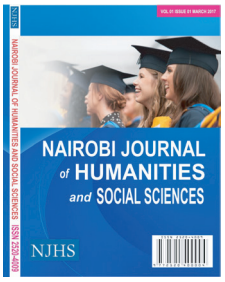

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Narratives of Rectitude and Extremist Ideology in Selected Kenyan Feature Films

Anne Mungai
Department of Film and Theatre Arts
Kenyatta University

John Mugubi
Department of Film and Theatre Arts
Kenyatta University

Abstract

The main objective of this paper is to explicate the way the content of films provide context for analysis of ideological perspectives raised within the film. This article starts with a summary of terrorism in Nairobi. This provides background information about the later arguments. Then the study discusses the embeddedness of social narration within the films' diegesis, what Turner (1999, p. 48) calls the "system of values", as represented through various film elements; cinematography, mise-en-scène, and composition. The study uses systems here as an ideological reference to imply the cultural orientations upon which terrorism is often discussed: religious, global, domestic, and so on. Other matters that the study discusses here include the construction of religious binaries as ideological binaries, the use of space as a tableau on which ideological patterns are mapped, and the use of aerial space to map out global hegemonic narratives. From here, the study classifies subsequent arguments into two broad subsections. The first deals with the materiality of innocence. By materiality the study means the essence of innocence as an ideological element that can spell out travesty of morality such as typified by the films' debate of violence. The second deals with interconnectedness between Islamic religion and violence, that is, how Islam and its symbols have been appropriated within the films to create and continue a conversation of irrationality and absurdity. The result of these is seen to be violence and trauma. The approach in all these sections is to use close reading of the film language, including cinematography, composition, montage, and even dialogue to support and propel the discussions.

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Introduction

This paper discusses the issue of art and ideology. In this regard, there are two key questions that need to be answered: the first concerns the ideological aspects which are negotiable through artistic spaces which seek to clarify the prevailing messages within the various artistic works; the second looks at artistic elements within film that make these negotiations possible, that is, the intricacies of symbolic representation of social and ideological issues within the artistic framework of the films under study. In the case, it is Gavin Hood's *Eye in The Sky* (2015) and Wanuri Kahiu's *From a Whisper* (2008). To answer both questions, then, it is imperative to also discuss the filmic representations of the ideological dimension of trauma, which is seen to be the result of terrorism. The study attunes the analysis to a tri-forked cross-disciplinary study of film spanning between a technological medium like film, a global agenda like terrorism and counter terrorism, and how these link with the human social life and the ideologies that come with it.

Global Terrorism: From Nairobi to the World

On August 7th 1998, something happened in Nairobi that captured the attention of many global security agencies. The American embassy in Nairobi was bombed in a synchronized attack that also saw the American embassy in Dar es Salaam attacked by terrorists. The significance of these two attacks, especially the one in Nairobi, on the global war on terror cannot be overlooked since they were the very first incidences in what has spawned to become global war on terror lead by America. As Pogge (2009, p. 105) notes, the "most notable attack until [the September 11 twin towers terrorist attack in New York which killed about 3,000 people in America] was the car bomb attack on the U.S. embassies in Dar es Salaam and Nairobi of 7 August 1998, which killed 257 people including 12 U.S. citizens". From these dual events, widely seen as an assault not just on the American nation but also an attack on global stability, was born a new public dilemma: how to deal with morality of terrorism in the aftermath of violence that extends beyond the site of blast, penetrating the lives of individuals.

From the ashes of this brutal past, terrorism has entered Nairobi's mainstream narrative discourses, including those that concern the social lives of individuals whose loved ones lost their lives. It is therefore most telling when films harness terrorism to open far-reaching memories of how such an event could become the center of far-reaching ideological discourses. The interest therefore is based on the ideological imaginations that emerge in the post-1998 period, and the various issues that are raised and questioned through various popular mediums. The first proposition in this chapter is that these two post-1998 films from Nairobi city which deal with terrorism; Gavin Hood's *Eye in The Sky* and Wanuri Kahiu's *From a Whisper*, think about Nairobi as a site from which various ideological narratives advances.

