# Tensions of Modernity in Flora Gomes's *The Blue Eyes of Yonta*

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In analyzing Flora Gomes's *The Blue Eyes of Yonta*, this author hopes to show that in spite of the postmodern promise of leveling or rather blurring the boundary between the metropole and the colony, the relationship of the former and the latter continues to be that of economic exploitation, subordination, and dependency. This dependency perpetuates an economic and cultural hierarchy between the metropole and the colony and consequently precipitates discourses of "nativity" and authenticity in opposition to Western values. As will be evident in *The Blue Eyes of Yonta*, this horrific economic condition encourages cultural narcissism on the part of the colony, in spite of it embracing hybrid or syncretic cultural identifications.

As Aimé Césaire observes, the controlled and selective modernization of the colony is not an accident in the colonial enterprise but germane to the definition of modernity itself (35–36). Modernity in the metropole is meaningless without the colony's alterity, which implies that claims to modernity can only be self-assuring to the metropolitan subject with reference to the "timeless," "uncivilized," "primitive," and "premodern." Incomplete or controlled modernization cannot be termed as the failure of modernity but instead is the prerequisite for any claims by the metropole

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to modernity. Fredric Jameson makes the relationship of the metropole and the colony clear in his analysis of the modern and the postmodern. As Jameson suggests, modernity can be described as a "sense of unique historical difference from other societies that a certain experience of the New (in the modern) seems to encourage and perpetuate" (*Postmodernism* 41), while postmodernism can be seen as the triumph of technology which does not valorize the New as in the modern experience (41). Jameson argues further:

[T]he keen sense of the New in the modern period was only possible because of the mixed, uneven transitional nature of that period, in which the old coexisted with what was then coming into being [...]. One way of telling the story of the transition from the modern to the postmodern lies then in showing how at length modernization triumphs and wipes the old completely out: nature is abolished along with the traditional countryside and traditional agriculture; even the surviving historical monuments, now all cleaned up, become glittering simulacra of the past, and not its survival. (41)

Modernity therefore depends on the existence of the old forms of economy and culture to prove its newness, which implies that the countryside is a reminder to the modern subject of its newness. The "native" needs to be one and the same with nature to justify domination while at the same time affirming the colonizer's modernity; or at best the "native" has to remain "bad copies" for the metropole to assert its modernity or "superior" civilization (Landau 141–71; Dirks 1-25; Gable 294–319). The native's assumed closeness to nature and "barbarism" have been used as reasons to justify the terrifying level of violence which came with modernity whether in Africa, the Caribbean, or even in the southern United States.

It is generally assumed that, after decolonization, global relations no longer depended on the use of force, especially since the nationalist movements and independence of the former colonies have forced the colonial administration back to the home country and the bourgeois subject has announced its own death (Jameson, "Consumer Society" 12–29). As Ellen Meiksins Wood would argue, rather than decreasing, the use of force has increased tremendously, which can be evidenced in the presence of the United States military in about one-hundred-and-forty countries (1). In addition, multinational corporations have replaced the colonial government and have perpetuated the exploitation and subordination of the colony, invariably creating a relationship of dependency (Jameson, "Modernism and Imperialism" 43–66). One discovers that in spite of gain-

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ing independence, whether politically or economically, the colony has not significantly modernized, a situation which characterizes the uneven development common in Third World countries but which can be traced to the logic through which colonialism operated.

Jameson's idea of "postmodern relief" becomes pertinent at this point. One of the manifestations of this postmodern relief is reification of the commodity which he describes as the "effacement of the traces of production" (*Postmodernism* 44). But in Jameson's idea of "postmodern relief," one finds a limitation in its application to the third world situations where reification of the cultural commodity is almost impossible (at least in a Western sense) because a paucity of economic and cultural capital excludes the indigent populations of African countries and other third world countries from consumerism. Such reification is more meaningful to the metropolitan consumer who in fact needs such effacement so as to avoid being confronted by the conditions in which the commodity is produced. In an age when the third world has also become the site of sweatshops, one cannot but anticipate the return of the repressed: the Marxian notion of reification in which the worker's labour already excludes him/her from consuming the commodity.

