.5.3). Overall, Chapter One demonstrated how the critical understanding of Slow Cinema's definition and history from theoretical and intercultural perspectives could generate context-centred knowledge of Slow Cinema concerning the study's aims.

Drawing on the historical development of Slow Cinema, the aims of the study, and the research design proposed in the first chapter, Chapter Two provided a continuum of understanding the conceptual and theoretical framework under existing literature in Slow Cinema. Based on the arguments of Cooke and Stone (2016: 313), I reasserted the explanatory power of auteur theory as the dominant principle in Slow Cinema, classified under art cinema in the context of global cinema. My discussion of how auteur theory has been contextualised in African cinemas was meaningful because this study is mainly concerned with how the concept of auteurism, as it applies to the film director, can manifest, diffuse, and modify itself through Slow Cinema within the Kenyan context. With that in mind, I constructed a conceptual framework that could be used to locate the aesthetics and functions of Slow Cinema that were consistent with its history. In the chapter, I showed that without locating the aesthetics and functions of Slow Cinema, it would be impossible to provide a conceptual and philosophical understanding of the three selected Slow Cinema films analysed in Chapter Three. A key point of my discussion in Chapter Two was a critical reexamination of the modernist aesthetic to demonstrate how the notion of modernity can react to the core principles of contemporary Slow Cinema. This reexamination accorded me

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the opportunity to discuss how certain aspects of modernism could be resituated in a Kenyan Slow Cinema film through a de-dramatised narrative, minimalism, and indeterminacy of plot. The chapter also addressed the largely contentious issue of the interrelations between durational cinema, transcendental style, and the aesthetic of slowness by providing significant insights into how Slow Cinema could be understood as a unique genre that does not entirely depend on other techniques for its existence. As a result, I positioned Slow Cinema as an alternative to the strategies deployed in a Hollywood film. Finally, the chapter discussed the concept of narration in Slow Cinema to offer a complete account of how Slow Cinema films employ essential narrative and formal elements in their construction. I showed that the slow narrative and the slow image could be constructed through the notion of neorealism as conceptualised by André Bazin and later advanced by Gilles Deleuze. This understanding laid the groundwork for a conceptual formulation of how Slow Cinema can ultimately be situated within Kenyan cinema.

As Hammersley (2008: 123) stated, we cannot comprehend what transpires in any national or local setting without viewing it in the context of global processes. With this understanding, Chapter Three addressed the study's second aim in terms of how Slow Cinema's narrative and aesthetic conventions have been situated in the selected films of world-renowned Slow Cinema auteurs. In turn, I explored how for instance, I could use my position as a researcher-practitioner to borrow the experiences and filmmaking practices of Apichatpong Weerasethakul, Béla Tarr, and Oliver Hermanus to make the first-ever Kenyan Slow Cinema film. To do so, I had to examine how these auteurs had constructed the narrative and aesthetic elements in their films with specific reference to minimalism, indeterminacy, and a tendency towards contemplation. Weerasethakul's oeuvre has been the subject of numerous studies, including some recent ones (Bergstrom 2015: 1-16; Fukushima 2017: 1-10; Guillamon 2018: 13-32), to name a few. These studies have explored overarching themes in Weerasethakul films, including memory, cinematic reincarnation, political theology, and the aesthetics of non-representation. My research is the first to explore how the techniques of *vraisemblance* and the dream vision have been used to narrativise slowness in *Uncle Boonmee, who can recall his past lives* (Weerasethakul 2010). These techniques were crucial to the conceptualisation of my film, *Men of the Hill*. The chapter also offered a close reading of Béla Tarr's *The Turin Horse* (2011). Nietzsche's nihilism has been explored in film with specific reference to *The Turin*

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Horse (see, for example, Steven 2017: 95-113). However, no study until now has examined any systematic research into how Tarr has stylised the philosophical notion of existential nihilism through a de-dramatised narrative, minimalism and indeterminacy within the framework of Slow Cinema.

My textual analysis of *The Turin Horse* enabled an exploration of a philosophical approach to Slow Cinema in a way that brought a greater degree of realism and truth in *Men of the Hill* as later attested to by the selected Kenyan film viewers (see Chapter Six). Again, *Skoonheid* (Hermanus 2011) has either been analysed in the context of post-apartheid South African queer intimacy (Andrews 2018: 30-47) or its commitment to self-criminalisation and the negotiation of Afrikaner identity (Rossouw 2012: 1-32). For the first time, the present study has analysed *Skoonheid* based on its attentiveness to the slow aesthetic. In *Skoonheid*, I have shown how Hermanus has spoken to some of the most problematic issues in contemporary African society through his film's slow narrative, aesthetics, and themes while giving attention to the indeterminacy of human experience. With the three textual analyses, Chapter Three addressed how the conventions of Slow Cinema as employed in the oeuvres of Weerasethakul, Tarr, and Hermanus can be situated within the context of Kenyan cinema.