Eye in The Sky, the most recent of the two films, tells the story of Alia Mo'Allim (Aisha Takow), a Muslim girl who lives with her father in Eastleigh, a mainly Somali estate in Nairobi. The director recounts about a transnational aerial drone operation between America, United Kingdom, and Kenya whose security officers synchronize an operation targeting a terror cell preparing for an attack in Eastleigh. Using an undercover agent, Jama Farah (Barkhad Abdi) as their surveillance groundman and close-range surveillance personnel, a drone pilot in Nevada targeting al-Shabab in Nairobi, the mission controllers led by British Colonel Katherine Powell (Helen Mir-

ren) in the United Kingdom are trapped by the decision of whether to hit the terrorists, led by a radicalized United Kingdom citizen, Susan Danford aka Ayesha Al-Hady (Lex King), and risk killing Alia. This becomes a moral decision when the initially capture mission becomes a kill mission in which two drone bombs are fired into the compound killing not only the terrorists, but also Alia. The film uses linear narration.

In *From a Whisper,* Kahiu tells the life story of Tamani, a young girl whose mother dies in the 1998 American Embassy bomb attack in Nairobi. The conflict in the film is built around Fareed, the terrorist who is preparing to launch a suicide attack at American Embassy in Nairobi. His friend, Abu, a security officer working near the place of the blast, is a moral aid to Fareed, while often seeming to disagree with radicalism. The film however incorporates various ideological issues, the biggest of which is post traumatic disorder and how it destabilizes Tamani and his father, Sam (Godfrey Odhiambo). Tamani's character revolves between her childhood Tamani (Samara Migwi) and teenage Tamani (Corrine Onyango). Using graffiti, she claims the trauma of the bomb blast and gives it an ideological face. Unlike Hood's film, Kahiu's narrative is told in a shambled temporality in that it mixes time and space in often confusing temporal sequencing.

The question that cross-cuts both films is that of moral duty to preserve life, which we see through juxtaposition of innocence with violence. The thesis is that the widespread consciousness about terrorism that we see in these films about Nairobi, set in the country's battle with global terrorism networks, are simultaneously ideological narratives of relevant issues that can be traced to the question of terrorism. The study do not seek to authenticate the various films which the study shall discuss as ethnographic narratives, or historical archives of these events or later events elsewhere, but the study want to draw attention to how such films, inspired by the reality of spreading global terrorism, could offer an opportunity for a closer collaboration between cinema and ideological narration.

Cinema and Social Narration: Pre-reflections

Rotten Tomatoes' description of *Eye in the Sky* starts with a curious quip: 'The moral implications of modern warfare are confronted in Bleecker Street's powerful drama, *Eye in the Sky*'. This movie database site summarizes Hood's narrative of war on terrorism from a human point of view, which in turn tunes the arguments about how we can access the ideological facet of films. Whereas the film would look like an obvious technological blockbuster about modern weaponry and the advanced counter-terrorism posisbilities, curiously, it has been reviewed elsewhere as a story about "legitimacy of the "war on terror" so much so that other technological issues and "performance skills serve for the most part to sugar-coat a big lie" (Laurier, 2016). This statement is important because it casts slander on the characterization and legitimation of violence and also seems to sprout from Rotten Tomatoes' view. In fact, Laurie (2016) disscredits thew whole operation as unnecessary and uncalled for "scare -tactic scenarios", asserting that:

> The false presentation of reality involves important plot contrivances. The filmmakers early on remove the possibility of capturing the suicide bombers. Why? There are only a handful of them and they are taking their time making videos and loading their vests with explosives. There is no reason why this should be any more than a Kenyan police matter.