It is therefore very logical that Manthia Diawara dwells on the importance of consumerism. In fact, Diawara observes that the living conditions in most West African countries are so gruesome that only tourists and professionals of his status could live a meaningful life in these countries. One way of overcoming poverty and gaining access to the commodity is for West African countries to temper their nationalist sentiments and open the borders for the easier movement of people, capital, and commodities. He believes opening up the borders without the present extreme forms of control would allow people the opportunity to travel to other West African countries. But more important for Diawara is the access to commodities, which he believes will not only improve the living conditions but also mitigate the corporations' domination of individual country's local markets. Diawara's other suggestion is what he calls "homeboy cosmopolitanism":

Young blacks today are more aware than their parents were of the political issues surrounding consumption in American society. Thus, they do not view consumption negatively, as a form of alienation. They are less concerned with instant gratification. They do not feel driven to seek success, to advance instantly, to consume in the venues that white people want to reserve for themselves and their children. Homeboy activ-

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ism places mobility and consumption at the very center of the struggle for the black good life. Homeboys refuse to be restricted to black enclaves or to be defined by racial stereotypes. Instead, they put those very stereotypes of blackness in the marketplace, and obtain higher prices for them. Mobility and consumption have thus become the vehicle through which young blacks control prevailing stereotypes and regain their individuality in the crowd. (273)

In the same vein, Diawara further explains that most African immigrants do not share the nostalgia of the Civil Rights years, a situation which sometimes leads to arguments between African immigrants in the United States and African Americans. Rather than show interest in the Civil Rights ideals, Diawara contends that most African immigrants are in pursuit of a good life and, like the modern generation of African Americans, do not view consumption as alienation but a means to living a prosperous life. Diawara therefore emphasizes the importance of migration and consumption as a means of living comfortably so that black people can re-create their own modernities. It is then so surprising when he asserts, in his study of popular Hollywood and Independent movies, that "[u]nlike white characters, black people are trapped in their skin. When they play the role of a gangster or a prostitute, spectators see them as playing themselves. They are locked in pathological identities" (273). Diawara does not explain how the homeboys' marketing of black stereotypes may have subverted the pathological gaze of the spectators evident in the Blaxploitation movies. But more important is the fact that the United States seems to be site for Diawara's notion of homeboy cosmopolitanism. Therefore, one has to ask questions about how to grapple with the increasing indigent West African population that lacks the agency to commodify black stereotypes. While migration may provide the African immigrants in the u.s. the access to the good life, it is doubtful whether migration can significantly alter the deplorable and gruesome living conditions in many parts of the African continent. With or without migration, the social realities remain shocking and are perpetuated by the almost limitless control of local markets by the multinational corporations and foreign goods. When we take Jameson's idea of the "modern" and "postmodern," and specifically the issue of reification on the one hand and Diawara's notion of "homeboy cosmopolitanism" on the other, there is a great opportunity for agency within the metropolitan space replete with consumer goods. But in many third world countries and particularly in West Africa, these approaches seem inadequate because they are derived substantially from social contexts

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in which the political, social, economic, and cultural dynamic cannot be easily interchanged for the ones in West Africa. In the movie *The Blue Eyes of Yonta*, Gomes offers an insightful look into the tensions inherent in the issue of modernity and complicates the above notion of consumerism. Therefore, *The Blue Eyes of Yonta* will help to demonstrate that whether in "modern" or "postmodern" times terrifying social and economic realities encourage cultural narcissism, reactionary nativism, and nationalism even though the characters in the movie exhibit liminal cultural identifications and multiple subjectivities.