Chapter Four addressed the third aim of the study, which principally explored how Slow Cinema's narrative and aesthetic conventions can be situated within Kenyan cinema's local, historical, and intercultural contexts. Informed by my textual analysis of the three selected Slow Cinema films in Chapter Three, I conceptualised a comprehensive framework needed to:

- Establish the existence of alternative film styles and genres such as Slow Cinema within African cinema,
- Assess specific formations of Kenyan cinema that could be adopted to develop a range of thematic, narrative, and formal elements in line with Slow Cinema,
- Understand how Kenya's film culture can speak to the situatedness of a particular body of Slow Cinema films, and
- Map out strategies that can be used to situate the conventions of Slow Cinema amongst Kenyan filmmakers.

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The above undertaking aimed to create a setting for better philosophising of the Kenyan society's social, political, and cultural anxieties. Of significance, and for the first time studying the history of film in Kenya, I characterised the period between 2002 and 2007 as the golden age of Kenyan cinema and 2010-2018 as the silver age. The golden age, in my theorisation, witnessed prosperity and happiness for Kenyan filmmakers because many films were consistently made and released to the public in cinema halls, in VCD and DVD formats.

On the other hand, the silver age was prestigious and eventful but less so than the golden age because of its average growth rate. Moreover, since the market-based economy drove it, the silver age created conditions in which Kenyan filmmakers experienced minimal restrictions in their filmmaking activities, even though the return on investment was not commensurate. I argued that these two significant developments would be crucial to understanding how Slow Cinema can be situated within Kenyan cinema's historical, economic, and cultural context. Another critical discussion in Chapter Four pointed to the notion of hybridity in film, which, as I demonstrated, could be analysed in the context of Nollywood's growing popularity in Kenya. I argued that Kenyan filmmakers, particularly in *Riverwood,* were inspired to hybridise their content with themes, narrative strategies, and aesthetic styles of Nollywood films. This transnational approach to Kenyan cinema, I concluded, provided a setting for the context and situatedness of Slow Cinema in the country's film culture. In the end, I emphasised that Slow Cinema cannot be entirely situated in Kenyan cinema without the explicit institutionalisation of Kenya's film culture, which comprises film schools, film festivals, and film archiving.

In Chapter Five, I presented an exegesis on the creative process of experimenting with slowness in Kenyan cinema. This task was in response to the fourth aim of the study. I positioned myself as a researcher-practitioner seeking to make the first-ever Kenyan experimental Slow Cinema film (*Men of the Hill*). Considering that the creative production was a PaR inquiry, I started by describing my journey as a researcher-practitioner to provide a context for my inspiration to experiment with cinematic slowness and the cultural and theoretical constructs that apprise such an undertaking. After that, I recounted my experiences in the creative production of *Men of the Hill,* from pre-production to exhibition. I explained how I approached the pre-production phase as a strategy to test, validate, and verify various production activities to reflect my overall vision for the film. As for my

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production strategy, I emphasised that I did not want my previous inclinations of production techniques to interfere with my creative practice of Slow Cinema. As I highlighted, the goal of the production phase was to consolidate an aesthetic style that could shape a narrative around the themes of Slow Cinema. In the post-production phase, I deployed the narrative efficient long takes edited in the camera. I borrowed this technique from Béla Tarr's intra-sequence cuts in *The Turin Horse*, and in line with Nielsen's (2007: 198) concept of covering scenes within a long take as a way of asserting "editorial control over the final shape of the film". The last part of Chapter Five presented my reading of *Men of the Hill*. I demonstrated how Slow Cinema speaks to the Kenyan experience in its thematic, narrative, and aesthetic constructions.

Finally, I investigated how the selected Kenyan film viewers and experts would visualise and interpret the narrative and aesthetic conventions of Slow Cinema deployed in *Men of the Hill* as a Kenyan Slow Cinema film. Therefore, Chapter Six reported the findings from the quantitative web survey analysis and the qualitative semi-structured interviews databases. As noted in the chapter, a response rate of 69% for this research was relatively high, hence supporting the generalisability of the findings. The chapter summarised the research findings into seven themes. First, in terms of Slow Cinema's context, the study found that a substantial majority of the participants had no previous exposure to Slow Cinema, thus giving credence to the idea that Slow Cinema was a new genre in Kenyan cinema. Second, concerning the narrative-formal expressiveness of *Men of the Hill*, the study concluded that a significant majority of the participants could identify the conventions of Slow Cinema used in the film. These results make it possible for Slow Cinema to be situated within the context of Kenyan cinema.