Exaggeration of risk then becomes a misguiding force in engaging America and United Kingdom in such an operation while sidelining Kenyan forces who could easily carry handle the threat without need for drone bombing. The implication then is that the aerial perspective adopted in most of the film, which is the perspective of the western militaries here represented by the drone, could be a signifier of moral detachment which is necessary in promoting war on terror narrative even in scenarios where the risk is controllable. The question then is, is *Eye in the Sky* deliberately misleading the viewer to buy into a skewed perspective of terror to justify Alia's death without demanding moral culpability? As the study shall argue, the final scenes uphold this account as the American commander tells the two drone pilots that they did a good job. This moral uprightness then becomes a new ground for staging the question of morality as the film ends with a flashback shot of Alia's memories as she plays with her hoop just the way we saw her at the beginning of the film. The use of drones in Hood's film thus immediately brings along these connotations of murder, both on the targeted individuals and on incidental casualties. Further, placing Alia's family at the center of this violence while the people who planned and carried out it have no remorse beyond a veiled unease results in the example of war on terror as sanctioned, senseless murder.

In this sense, we can see the drone as a tool of violence against the human person. The film's stance against terrorism can thus be read alongside the bigger question of how to deal with war technology responsibly. The 'presence' of the American and United Kingdom security forces in the form of aerial drone surveillance and bombing is a continuation of a Muslim-as-terrorist discourse seen elsewhere around the world (see for instance Pogge (2009). That Hood can dig into this religious narrative with ease is further facilitated by this global narrative of counter-terrorism through remote surveillance and counter insurgency. The use of drones in this film however poses a critical dilemma about global morality, and hence social and social questions of war. As Walsh (September 2013, p. 1) asserts, the

> objectives of...drone strikes are to punish and to deter insurgent and terrorist organizations...by killing and creating fear and uncertainty among current members. They also seek to deter insurgents and terrorists from engaging in more violence, as well as to deter others from joining or supporting these movements.

Similarly, *From a Whisper* (2008) evokes the experiences that people go through in times of emergencies and tragedy. The bomb blast brings to attention the psychological and religious inclinations that pervade global terrorism discourses. There are two distinct religious groupings in the film. Sam and Tamani embody the Christian religion, which is a victim of Islam, embodied by Abu and Fareed. The director deploys stylistic approaches, especially nonlinear, and often, discordant temporality, to make Tamani's journey a confusing one. Her childhood and adulthood are merged through erratic back and forth narration that avoids a linear progression of events, but calls attention to the huge disharmony between the two religions between which she is caught. Abu is her comforter and moral supporter, yet, he is also seen as a failure in the sense that in his capacity as a security officer and friend to the suicide bomber, he failed to stop the bomb blast that killed her mother. Putting side by side these two roles thus draws attention to the enigmatic discourse at play within

the film. While anti-Abu's Islamic interpretation of the Quran is anti-radical, it does not absolve him of his culpability as he is seen to have had prior knowledge is Fareed's intended suicide bomb mission. On the other hand, Sam's and Tamani's sense of victimhood elicits trauma. It is a mutual feeling which we also see in Fareed.

When we analyze Kahiu's film at a superficial level, we can read the film as an effort to discourage suicide bombers from their dogmatic ideological orientation, set in the character of Fareed. But Kahiu also raises another important issue, that the discourse of religious violence needs to be revisited. It is noteworthy that the film seeks liberation from religious radicalization and from the social trauma that lingers in the aftermath of terrorist attack. But there is a more important social narrative that runs within this film, that of avoiding culpability. When we evaluate the character of Abu who is occasionally paired with Tamani in the film, we are faced with the possibility that he, a security officer whose friend caused the death of Tamani's mother, is trying to assuage his guilt by mediating the gap between Tamani and her father. From the readings of these two films, the study can argue that ideological narratives within these two films take the form of vindication in the face of obvious culpability. The tensions between perpetrators and victims are a chiasmic one that cannot be easily bridged with mere comfort or believe. Radicalization can then be a term that applies to both the terrorists and those who fight terrorism as well.

