Frantz Fanon’s predictions with regard to the ‘pitfalls of national consciousness’ have by now become a common description of the current postcolonial dilemma. In fact, the story has been well rehearsed: after a brief period of third-world euphoria in the 1960s and 1970s, crystallized by events such as the Cuban revolution, the victory of Vietnam over the U.S., and various African independence struggles, it became clear that the world was not on the brink of a universal socialist revolution, and that various nationalist governments turned out to be prone to corruption and elitism. Thus, as Arif Dirlik argues, the phrase ‘postcolonial’ came to replace the oppositional geopolitical configuration of the third world and became a descriptor for various transformations within the capitalist world.

What I would like to suggest, however, is that, despite the argument espoused by many postcolonial theorists that the nation-state is on its last legs, the potentialities of national consciousness, as Fanon understood them, have not entirely succumbed to these envisaged pitfalls. For Fanon, “The national government, if it wants to be national, ought to govern by the people and for the people, for the outcasts and by the outcasts” (Wretched, 205). Thus, Fanon delineates a type of national consciousness that can be truly national—and hence, oppositional—only by serving the interests of those who have been cast aside by the national bourgeoisie.

This paper explores the ways in which a national consciousness that is inclusive, heterogeneous, and combative operates in what has been called ‘post-third’ cinema by creating new structures of looking. In particular, I examine two films: Woubi Cheri (1998), Philip Brooks and Laurent Bocahut’s documentary on gay life in the Ivory Coast, and Quartier Mozart (1992), Jean-Pierre Bekolo’s Cameroonian gender-bending teenage comedy. In Woubi Cheri, the Australian Brooks and Frenchman Bocahut film
the lives of a community of *woubis* and *yossis*, or gay, bisexual, and transgender men and women, in Abidjan. The film consists primarily of interviews with members of the community, who reveal an underground subculture and secret vocabulary that is used to describe who assumes the role of husband or wife, who identifies as transgender, and who might be hostile and dangerous to the community. The documentary also tracks the life and political activities of the charismatic Barbara, president of the Ivory Coast Transvestite Association, as she reveals her sexual identity to the heterosexual population. Although the film tackles serious subject matter, from homophobia to infidelity, the ultimate tone is one of celebration. The subjects of the documentary believe that, in proliferating sexualities, they are opening up the possibilities of national identity in the Ivory Coast and thus shaping the future of the nation. Furthermore, by putting themselves on camera, the *woubis* and *yossis* of Abidjan are also forcing their compatriots to establish new ways of looking, ways of looking that challenge the hegemonic notion that African sexuality and identity are monolithic.

Likewise, Bekolo’s *Quartier Mozart* demonstrates the ways that African national identities can be creatively de-stabilized, queered, and re-envisioned in an oppositional manner. The film is a farce about the sexual politics of Cameroonian teenagers, who are preoccupied with the types of things that concern all teenagers—sex, beer, soccer, popular culture, and parental authority. But this is not a typical romantic comedy. For, the protagonist of the film is Queen of the Hood, a sassy and curious young girl on the verge of teenage-hood, who wants to experience life as one of the neighborhood guys. Queen consults with her friend Maman Thékla, a local witch who often transforms herself into various men and boasts about how she has “known all sorts of women.” Subsequently, Maman Thékla transforms Queen into My Guy, a neighborhood stud who seduces the police chief’s daughter. But Queen’s request for temporary gender reassignment is less about exploring different sexual practices than it is about the desire to become an active viewing subject in a male-dominated social space. She tells Maman Thékla that she wants to “rip off the houses’ roofs with one blow” in order to catch a glimpse of what happens in the private spaces of the neighborhood. She articulates her desire as the wish “just to see.”

In quite different ways, both *Woubi Cheri* and *Quartier Mozart* establish new modes of looking that can be captured in what I would like to call the indiscreet look, which describes ways of envisioning and remapping a future, heterogeneous nation by disturbing, or queering, national time and space. In this way, the indiscreet look contributes to the construction of a Fanonian nationalism by imagining communities capable of unsettling traditional boundaries and opening up times and spaces that are excluded from bourgeois nationalism. As Judith Halberstam argues in her book *In a Queer Time and Place: Transgender Bodies, Subcultural Lives* (2005), queer time and space provide alternative modes of affiliation and association that oppose heteronormative spatio-temporal structures of family, reproductive time, and bourgeois respectability.