Finally, the chapter also considered the effects of minimalism and indeterminacy in *Men of the Hill*, where a relatively low emotional engagement with the film's narrative was observed. Explaining the results, Participant 3 accurately inferred that a Slow Cinema film suppresses the viewer's emotional feelings favouring an intellectual response to the narrative, hence minimalism. A sizeable number of participants also actively engaged with the plot, thus suggesting a sense of indeterminacy. Overall, the study found that minimalism and indeterminacy used as the main conventions of Slow Cinema can complicate the

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comprehension of the narrative, thereby creating a new reality of uncertainty for the viewer, leading to contemplation in and outside of the film.

Regarding the appreciation of Slow Cinema in Kenyan cinema, results across the web survey and the interview showed that most participants appreciated Slow Cinema for its style and attentiveness to relevant themes in the Kenyan context. However, the results also spoke to the considerable challenges experienced in Kenyan cinema, mainly because of Kenyan audiences preferring Hollywood films to Kenyan films. As such, I argued that given the results that showed significant challenges in Kenyan cinema, Slow Cinema could be used to encourage narrative-formal experimentation amongst Kenyan filmmakers. It can also highlight new issues of concern in Kenya and showcase the country's cultural tendencies and physical reality, to name a few. Finally, the study in the sixth chapter concluded that the context and situatedness of Slow Cinema in Kenyan cinema have significant implications for the country's film culture, judging from the activities that the respondents intended to undertake regarding Slow Cinema after the screening of *Men of the Hill*. I concluded the chapter with a discussion of auteur theory following the study's significant findings. I emphasised that Kenya's film culture would have to experience a substantial transformation to bring attention to Slow Cinema within Kenyan cinema.

7.3 Strengths and Limitations of the Study

There has been no detailed investigation of Slow Cinema's context and situatedness within the context of Kenyan cinema. Thus, the key strengths of the present study are:

- It recentres scholarship in Slow Cinema after the paucity of previous research. It explores valuable practices in Slow Cinema in a culturally meaningful and critically productive way to Kenyan cinema.

- It recognises prominent Slow Cinema auteurs drawn from diverse backgrounds and provides critical concepts and theories for re-reading their oeuvres within an African (Kenyan) context.

- It offers a critical discourse that repositions Kenyan cinema in terms of its history and its propensity to dialogue with other cinematic movements within a transnational framework.

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- It represents a comprehensive examination of the whole in reference to the rigour of academic research and the performative and reflective techniques of making a Slow Cinema film within the Kenyan context (PaR).

Several limitations of this study need to be acknowledged.

- Due to COVID-19 prevention protocols in Kenya at the time of data collection, it was impossible to get a bigger sample size of Kenyan film viewers. As a result, the study's final sample size of 188 participants out of a possible 400 initially envisioned was relatively small. In the end, it was not easy to find significant relationships from the data, as statistical tests usually require a larger sample size to ensure a representative distribution of the population (see James & Murnan 2004: 66-67). Therefore, the generalisability of the web survey findings is limited.

- When I embarked on this study in 2017, I immediately identified seven Slow Cinema films that I wanted to consider as units of analysis in Chapter Three. I intended to ensure that filmmakers from diverse backgrounds were included in the study, not to mention Abbas Kiarostami (Iran), whose film *Taste of Cherry* (1997) was a great inspiration to my creative practice (*Men of the Hill*). Unfortunately, I had to exclude at least four films due to constraints of time and space. Additionally, I had selected two films, namely *Skoonheid* (Hermanus 2011) and *Timbuktu* (Sissako 2014), as consistent with my definition of an African Slow Cinema film. However, three years after my initial reading of *Timbuktu* in 2017, I discovered that *Heremakono* (Sissako 2002) was a better Slow Cinema film than the former. Unfortunately, I could not provide a close reading of *Heremakono,* but I have cited it in Chapter One (section 1.1).

- There was little, if any, prior research on Slow Cinema within the context of African cinemas. Moreover, as I have suggested in Chapter One (section 1.1), there was no evidence of Slow Cinema in Kenya. Hence, it was difficult to lay a foundation for understanding Slow Cinema within the context of African and Kenyan cinemas.

- Since the qualitative interviews heavily relied on self-reported data provided by the Kenyan film experts, there could be several potential sources of bias in regards to selective memory and exaggeration.