# The Blue Eyes of Yonta and other African Films

The film *The Blue Eyes of Yonta* brings together certain aesthetic devices which challenge its categorization as a specific genre or sub-genre within third world film and African film traditions. One of the dominant models in African film is the Third Cinema, a term coined by the Argentinean filmmaker Fernando Solanas and the Spanish-born Octavio Getino in their influential essay "Toward a Third Cinema" published in 1969, although by the time the Third Cinema was developed there had been a remarkable number of films produced within the African context in particular and third world in general. Solanas and Getino's theory of Third Cinema emerges out of their movie La Hora de los Hornos (1968). As Jim Pines and Paul Willemen observe, Solanas and Gitano are influenced by the Cuban Revolution and so it is obvious why revolutionary energy is central to their notion of Third Cinema, which they describe as a cinema of subversion and change. The Third Cinema is conceived as a subversion of the Hollywood movies and the European B movies in order to create aesthetic, critical, and political space quite unavailable within the dominant forms. Stylistically, they tend to adopt forms of the Italian neo-realism as a way of raising people's consciousness about oppressive regimes and emphasizing the need to subvert such authorities. The Battle of Algiers certainly fits the category of Third Cinema, as established by Solanas and Getino, in terms of the dominant neo-realism and revolutionary purpose. In addition, movies of Ousmane Sembene like Borom Sarrat (1963), Tauw (1970), and *Xala* (1974) thematize the stifling poverty of the Senegalese countryside and cities, the abuse of power by religious and political leaders, the decadence of post-independence governments, and the responsibility of the common people in challenging such excesses. Unlike the film *The* Battle of Algiers, Sembene's movies encourage individual and collective resistance against oppressive and corrupt post-independent administrations but still do not manifest the revolutionary zeal characteristic of Third

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Cinema. Although *The Blue Eyes of Yonta* also explores issues concerning poverty and oppression, it does not portray the revolutionary energy of *The Battle of Algiers*; in addition, the extreme poverty portrayed in the movie does not generate the kind of social criticism that one finds in many of Sembene's movies, particularly *Gelwaar* (1993). The movie is sometimes playful, an aspect which seems postmodernist, especially with its play on history, national identifications, and the interplay between tradition and modernity. However, Gomes's playfulness does not go as far as Jean-Pierre Bekolo's in *Quartier Mozart* (1992) and *Aristotle's Plot* (1996), in which the former demonstrates extreme playfulness about gender and sexuality and the latter offers an ironic representation of the Hollywood action genre. The Blue Eyes of Yonta does not share the nostalgic or pastoral cultural preferences of Gastone Kabore in Wend Kuuni (1982) and Souleyman Cisse in Yeelen (1987) in which the directors are more concerned with exploring African myth, epistemology, and cosmology (Yeelen) and naturalism (Wend Kuuni). The Blue Eyes of Yonta cannot be adequately categorized as a movie of revolutionary optimism even though it starts with the celebration of Guinean revolution over the Portuguese; neither can one group it with Sembene's movies that criticize the corrupt, neo-colonial post-independence African administrations nor put it together with the postmodernist movies of Jean-Pierre Bekolo, in which the director is not concerned with portraying a sense of Africanness. Therefore, the movie is eclectic in its thematic and aesthetic preoccupations because it combines the dominant concerns in other movies. Gomes in *The Blue Eyes of Yonta* seems to take the issues in the revolutionary, mythical, naturalistic, and ironic models of African films and presents them as a problematic, necessary for grappling with modernity.

### **Synopsis**

The Blue Eyes of Yonta is set in Guinea Bissau, a country dominated by the Portuguese for five centuries and its people subjected to the most brutal form of slavery and colonization (Carlos Lopes 19). According to Lopes, the ruling Portuguese still practised slavery and slave trade for much longer after it had been abolished by both France and Britain. Like the French, the Portuguese also practised the colonial system of assimilation, but the main difference is that the Portuguese promised the people of Guinea Bissau Portuguese citizenship in exchange for their labour on plantations in Guinea Bissau and Cape Verde (22). The people protested against the Portuguese ruthlessness, but they were met with stricter oppression and repression. With the opening credits, as the camera follows an old car

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into a dilapidated city, one discovers that Guinea Bissau has not recovered from the effects of Portuguese domination, although the hardship has been worsened by dictatorship. The scene changes to a group of young kids celebrating the victory of the nationalist movements over the Portuguese. But the ceremony is cut short by a lorry driver who obstructs some of the kids from rolling their inflated tire tubes in celebration, a situation which leads Amilcar, the younger brother of Yonta (Vicenté's girlfriend), to confront the driver, accusing him of forgetting the revolution and trivializing its celebration. Amilcar then yells at the driver that Vicenté, the protagonist and veteran of the revolution who is held in high esteem, would intervene on his behalf; and surely Vicenté comes and rescues Amilcar from the scene. Amilcar shares the same name with Amilcar Cabral, one of the foremost militant nationalist leaders of Guinea Bissau who strongly believed that wresting his country from the hands of the Portuguese was the only way to escape trauma, violence, slavery, and racism. He was one of those who led the armed conflict which began in 1961 and lasted till 1972, after which the Portuguese were defeated (Rosemary E. Galli and Jocelyn Jones 57). Unfortunately, he was assassinated on 20 January 1973, a year before Portugal recognized Guinea Bissau as an independent country.