Despite the understandable cynicism between various disciplines of scholarship on how to read cultural narratives, anthropology and sociology for instance, there seems to be a consensus that film has the potential to influence ideological narratives. In a discussion of *From a Whisper* after it premiered during the 6th Annual WOCAF - Women of Color Arts and Film - Festival held at the Carter Presidential Center Atlanta on March 25th 2010, Dr. Violet Johnson, a renowned Africana Studies scholar at Texas A & M University, summarizes the film as follows:

> This movie is not about government, it is not about politics, it is definitely not about the west. It is not about what a party handles terrorism better than the other, or what civilization is better prepared to deal with terrorism or what civilization is not. It is not about terrorism, this is about real people it is about families, it is about emotions from anguish to anger, to forgiveness. It is about decisions, personal decisions, from deceit and secrets and lies, to honesty and openness and finally forgiveness, and the process of forgiveness itself .

In these remarks, Dr. Violet Johnson easily moves us from the conceptualization of a globally controversial subject, terrorism, to an ideological interpretation of the violence associated with terrorism. In fact, her words apply as much to Hood's *Eye in the Sky* where remote counter-terrorism and counter-insurgency measures quickly become subject to ideological considerations. By this shift of focus, Johnson manages to create a connection between the narrative of global terrorism and the societies in which such events occur. Gavin Hood's *Eye in The Sky* and Wanuri Kahiu's *From a Whisper* are primarily narratives about pressing ideological and cultural concerns, especially terrorism which is on the forefront of global conversations. They are stories of hope, fears, anxieties, and aspirations of the people in circumstances that are very difficult and often threatening to dismantle the society. This is the same logic with which the study considers them exemplary of the objective for this chapter. This assertion has been echoed elsewhere. In their book, *Using Narrative Inquiry as a*

Research Method: An introduction to using critical event narrative analysis in research on learning and teaching, Webster and Mertova (2007) discusses the connection between narrative inquiry approaches and ideological influence of narratives where they argue that:

> Narrative inquiry approaches to human experience and the construction and reconstruction of personal stories blend in such a way that they highlight issues of complexity and human centredness that are of concern to many researchers. These are recalled in the form of critical events that are instrumental in changing and influencing understanding (Webster & Mertova, 2007, p. 71).

This quote elicits the connection between how we understand narratives and the human experiences at the center of those narratives. By citing these words, the study aim then to import this important conceptual view of human expertiences in narratives, what the study call ideological narratives, into a reading of fillms. At the center of this transposition is what Webster & Mertova (2007, p. 73) calls a "critical event", which "reveals a change of understanding or worldview by the storyteller". A ideological narrative in this sense becomes a link between world occurences on one hand, and the significance they hold for those involved at the present, and even afterwards, in the form of trauma, on the other hand. Trauma is an important conenctor here because the films that the study analyze in this chapter are centered on post-violence trauma associated with global terrorism. Moving this reading of ideological narratives to the field of cinema, Sheila Leddy of The Fledgling Fund, an organization that sponsors the production of films for social and ideological change, summarises this connection thus:

> we believe that storytelling through film can be a powerful tool to engage audiences. A film, and the story it tells, can create a greater awareness of complex problems, and just as importantly it can highlight possible solutions. It connects viewers to its characters and can inspire those viewers to become involved in, or reconnected with, social change efforts. We begin to understand how an issue plays out in the lives of individuals, families and communities (Leddy, 2012).

Sheila seems to attest to the wide reaching impact of film narratives, born of the subliminal interaction between the viewer and the film medium, and which can influence our worldview and how we make sense of the events around us. In the field of film theory, which is where strategies for analysing this connection lies, the debate is torn between whether to discuss film from its formal elements such as formalists do, or from it mimetic aesthetics as realists do. As such, this debate presents a double forked opportunity to merge the two views, which is what the study attempts.