- Another potential bias for the study was the influence I had upon some film experts due to our previous working engagements. Kenya's film industry is relatively small, meaning that a significant majority of filmmakers know and work with each other regularly on various projects. Interestingly, the participants who were well known to me were even more critical in their visualisation and interpretation of *Men of the Hill*. It suggests that they understood and appreciated the significance of my research well enough to provide honest answers.

7.4 Implications for Theory and Practice

First, concerning theory, I have already indicated that this work represents the first study that explores the interplay between the context of Slow Cinema within Kenyan cinema and the situatedness of specific conventions used in Slow Cinema to produce the first-ever Kenyan Slow Cinema film. While similar studies may have been conducted in other contexts, they may not have included a creative practice undertaken through PaR. This study shows the significance of extending the scope of practice research into the academic field. For its contribution to knowledge in Slow Cinema, this study emphasised the importance of producing context-bound and situated learning as a multicultural paradigm. While many studies in Slow Cinema still centre on a corpus of Slow Cinema films from Europe, Asia, and Latin America, it appears necessary to expand the scope of analysis to an African (Kenyan) context, thereby providing different knowledge dimensions.

Furthermore, the present study provides empirical evidence from selected Kenyan film viewers, thus emphasising the inventiveness of knowledge. The study suggests that future research in Slow Cinema or any other genre considered to be new within a given context should comprise a creative practice and the rigour of traditional academic research. In Chapter Five, I have provided unique and personal insights into the creative production of a Kenyan Slow Cinema film. However, new measures would have to be developed that are appropriate to the context of individual researcher-practitioners. Additionally, this study insists on the consideration of different methodological approaches in the research of Slow

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Cinema. As I have noted in Chapter One (see section 1.2.3), many related studies rely too heavily on the qualitative approaches in their analysis of Slow Cinema films while attending to slow narratives, aesthetics, temporality, and politics. Using one methodological approach may inadequately attend to the most salient features of the phenomenon being studied. Since this study has also produced tacit knowledge in the form of a Kenyan Slow Cinema film, it may benefit future film students and scholars, who may want to provide their close readings of *Men of the Hill* in a more productive manner and consistent with their intellectual interests.

Regarding the study's theoretical framework, there is evidence that the auteur theory can be successfully applied to research in Slow Cinema. Furthermore, it seems to be especially appropriate for analysing the works of Slow Cinema auteurs and the tacit production of knowledge from a researcher-practitioner point of view, as I have explained in Chapter Five, through the different phases of production. Lastly, this study can potentially influence the pedagogy of film in Kenya's academic field and the country's film culture at large. Consequently, it can contribute to bridging the traditional gap between the academy and the industry. Currently, Slow Cinema is neither taught nor researched within the academy. Therefore, the availability of context-centred academic research in Slow Cinema and tacit knowledge (*Men of the Hill*) can become essential learning materials or guides if Slow Cinema were to be taught in a classroom.

Several practical implications emerge from this study. First, for independent Kenyan filmmakers, who may want to adopt the slow aesthetic in their works, second, for companies or organisations that do business with filmmakers and film policymakers in the country. To begin with, Kenyan filmmakers should reconsider their didactic narrative strategies and aesthetic styles (see Chapter Four sections 4.3.3 and 4.3.4), even if it suits them in the short term. This study provides a context-centred benchmark for producing a Slow Cinema film, which might be helpful to interested filmmakers. Furthermore, policymakers and regulators such as the Kenya Film Commission (KFC) and Kenya Film Classification Board (KFCB) can facilitate knowledge and skills transfer to the filmmakers. Companies that do regular business with filmmakers can also encourage creating hybrid content that promotes Slow Cinema conventions within the local mythos. In the long run, such measures could further situate Slow Cinema within Kenyan cinema. Opportunities for collaboration between the

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academy and the industry can also be explored through Slow Cinema. As I have aptly explained in Chapter Five (see section 5.3), *Men of the Hill* was a product of collaboration between myself as the researcher-practitioner and professional crew and actors in the Kenyan film industry. This collaboration is an example of knowledge and skill sharing, supported by the study's findings (see Chapter Five). Chapter Four (see section 4.4.3) proposed a framework for situating Slow Cinema within Kenyan cinema through the institutionalisation of Kenya's film culture. A key point of discussion involved the role of film festivals and film archives in the context and situatedness of Slow Cinema. I observed that an experimental Slow Cinema film could be recognised for its knowledge and skill inventiveness during one of the film festivals in the country. On the other hand, film archives can facilitate the acquisition and preservation of *Men of the Hill* to sustain reflection by future film researchers, filmmakers, and viewers.