The scene shifts to a group of fishermen complaining to Vicenté about a power outage that is undermining fish preservation, and then Vicenté's facial expression reveals his frustration about the energy crisis. However, he is able to procure a loan to fix the electricity shortage, his clients are happy, and Vicenté can resume his regular business activities. Meanwhile, on returning from a business trip to Portugal, Vicenté speaks to his gods about the shipping port which now stands over the Geba River. The Geba River throughout the colonial years had been the site of imperial conflicts between the Portuguese, French, and the British because of its potential for transporting goods. Vicenté seems extremely upset by the presence of the port on a river that seems to hold the essence of innocence and purity for him, so he laments the violation of the river. After this lamentation he meets his girlfriend and her family, but his brief visit reveals he does not seem to have enough time for her. In the meantime, Yonta has received an anonymous letter (from an indigent, secret admirer, Zé) which contained a poem addressed to her as a beautiful woman with blue eyes. The poem is read at the Tropicana Club, much to Yonta's delight, and while she enjoys the bustling party, Vicenté seems uncomfortable among the excited youth. He later complains he would not attend a wedding that Yonta desperately wants to attend, but Yonta still hopes that her boyfriend would yield.

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Meanwhile Nando, Vicenté's old comrade from the revolutionary wars, comes to Bissau after hearing over the radio that Vincenté is searching for him. Nando's introduction in the film takes the spectator through the city's commercial centre, where he meets another old comrade who looks as haggard as himself. They discuss the worsening economy (which has failed by 1992 when the film was released) and its effects on their general appearance and health. During this time, Guinea Bissau was in the clutches of the IMF and World Bank, with their Structural Adjustment Program that resulted in crippling of exports, devaluation of currency, and undermining of the informal sector of the economy (Joshua B. Forrest 88–94). This situation has pushed Guinea Bissau, like many other countries of West Africa, to a position of dependency out of which they have not been able to extricate themselves. It is therefore not surprising that Gomes foregrounds squalor in this movie, especially through Nando who looks disheveled. The two friends experience a joyous reunion, and Vicenté tries to convince Nando to move to the city of Bissau in order to taste the "national cake." But Vicenté is shocked when he discovers in the morning that Nando has disappeared, leaving his hat lying on the bed. Vicenté becomes extremely troubled and sees himself as one of the corrupt politicians who fleece and oppress the masses. The scene then changes to a traditional marriage ceremony where the goods for the wedding are not limited to those found in local markets. When a young boy offers a condom as a wedding gift, some old men and women are offended, but he explains that it will prevent venereal diseases. The condom is quite significant because it demonstrates Gomes's appropriation of modernity. The movie ends with the adults hungover at a poolside party while the young kids, led by Yonta, sing and dance around the pool.

# Modernity's Dilemma in The Blue Eyes of Yonta

The spectator first sees Vicenté through Amilcar, who describes him thus, "Look, Vicenté. A great soldier. He scared the Portuguese away." As soon as Vicenté intervenes in the disagreement between Amilcar and the stubborn lorry driver, he immediately reprimands the driver for being indifferent to the anniversary of victory over the Portuguese. As he drives Amilcar home, he complains about people like the driver who are indifferent to celebrating the victory over the Portuguese. But Vicenté is now a businessman in Bissau, and so many clients count on his business for their own livelihood. His business is not restricted to Bissau, and upon returning from a trip to Portugal he exclaims, "Hey lads! Some Portuguese wine to celebrate being back." Culturally, Vicenté bestrides Guinea Bissau and Portugal as a hybrid

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who occupies interstitial spaces and therefore neither he nor his workers care if the wine is Portuguese or Guinean. All they desire is a meaningful existence that affords them the opportunity to partake of the consumer culture. Kwame Anthony Appiah would support this argument when he contends that European culture is not other to the African self because the African subject has appropriated the cultural artifact and stripped it of foreignness (441). When analyzing a postmodern African sculpture, Appiah argues that