When we look at the directors of the two films, Garvin Hood and Wanuri Kahiu, we at once realize that their ideas on terror and violence easily suggest theit interest in ideological narration. This claim is based on recent studies that have looked at how film style can be a tool for framing and ideological perspectives and thus making ideological arguments. Disclosing the findings of a research about the relationship between film style and narration, Redfern (2014, p. 21) notes that "[d]

ifferent types of shot are used to create the narrative perspectives", which range from "ambiguous mode of narration" to what is termed as "an epistemological puzzle for the viewer". The implication of this suggestion is that film's formal elements present fertile sites for interrogating and interpreting the relationship between the narrative and its ideological agency. Ideological narration then, as the use of filmic elements to create narrrative perspectives, can be treated as a formal slate in which filmic "images, as well as words, carry connotations" (Turner, 1999, p. 54). Turner seems to continue an ongoing debate among film theorists, especially formalists and realists, on how to approach film analysis when he asserts that

> A filmed image of a man will have a denotative dimension—it will refer to the mental concept of 'man'. But images are culturally charged; the camera angle employed, his position within the frame, the use of lighting to highlight certain aspects, any effect achieved by colour, tinting, or processing, would all have the potential for social meaning. When we deal with images it is especially apparent that we are not only dealing with the object or the concept they represent, but we are also dealing with *the way in which they are represented* (Turner, 1999, p. 54).

What we gather from these statements is that film images and film language work synchronously to code and decode the ideological discourses inherent within the film itself. This is important because it provides a formular for understanding the interface between cinema and ideological narration. the study enter this conversation by positing that both Hood and Kahiu are leveraging on this cross-mediation to persuade the viewers to see their films from a humanistc perspective. The important issue then is the methodology of accessing these ideological narratives, which in the case is critical event.

Going to the question of theories, the study start with Turner (1999, p. 36) who observes that the "'expressive' use of film is usually defined as the reshaping of the raw material printed on celluloid, using images of the real world to 'make a statement'. The images become something else, art". Turner here seems to suggest that the film image, removed as it is from the volumetric reality of space that is replaced by technological mimesis of this same reality, still retains, and must be seen to embody, inter alia, a (ideological) statement. In other words, by analyzing some or all the elements of the film, we are confronted with an ideological discourse upon which salient ideological tropes are embedded. The film's 'statements' are to be found in how it applies montage as an aesthetic device to achieve "social realism" (Turner, 1999, p. 40).

Also feeding into the construction of these 'statements' is Klapproth's (2004, p. 35) view that stories ought to be understood as "*social units of exchange*, in relation to the social and ideological institutions and practices within which they are produced... [and] relate to other forms of dicourse practiced within the culture of their origin". Fitting into Klapproth's description of culture as a web of dicourses, this assetrtion then introduces a multi-perspectival analysis of (film) narratives, extending the purview from mere thematic analysis to contextual analysis. Here, semiotics provides anchor to the analysis of film narratives as ideological disocurses. The analysis proceeds from this array of thoughts.

The argument so far has been geared towards a moralistic reading of counter-

terrorism in Hood's film, and terrorism in Kahiu's film. Both directors seem to favor a neo-realistic reading of their films through deliberate use of realistic events, a decision that seems to authenticate their quasi-documentary films. For Hood, it is the ideological profiling of Muslims, in this case in Eastleigh estate in Nairobi city which is occupied almost exclusively by Somalis, who are Muslims by faith, while for Kahiu, it is the religious profiling of Somalis as Al Shabab. Having narrowed down the discussion of cinema and ideological narration into a question of morality, the study now focuses on the use of innocence as an ideological paradigm.