7.5 Suggestions for Further Research

Despite numerous studies on Slow Cinema and a growing number of international filmmakers associated with Slow Cinema, the aesthetic of slowness remains relatively new, particularly in the African context. This research, for instance, was the first to investigate the context of Slow Cinema and how a Slow Cinema film was visualised and interpreted by Kenyan film viewers and experts. It is also the first study to produce context-centred tacit knowledge of slowness through a Kenyan feature-length Slow Cinema film. Therefore, it offers a framework for exploring other related research activities either from a Kenyan context or at the continental level. This section identifies possible areas for further research in Slow Cinema.

- Considering that there is a shortage of African Slow Cinema films, a further study could analyse the narrative and aesthetic strategies used in the oeuvre of Abderrahmane Sissako, in particular his film *Heremakono* (2002). Such a study would further highlight alignments between Slow Cinema and selected African cinemas.

- Since the present study sampled a significant majority of Nairobi-based Kenyan film viewers who had access to the Internet, questions can be raised about its generalisability. Therefore, it would be worthwhile for a further study to analyse the

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experiences of watching a Slow Cinema film among different individuals living in rural and peri-urban areas across Kenya, including those who have no access to the Internet.

- Practice-as-Research (PaR) as a methodological approach in film studies may be prevalent in Australia, the United Kingdom, and South Africa. Still, it has not been sufficiently explored in Kenya, especially in film studies. Future research work in PaR could be beneficial to film students, film scholars, and filmmakers concerning collaborations or tacit knowledge sharing.

- The current study obtained quantitative data from a web survey of selected Kenyan film viewers to determine how they would visualise and interpret the Slow Cinema conventions used in *Men of the Hill*. It would be interesting to obtain qualitative data from a Focus Group Discussion (FGD) of Kenyan film viewers in different demographics to analyse their insights and attitudes towards a Slow Cinema film.

- Further research might also explore questions of homogeneity in Slow Cinema in response to the arguments laid out by Schrader (2018: 11) and Çağlayan (2018: 16) against the generalisation of Slow Cinema films. Further investigation and experimentation are needed to compare and contrast Slow Cinema films from diverse backgrounds regarding their narrative and aesthetic strategies, thematic concerns, and politics.

7.6 Concluding Remarks

The history of Slow Cinema suggests an aesthetic that has generated controversy over its narrative, aesthetics, and politics (see, for example, Luca & Jorge 2015: 2). It is a cinema characterised as both austere and transcendental, contemplative and oblique, and philosophical and boring. Yet, as this study's results have shown, it is a unique style that can potentially address various challenges within Kenyan cinema while resonating with the country's local, historical, and cultural sensibilities through its thematic concerns. Results also indicate that its narrative and aesthetic strategies elicited varied responses from the selected Kenyan film viewers, with a sizeable majority expressing the desire to watch other films similar in style to *Men of the Hill*. Considering the growing importance of global film

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spectatorship, this is an encouraging development for Slow Cinema. Thus, this study expands the scope of empirical research into Slow Cinema and its situatedness within the context of Kenyan cinema and complicates the relationship between cinematic duration and film viewing habits. Doing so contributes to the notion of how Slow Cinema can be positioned as an alternative cinema rather than a reaction against the accelerationism of Hollywood films. However, given the limitations of this study, the fundamentally enthusiastic response from the participants should be received with caution, hence leaving room for further research and practice in Slow Cinema within the framework of Kenyan cinema and the country's film culture at large.

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APPENDIX A: *MEN OF THE HILL* SLOW CINEMA FILM (2020)

Writer/Director:

Emmanuel Wanyonyi

The film is complimentary to this thesis. As the first-ever Kenyan Slow Cinema film, it attempts to situate cinema as a sensory vehicle that transports viewers into multiple temporalities of slowness. Even seemingly ordinary experiences may have alternate meanings and extended durations.

MEN OF THE HILL (2020)

1,750 views • Premiered Aug 23, 2020

130   1   SHARE   SAVE   ...

YouTube Link: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=prBdmL7Q34I

APPENDIX B: RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE APPROVAL

UNIVERSITEIT VAN PRETORIA
UNIVERSITY OF PRETORIA
YUNIBESITHI YA PRETORIA

Faculty of Humanities
Research Ethics Committee

7 December 2018

Dear Mr Sikuku

Project:	**Slow Cinema: Narrative, minimalism and indeterminacy in Kenya cinema**
Researcher:	**EW Sikuku**
Supervisor:	**Dr C Broodryk**
Department:	**Drama**
Reference number:	**17319669 (GW20180408HS)**

Thank you for your response to the Committee's correspondence.