Yoruba Man with a Bicycle was produced by someone who did not care that the bicycle is the white man's invention—it is not there to be other to the Yoruba self; it is there because someone cared for its solidity; it is there because it will take us farther than our feet will take us; it is there because machines are now as African as novelist ... and as fabricated as the kingdom of Nakem. (441)

Like the Yoruba man with the bicycle who is indifferent to the source of his modern transportation, Vicenté appropriates the Portuguese wine in refashioning his subjectivity. Simon Gikandi makes a similar argument by stating that Europeanness, or Englishness, is a creation of the third world, and this profound assertion debunks any claim to authenticity (Maps 163–64). Rather, it shows how Vicenté has re-invented himself by appropriating local and "foreign" resources for his business on the one hand, and, on the other, it proves that culturally he belongs in the liminal space. Vicenté's girlfriend, Yonta, offers a parallel example: at the Tropicana Club, one of Yonta's friends reads the poem written for her by a secret admirer, Zé, who among other things describes her as having blue eyes. In actual fact, the poem was originally written for a Swedish woman by her mentally unstable boyfriend and later appropriated by Zé. In spite of the fact that she does not possess blue eyes, Yonta is delighted, and through her appropriation of the blue eyes Gomes situates her within cultural interstices where physiological traits express multiple significations.

In the case of Vicenté, although at the opening of the movie his business suffers a setback resulting from lack of electricity, he is able to resolve the energy problem by getting a loan, and this change in his business can be seen when the workers celebrate the newly restored electricity. Whether in terms of consumerism or moving across spaces, Vicenté is a modern Guinean who is immersed in the consumer culture and who is not circumscribed by national space. In addition, Vicenté's private business testifies to his ability to manoeuvre the economic crisis in Bissau; the

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importance of his success lies in the fact that most government-sponsored businesses had failed and the informal sector which had succeeded before independence has crashed (Forrest 88–94). After establishing Vicenté as a hybrid subject immersed in consumer culture, it is crucial to examine the tension of modernity that he represents.

The tension of modernity in Vicenté does not arise from his rejection of European influence but from the after-effects of Portuguese colonialism. These effects are seen in post-independence dictatorships and the attendant disastrous economy that has left many of his people in the nadir of poverty. In The Blue Eyes of Yonta, modernity is portrayed in its most brutal form in the recurrent image of the ship port known for its disciplined labour, which resonates with forced cropping and the gradual disappearance of subsistence agriculture. After a few days of backbreaking labour, Zé quits the shipyard, realizing quickly that the port will potentially reduce him to thralldom. Frederick Cooper argues that the dock entrepreneurs labeled the Africans as lazy not just because they wanted to control their labour but also because they wanted to obliterate any other kind of labour different from the European "conceptions of work time" (211). Cooper argues that labourers were able to work on their own terms as long as they worked outside of the controlled labour system. Many of them avoided the shipyard as a rebellion against its regimen and quasi-slavery labour. The port in *The Blue Eyes of Yonta* mirrors this labour system too, and understanding Vicenté's volatile reaction to this site of labour is pivotal to the complex depiction of the shipyard. After returning from Portugal, Vicenté laments modernity's contamination of nature and tradition: "See the town? How it's decaying. It weeps over its divorce from river Geba. Now it's married to container ships." The camera gives medium and close shots at this point, emphasizing Vicenté's contemplative mood and the seriousness of the issue. Certainly, Vicenté may not be particularly happy with container ships dominating the Geba River, but more importantly he laments how the people's living conditions and welfare have deteriorated: "See the town? How it's decaying." This statement is a direct reflection of the sordid images the spectator encounters in the movie. Vicenté's apprehension about the port is realized when Zé quits his job at the port after a few days on the docks because he could not cope with the workload and because he discovers that he has virtually lost his freedom. The foreman always wears a cruel countenance and shouts orders at Zé any time he relaxes, a point that justifies Cooper's assertion that the "colonizing" time at the ports envelopes the worker as a way of possessing absolute control over his labour. Vicenté's anxiety about the port is soon confirmed when

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Zé's brother, who works full time at the shipyard, still cannot afford basic utilities and Zé is forced to study under dim street lights.