The Materiality of Innocence

The problem of the global war on terror is the continuous "defending [of] severe violations of basic human rights as necessary responses to terrorist threats" (Pogge, 2009, p. 106). And the reason is, on the part of citizens involved, a moral one. As Pogge (2009) further suggests;

> our moral judgement that these terrorist attacks are exceptionally heinous... lends special urgency to fighting this terrorism as the effort promises not merely a reduction in the risk of harm each of us is exposed to, but also the suppression of a dreadful moral evil. Because we perceive these terrorist attacks as so exceptionally heinous, we attach to their suppression an importance that is greatly disproportional to the immediate harm they inflict (p. 107).

Form this statement, then, it is arguable that narratives of terror are irreducible to just incidences, or operations. To be fully appreciated, they must be seen from a moral grounding which is, ultimately, the justification of the violence and its aftermath that is involved in this war. But this morality of violence cannot be comprehensively understood without understanding the other end of the spectrum; the innocent casualties of this war. This is the focus for the remainder of this section.

If Hood's and Kahiu's films are to be understood as ideological narratives, the notion of violated innocence should be at the center of this understanding. This is because in both films, the directors dwell on the lingering harm that terrorism leaves in families. In *Eye in the Sky*, Hood focuses the film on Alia's innocence. The film starts at her home compound where the father is making her a hoop while her mother is baking cakes in the family wood oven. The composition of these initial scenes shows Alia's vulnerability as a child, so that when new see her later selling the cakes that her mother baked, we a reminded of her family situation. Being at the center of the film, this young girl's innocence becomes a big debate, and decisions in the film narrow down to whether the joint American and United Kingdom forces have the moral capacity to determine her right to life. As the film ends with her as a casualty of the attack, there is no moral resolution to the dilemma, especially when she dies. The parents and the commanding team that bombed her vicinity are all seen as remorseful, perhaps mitigating culpability for the latter. The trauma of war is even greater in the hospital scene which shows her father hugging her dead body (see figure i).

In this medium shot, the director gives prominence to Alia's face, which seems battered and caked with blood. Her father's head, seen from the back, is also filled with dried blood stains, adding to the aura of horror. The question that arises at this point then is whether the commanders of the mission were justified to take away her

life to possibly save more civilians from terrorist attack. It is also implicit in the nostalgic ending of the film which shows a flashback of Alia in her jovial days playing hoop at her home. The choice of a close-up shot fills in the gap of the missing drown which remains out of sight for most of the film. The distance that it creates between itself and its subjects is collapsed in this shot which reifies the reality of its violence upon the lives of its victims. In the next shot (see Figure ii), we see Alia's parents mourning her death.

Figure i: A medium close-up shot of Alia's father holding her head as her body lies on a hospital bed her after her death. The shot is a freeze frame from Garvin Hood's film, *Eye in the Sky* at time frame 01:31:56.

The medium long shot in Figure ii is composed to highlight the parents' collective trauma. The foreground is empty, except for the bed on which Alia's body is lying. Both parents are holding Alia's head and staring into her face. They are soaked in blood. In the background, there is an open door, beyond which there is only a wall. This *mise-en-scène* shows the space as a place of abandonment. The dark shades used in the scene also amplify this aura of abandonment, so that we can read the dullness as an index of the dark results of war. As their only child, clinging to her body recreates another version of their family in this hospital room, which is contrasted to their original happy family which we see at the beginning of the film. This temporarily then constitutes a paradigm of how war changes the ideological conditions of its victims, often disrupting families irreversibly. The emptiness of the room, with only the parents and their dead daughter after the doctors have left can be read as a signifier of the emptiness in their lives. The shot then zooms out so we can see the doctors standing on the foreground, again adding to the aura of collective sorrow of war. This zooming out movement is combined with a cut transition into the mission command room in America where we see the drone pilots staring at the screens. The camera movement becomes a continuation device that binds the two shots, miles apart, into the questionable aftermath of war.