I have pleasure in informing you that the Research Ethics Committee formally **approved** the above study at an *ad hoc* meeting held on 7 November 2018. Data collection may therefore commence.

Please note that this approval is based on the assumption that the research will be carried out along the lines laid out in the proposal. Should your actual research depart significantly from the proposed research, it will be necessary to apply for a new research approval and ethical clearance.

We wish you success with the project.

Sincerely

Prof Maxi Schoeman
Deputy Dean: Postgraduate and Research Ethics
Faculty of Humanities
UNIVERSITY OF PRETORIA
e-mail: PGHumanities@up.ac.za

cc: Dr C Broodryk (Supervisor)   Prof M-H Coetzee (HoD)

Audience Survey for *Men of the Hill*

Thank you for attending today's screening of the feature film *Men of the Hill*. My name is Emmanuel Wanyonyi, the writer, director and producer of the film you have just watched and a PhD Candidate of Drama and Film Studies at the University of Pretoria, South Africa. This survey forms part of the data collection phase of my doctoral research in which I explore the narrative characteristics of Slow Cinema in the Kenyan context. If you would like more information on the research, please email me at wanyonyiemmanuel@gmail.com to obtain a copy of the research proposal.

The survey should take around fifteen minutes to complete. Your participation is voluntary and you may choose to withdraw from the study without penalty by informing me (the lead investigator) that you no longer wish to participate (no questions will be asked). Your confidentiality as a participant in this study will remain secure. All information collected about you during the course of this survey will be kept strictly confidential. Any paperwork with your personal details on it will be stored in locked filling cabinet separate from your participant research number. Electronic data will be stored on a password-protected computer. Only the research team and regulatory authorities (for monitoring the quality of the research) will have access to the data. The Drama Department and the Research Ethics Committee of the University of Pretoria, South Africa have approved this study.

1. **In a typical year, approximately how many times do you watch local Kenyan films in a theatre?** (*Select one*)

1. ☐ None- this was my first time watching a Kenyan film this year

2. ☐ 1 or 2 times a year

3. ☐ 3 to 5 times a year

4. ☐ 6 or more times a year

2. **Whose decision was it to attend this screening?** (*Select one*)

1. ☐ Mine

2. ☐ My spouse or partner's decision

3. ☐ A joint decision with my friend

4. ☐ Someone else's decision

3. **Select the three most important reasons why you attended the screening.** (*Select three*)

1. ☐ Because someone invited you

2. ☐ To spend quality time with family or friends

3. ☐ To energize your own creativity

4. ☐ To see the work of the film director

5. ☐ To be emotionally moved or inspired

6. ☐ For work or educational purposes

7. ☐ To support the local film industry

4. **Did you do anything (apart from reading the invitation card) in order to prepare yourself for today's screening?** (Select one)

1. ☐ Yes

2. ☐ No

5. **If yes, please give an example of what you did to prepare specifically for this screening.**

_____

_____

6.

Before the screening (*Select a number*)	**Not at All**	**Slightly**	**Neutral**	**Moderately**	**Very Much**
A. Overall, how much were you looking forward to this screening?	1	2	3	4	5

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☑ **Reflecting on your experience**

7.

In regard to the screening (*Select a number*)	Not at All	Slightly	Neutral	Moderately	Very Much
A. Overall, to what degree were you engaged in the narrative of the film?	1	2	3	4	5
B. Overall, to what degree did the cinematography (camera shots and angles movement) contribute to the story?	1	2	3	4	5
C. Overall, to what degree did you understand the plot of the film?	1	2	3	4	5
D. Overall, how much did the characters contribute to your engagement in the film?	1	2	3	4	5
E. How likely are you to watch films that are similar to *Men of the Hill* in terms of style, plot, character or any other pertinent factor?	1	2	3	4	5

8.

In regards to the screening (*Select a number*)	Not at All	Slightly	Neutral	Moderately	Very Strong
A. Overall, how strong was your emotional response to the film? An emotional response refers to whether your feelings were stimulated by the film.	1	2	3	4	5
B. Overall, how strong was your intellectual response to film? An intellectual response refers to how you were mentally and knowingly involved in the film.	1	2	3	4	5

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9. **What emotions were you feeling as the film came to an end? Please describe your emotional response in the space provided.**

_____

_____

10. **Please describe your intellectual response to the film in the space provided. An intellectual response refers to how you were mentally and knowingly involved in the film.**

_____

_____

11.