Vicenté's juxtaposition of the Geba River and the container ships is instructive because such binary opposition reinforces the narratives of a grand modernity in which the colonizer establishes domination over the colony. A detailed scene supports Vicenté's view of how the container ships have taken over the river. The camera gives a long shot of the shipyard, but in spite of the scope of the camera the port still extends beyond the frame; such a view is an expression of power that cannot be contained within the frame. Vicenté notes again that the river has been divorced from the town and married to container ships, but what strikes one here is the inevitable dearth—drought, hunger, and poverty—that the image of the separation of the river from the town has evoked. Such an image allows Vicenté to articulate the binary opposition between modernity, especially as connected to European expansion, and nature; that is, modernity becomes the force of newness that triumphs over nature. For the colonizer, the "native" and nature are one and the same and the destruction of one implies the conquering of the other (Dirks 1–25). In a more significant sense, the colonial culture of photography and hunting share the same technology and desire to conquer both the "authentic" African, the big game, and the lands too (Landau 141–71). Although his own business is now thriving, the images of abject poverty which dominate the screen are a testament to the discordant relation between the impoverished populace and the modern economic systems.

Modernity's dilemma is ultimately thematized in Vicenté's encounter with Nando, his comrade with whom he had fought to expel the Portuguese from Guinea Bissau. As stated in the synopsis, we hear the radio announcement Vicenté has sponsored for information about his friend, Nando. It is no coincidence that Nando is the quintessential poor man who lives in a village removed from Bissau, where he farms and fishes for a living. Partly because he is now successful in Bissau and partly because of Nando's indigent condition, Vicenté advises him to stay in the city. Vicenté believes that Nando will not find independence in the village, evidence of the uneven development that characterizes many post-independence African countries in which the villages are grossly underdeveloped (Dirlik 241-70). But when Nando disappears in the morning, Vicenté convinces himself that he has betrayed the revolution because he discovers that although he is now successful, his friend Nando and the majority of the population are far removed from the life of comfort that he lives. The spectator perceives Vicenté's shock when he sees Nando's lone hat, lying on

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the bed. From that moment, Vicenté looks physically and psychologically troubled and interrogates his gods about his friend's disappearance. But he soon goes to the balcony and describes himself as a vulture, a common metaphor in the post-independence Africa for corrupt politicians. From the back, the camera captures Vicenté's arms as he simulates the vultures gliding above him in a blurry sky suggestive of a somber sense and surreal temperament.

Nando's reappearance in Bissau can be seen on three main levels: one, the reunion of two old friends who are also revolutionary war veterans; two, the revival of Vicenté's beliefs in the ideals of the revolution; and three, the unraveling of the social, economic, and political conditions of modern Guinea Bissau. The three are so interconnected that Vicenté again revives the disjunction between the successful capitalist monopoly of the port (including Vicenté's own growing business) and the bitter reality that ordinary people confront daily. Although he has been able to create a new life for himself in Bissau, Nando's introduction in the film and the harrowing memory of his appearance and disappearance evoke a different but legitimate aspect of Guinea Bissau that Vicenté has probably taken for granted. Vicenté's reaction to Nando's disappearance may be a dominant part of the movie, but the director provides other arguments, especially from Yonta, which evince the general dilemma about modern Guinea Bissau.

In contrast to Vicenté, Yonta fully understands the temptation of the cultural narcissism and fetishization of the past. On this occasion, Yonta has come to remind Vicenté of the wedding they plan to attend on that day, but Vicenté is distraught and unfriendly to her. She promptly tells him that the past is valuable but impossible to re-create: "If your ideals have been spoiled, it's not my fault. We respect the past but we can't live in it. I like you for what you are, but I want to be free to choose. Isn't that what you fought for?" Yonta's statements may have highlighted her boyfriend's obsession with the past but paradoxically reveal Vicenté's urgent concern with how the ideals of the revolution might have been perverted by corruption, abuse of power, and the lack of basic needs. As Edouard Glissant argues in the Caribbean context, the past is no longer available in space and time partly because of spatial displacement (8–9). But in a profound sense, the past in Africa has also been altered by the dynamics of history. Gikandi rightly observes that "the repressed or marginalized Caribbean self can never find wholeness and deep meanings in the world of the other; because this self cannot belong wholly to the other's scheme of things, it must live as a fragment of both its culture and the value system