Fig.ii

The contrast between the shot of deathbed and this command room connotes an important question of the equitability of trauma in violent social events such as seen in this film. On one end, we see Alia's parents undergoing great agony as they hug the lifeless body of their daughter. This image brings along connotations of how death has disrupted the family and how it continues to affect the family. The family here represents the continuity of the war not just as an event, but a violent means of ideological configuration. On the other end, we see the drone pilots as just workers under command to deploy military technology. For them, the screens in their room do not represent death, but represents the completion of a mission. This detachment is represented in the form of a drone camera feed (see Figure iii) that maps the site of bombing in coordinates and technical aerial information

In this shot we see an aerial shot of the compound where the suspected terrorists were congregated. The shot is seen after the first drone strike, just before moments before the second strike. The destroyed house is seen at the center of the screen while Alia's body, at this point invisible, is just short distance from the wall. What this composition style achieves is creation of boundaries by adopting two lenses of narration. From the joint American and United Kingdom command base's point of view, this scene is seen from a technological and mission point of view. The addition of cross-airs at the center of the shot invokes a sense of lockdown of the target, and effaces the story of the civilians. This means that these markers of precision and coordinates provide narrative agency to the detachment with which we see the attack. From the humanistic point of view, seen in the shots when Alia's parents come to pick her up, there are no technical details as the scene does not reflect a view from the drone, but a view from the actual scene of violence. This provides a humanistic view of the attack, which contrasts with the technical one we see through the aerial drone's perspective.

It is also curious that Alia's parents are transported to the hospital by the hitherto hostile radical Islam men who control the area. When we see them dismantling their machine guns from the pick-up to give room to the stricken Alia, especially at a point when they have just had an attack, we are coerced to question their radicalism. Who, then, between the radical Al Shabab and the foreign military, values life more? This question, cued by this contrasting perspective on war, demands of the viewer to make a judgment about whether these far away military officers are morally justified

to destroy a family a continent away. There is a deep sense of sorrow cultivated in these rooms. Why would a film that purports to be on a mission to save lives end with a nihilistic scene where innocent lives are lost? Again, this is a moral question which touches on the ideological implications of global war.

More importantly, innocence is a hard currency for raising and negotiating morality. The study has discussed these foregoing discussions in Hood's film because it provides background setting for analyzing Wanuri Kahiu's *From a Whisper*, the other film about terrorism in Nairobi, as an ideological narrative. The idea of innocence as a moral and hence an ideological discourse in Kahiu's film are articulated in the way the director deploys, among other cinema techniques, innocence as a persuasive temporal discourse. Similarly, when we look at Kahiu's film, *From a Whisper*, the aftermath of the bomb blast is explicated using Tamani's character. As already pointed out, there is no linear narration of her life, but an erratic one, where the film keeps shifting between her childhood and teenage, between her home and her dilapidated gallery. It is from within this gallery (see Figure iv) where many clues of her inner suffering are expressed.

This shot is taken from the scene when Abu visits Tamani's improvised art gallery from where she does most of her graffiti work. The shot captures the moment when she gets hold of the file which shows the details of her late mother, including the obituary in a print media. In the foreground is a defocused partial view of Abu. In the middle ground are the love-shaped creations which we later see in the memorial park. Tamani is at the background. The composition of the shot raises an important issue about Tamani's graffiti, that of her connectedness to the discourse of violence within the film. In the scene from which this film is extracted, we first get to understand her trauma as she understands, for the first time, how her mother died.

Figure iii: An aerial long shot showing a drone perspective of the compound in Eastleigh where the terrorists have been bombed by the drone. The shot is a freeze frame from Garvin Hood's film, *Eye in the Sky* at time frame 01:24:15.

Figure iv: A reverse shot showing Tamani inspecting the file with documents about her mother's death in the 1998 Nairobi bomb blast. Abu's shirt is visible on the side,

with a blue color. The shot is a freeze frame from Wanuri Kahiu's film, *From a Whisper*, at time frame 00:35:54.