In regard to the screening (S*elect a number*)	Not at All	Slightly	Neutral	Moderately	Very Much
A. How much did the film expand your thinking on an issue or idea that you hadn't previously given much thought to?	1	2	3	4	5
B. To what extent did the film expose you to a style of filmmaking that you previously were not familiar with?	1	2	3	4	5
C. During the screening, how much did you think about the structure of the plot?	1	2	3	4	5
D. During the screening, how much did your mind wander to matters outside of the film itself?	1	2	3	4	5

12.

In regard to the screening (*Select a number*)	Not at All	Slightly	Neutral	Moderately	Very Much
A. To what extent did anything about the film in its content or style make you uncomfortable?	1	2	3	4	5
	1	2	3	4	5

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	1	2	3	4	5
B. To what degree would you recommend someone else to watch this film?					
C. How much more likely than you were before the screening to watch this type of film again in the future?	1	2	3	4	5
D. To what extent did the film showcase anything about Kenya that you had already valued before the screening?	1	2	3	4	5
E. To what degree do you think Kenyan filmmakers should be making these types of films?	1	2	3	4	5

13. **Did the film leave you with more questions than answers?** (Select one)

1. ☐ Yes

2. ☐ No

14. If "Yes", please describe those questions that you would have liked the film to answer.

_____

_____

15. **During the screening, did you privately discuss the film with a member of the audience?**

1. ☐ No

2. ☐ Yes

16. **After the screening, do you plan to do any of the following activities?** (Select all that apply)

1. ☐ Discuss the film with other audience members

2. ☐ Speak with a family member about the film after you get home

3. ☐ React to the film online or on social media

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4. ☐ Reflect privately about the meaning of the film

5. ☐ Research about such a film online

17. Overall, at what level were your expectations fulfilled for this screening?
(Select a number)

Below Expectations	Slightly Below Expectations	Neutral	Moderately Met Expectations	Above Expectations

--------1-----------------2 -------------3--------------4--------------------5------

18. How could your experience of the film have been improved?

_____

_____

About You

This final section is about you the audience member. The personal information requested here would be useful for this study because by answering these questions, you will help me to learn the attitudes of Kenyan film audiences towards different styles of filmmaking. If there are any questions that you'd rather not answer, please select "Prefer not to say" and skip to the next question. If you would prefer to not complete this section at all, simply leave it open.

A. In terms of gender, do you identify as: (*Select one only*)

1. ☐ Female   **2.** ☐ Male   **3.** ☐ Prefer not to say

B. Which of the following age groups do you belong to?

1. ☐ 18-24

2. ☐ 25-34

3. ☐ 35-44

4. ☐ 45-54

5. ☐ Above 55

6. ☐ Prefer not to say

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C.   **Do you live in Nairobi and surrounding areas?**

1.   ☐   No

2.   ☐   Yes

3.   ☐   Prefer not to say

Thank you for your help.

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APPENDIX D: INTERVIEW GUIDE

SLOW CINEMA: NARRATIVE, MINIMALISM AND INDETERMINACY IN KENYAN CINEMA

Semi-structured Interviews of Selected Kenyan Film Experts

I.   Opening

A. **(Introduction)** My name is Emmanuel Wanyonyi, a PhD candidate of Drama and Film Studies at the University of Pretoria, South Africa. My study seeks to establish how the narrative conventions of Slow Cinema can be transposed into Kenyan cinema. I would like to interview you in your professional capacity as a film expert so that I can optimally contextualize the topic of Slow Cinema within the Kenyan film industry, and to obtain your expert opinions on my film *Men of the Hill*, which is part of my research.

B. **(Purpose)** This interview forms part of the data collection phase of my research. I would like to ask you some open-ended questions about your educational and professional backgrounds; and some of the experiences you have had in the film industry so far. Your expert opinion will provide insight not only for this study but also for future research. Afterwards we will discuss your views on Slow Cinema with specific reference to notions of narrative, minimalism and indeterminacy in so far as the Kenyan film industry is concerned. The conversations and notes taken will be anonymous and confidential. You can withdraw from the interview process at any time without any disadvantage to yourself. If you choose to withdraw from the interview, none of the information you provided in the interview will be used in the research and all documentation of your interview will be destroyed. If you would like more information on the research please email me at wanyonyiemmanuel@gmail.com to obtain a copy of the research proposal.

C. **(Motivation)** I wish to audiotape this interview for ease of review and analysis. None of the audiotape material of the interview will be included in the study, as the recording is for my own research reference purposes only. If you agree to be recorded for research documenting purposes, please sign the **letter of informed consent** (see p. 4-7). Your identity will not be divulged in the study. Again, should you decide to withdraw from this research after having been recorded in audiotape form, your identity will be protected by destroying all the recordings in which you are represented.