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of the dominant" (Writing in Limbo 173). Although Gikandi focuses on the Caribbean, the statement is equally valid for the African self who cannot live fully in an "authentic" African culture or fully in the modern value systems but must fashion new subjectivities from the two. As Gikandi puts it, "The masked figure merges forms from Africa with those invented in the diaspora; in the process, new meanings about self, history and culture are created" (Writing in Limbo 175). While the above assertions may be valid, the past in The Blue Eyes of Yonta assumes a different but important signification. The past brings about the reality of uneven development marked by disturbing images of penury, especially children who are dressed in rags and adults like Nando and others in the market and the port who appear destitute and broken.

Unlike Jameson, who regards consumerism as reification, Diawara believes that consumerism is empowering for Africans; with the goods that Vicenté brings with him from Portugal he partakes of consumer culture. As stated earlier, The Blue Eyes of Yonta does not end with Vicenté's re-inventing his own modernity but portrays how the distressing effects of capitalist commerce and corrupt regimes can lead to grand narratives of modernity in which modernization and nature are set in binary oppositions to each other on the one hand, while the past is situated in opposition to a more fluid present that Yonta and Vicenté embrace on the other. It is pertinent to note why Diawara would favour the expansion of markets and the opening of borders for circulation of people and commodity. For Diawara, markets are important for three reasons: first, the market resists the unjust takeover of African economic, political, and cultural productions by the multinational corporations and international organizations like the IMF and the World Bank (154). Diawara acknowledges the tyrannical nature of African leadership in the questionable execution of Ken Tsaro Wiwa by the Abacha regime in Nigeria, believed to have been greatly influenced by Shell Oil (154). He advocates mobilizing resistance to the oppressive nature of globalization in West Africa. Second, the market also uses different methods to resist the nation-states' intention of wiping out the market in favour of a more organized form of commerce proposed by the multinationals and international monetary organizations. Third, the market will enhance consumer culture which Diawara believes will transform cultural productions in West Africa, especially if the borders can be made porous to facilitate an easier mobility of people and commodities. Enhanced mobility will discourage the unhealthy nationalism that has prevented African nations from transforming to truly modern nations. Diawara's notion of the market transcends the representation of

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the market as exploitative and malevolent and as a place where the colonial power has established a dominion (Masquellier 3–33; Austen 89–110; Bastian 129–66). Diawara's propositions for a decreased nationalism and relaxed border policy may be auspicious, but one has to be a little skeptical because of the role that the African ruling class might play since it controls tremendous wealth at the expense of the poor masses.

#### Conclusion

Uneven development is not antithetical to, but is consistent with, the project of modernity and is contingent on affirming the European self as modern which is only meaningful in relation to the existence of the "premodern" and "uncivilized" other—the colony. Unlike Césaire, who posits that colonialism's uneven development and controlled gift system was meant to serve the needs of the colonial authority, I would add that colonial authority derives its justification from the use of force and its narratives of modernity and "civilization." From a postmodernist point of view, according to Jameson, modernity in the metropole derives its signification from the existence of the old and the archaic while the postmodern is complete modernization and total disappearance of the old and the archaic. In the global age when the world has become like a small community, the myth of the modern gets perpetuated because the colonizer has only been replaced by the multinational corporations whose operations have deepened the injustice of colonization. Vicenté, the male protagonist in *The Blue Eyes of Yonta*, has been able to confront the cruel economic landscape to fashion his own modernity by moving across national borders and establishing a viable business. But one fundamental question that the movie raises is if the little modernities like Vicenté's self-transformation and Diawara's idea of the market in West Africa would not be haunted by the gruesome aspects of contemporary life. Again, Nando's appearance exposes the limitations to the notion of little modernities in spite of its discursive appeal (Knöbl 158–78). The notion of little modernities illustrates how a few people have been empowered within a hostile polity but ironically highlights the indigent population's inability to enjoy what Diawara calls "black good life." While there is no doubt that one needs to acknowledge African agency before and after trans-Atlantic history (Rathbone 18–30), *The Blue Eyes of Yonta* ultimately raises questions about the viability of such agency, in a world where Nando can still emerge from the "past" to haunt the complacency of "modern" Africa.

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