D. (Time Line) The interview should take about 30 to 40 minutes, but it can be shorter or longer in duration depending on where the open-ended interview takes the conversation. Please inform me at any time during the interview if you need a comfort break.

Thank you for your time, and for agreeing to participate in my research in your professional capacity.

II. (Background) *Participant*
1. Briefly tell me about your educational or professional background.
2. Could you briefly describe some of the experiences you have had in the film industry so far?

III. (Topic) *Men of the Hill*
1. Have you previously watched another film, similar in style and narrative to *Men of the Hill*? If so, describe how narrative and aesthetic strategies have been deployed in the film.
2. What did you identify as the noticeable features of *Men of the Hill* in comparison to a typical Hollywood film?
3. What would you say is the main aim of Slow Cinema either based on your reading of the narrative structure and aesthetic construction of *Men of the Hill* or another similar film you have watched?
4. How in your expert opinion would the average Kenyan film viewer visualize, interpret or react, to *Men of the Hill*?
5. What in your view are the main challenges in Kenyan cinema in terms of narrative and aesthetic styles used?
6. In your view, how would the narrative and aesthetic conventions of Slow Cinema be situated within the local, historical, and intercultural contexts of Kenyan cinema?
7. What is your interpretation of the findings obtained from the survey of selected Kenyan viewers as regards *Men of the Hill*?
8. Would you say that *Men of the Hill* is a successful Kenyan Slow Cinema film, considering what each of these words mean – narrative, minimalism, and indeterminacy as indicative of some sort of meaningful artistic expression?

APPENDIX E: KFCB FILMING LICENSE

Licence No:R000559

000559

KENYA FILM CLASSIFICATION BOARD

When Replying Quote
Telephone Nairobi-(20)-2250600/2241804
FAX:2251258
www.kfcb.co.ke

Uchumi House
15th Floor
Aga Khan Walk
Po Box 44226-00100
Nairobi.

FILMS AND STAGE PLAYS ACT CAP. 222
LAWS OF KENYA
Part 11 Section 4
(No film to be made without filming licence)

FILMING LICENCE

info@kfcb.co.ke
licensing @kfcb.co.ke
License fee Kshs...15.000
Filming fee Kshs...50.00

Date: 25/12/2018

Licence is hereby granted to ..CEDAR COMMUNICATIONS LTD

on behalf of ..EMMANUEL WANYONYI

To film in Kenya ....FEATURE FILM

Title: ..MEN OF THE HILL

Location ELGEYO MARAKWET (SAMICH RESORT) KAJIADO - LESIOLO, KONA BARIDI, DAYSTAR UNIVERSITY, KAJIADO - ADVENTIST CHURCH, SUGOR KABARNET ROAD

Shooting Dates 14TH, 6TH - 12-2018, 4TH, 13TH - JANUARY 2019, 15TH/12/2018

Number of Days ..FIVE (5)

Licencing Officer
Kenya Film Classification Board
P O Box 44226-00100,
for: Film Licensing Officer

Cc   PS Ministry of Interior and Co-ordination of National Government
     Inspector General of Police
     National Intelligence Sevice
     Director, Department of Immigration Services.

OFFICIAL CLEARANCE MUST BE OBTAINED TO FILM AT GOVERNMENT BUILDINGS

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APPENDIX F: TURNITIN ORIGINALITY REPORT

Slow Cinema: Narrative, Minimalism, and Indeterminacy in Kenyan Cinema

ORIGINALITY REPORT

6% SIMILARITY INDEX	5% INTERNET SOURCES	2% PUBLICATIONS	% STUDENT PAPERS

PRIMARY SOURCES

1	vdoc.pub Internet Source	<1%
2	fr.scribd.com Internet Source	<1%
3	kar.kent.ac.uk Internet Source	<1%
4	www.otherfilmspectator.com Internet Source	<1%
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8	www.festival-cannes.fr Internet Source	<1%
9	s3-eu-west-1.amazonaws.com Internet Source	<1%

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APPENDIX G: DECLARATION FROM PROOFREADER

This is to state that the PhD: 'Slow Cinema: Narrative, Minimalism and Indeterminacy in Kenyan Cinema' submitted to me by Mr. Emmanuel Sikuku (student no: U17319669) of the University of Pretoria, South Africa, has been language edited by me, according to the tenets of academic discourse.

Signed:

Mary Migichi, MA (Communication Studies); BA (Communication); PRINT; Certificate in English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL)- (First Class)

Editor- Evangel Publishing House,
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15 October 2021.