To make sense of this shot, one may have to understand the various functions of graffiti in social change. One of these is establishing and marking territories. Ley & Cybriwsky (1974, p.491) points out that graffiti "identify tension zones related to social change", further adding that the "conquest of territory, even in fantasy, is always an act performed for an audience. Locations have a meaning; to claim access to an inaccessible location is to make a claim of primacy for oneself" (Ley & Cybriwsky, 1974, p. 494). One possible interpretation of these words is that graffiti empowers the artist to posess a space, but aölso the connotations associated with that space. In *From a Whisper*, Tamani's obsession with graffiti is an attempt to claim ownership of the trauma of the 1998 bomb blast in which he mother died. She often uses spray cans at night to paint her graffiti images and leave them around the compound of the memorial park. When later Abu, the security officer in charge of the park, pounces on her, she leads him to her improvised gallery where the above painting is shown as one of the central images in her collection of works.

By her actions, both physically painting around the memorial park and painting emotions of the event in her gallery, she claims and in fact possesses the pain of loss, the violence, and the social disintegration which pervades most of the film's narrative. Graffiti is a refusal to let the spectral gaps in her life to be lost as the paintings help her to 'find' her mother who has been missing in her life since childhood. At the end of the film, when we see her and her father inside the bomb blast memorial park, we are reminded that her paintings are at the center of the park's paintings gallery, so that then her effort shifts from individual memory of the blast, to a collective societal memory of the blast. On the small grass lawn, next to her paintings are love-shaped creations pinned to the lawn in memory of those who perished in the blast. They are objects that contemplate the loss of life. But these too, like the graffiti, can be read as a message of love to the survivors, giving the film a humanistic ending.

Figure v: long shot of Tamani seated next to the plaque of the names of the victims of 1998 Nairobi bomb blast, which is located at the memorial park. The shot is a freeze frame from Wanuri Kahiu's film, *From a Whisper*, at time frame 01:12:14.

In this shot we see the older Tamani seated next to the names of the 1998 bomb blast victims. The wide-angle framing emphasizes her frailty, or the precariousness of her life. It can also be read as a representation of her traumatic consciousness. Whereas she stands out as an epitome of love seeking to cancel out evil, that her ability to prevail in embodying this love is paired with Abu's inability to stop evil foments an uneasy binary, hence the climate of uncertainty that we see in the opening of the film as the city is a subdued space. This binary of good versus evil brings into mind the mimetic nature of this film, already evident in the neorealist approach adopted by the director. Kahiu uses the actual place where the 1998 bomb blast occurred, with the images of the adjacent Cooperative Bank towers, the ruins of the American Embassy, and later, the memorial park dedicated to those who lost their lives in the blast. In a way, then, by using this quasi-documentary approach, the film amplifies the innocence of the victims, as we get to see Tamani seated next to the plaque with the names of the victims (see Figure v). Among the names is that of her mother. The red-heart shaped creations which adorn the green lawn adjacent to the concrete paved space with the plaque also sere to memorialize the event.

With her mother's name on the plaque and in one of the heart-shaped flowers, the *mise-en-scène* of the shot functions as a memoir of the social trauma that came after the terrorist attack. Again, it brings human thoughts, feelings, attitudes, and emotions to our lives, marking the end of Tamani's psychological journey of pity and discovery in the process of searching for her mother. At this point it is perhaps worth recalling the words of Dr. Violet Johnson who comments that *From a Whisper* brings out 'creativity at healing' as a 'role of art that is being emphasized'. She continues to asset that 'there are artists who push an agenda of rehabilitation through art... some of these artists are not artists that are trained in a structured way'. Art then functions as what she terms as an 'avenue' for psychological issues which affect characters in their various stations and situations in life, and by extension, the human society at large. The choices of cinematography serve to inform, educate, entertain, socialize, and empower the viewer on ideological issues that affect them.

This is probably what the resolution of the film attempts to achieve when we

see Tamani and her father finally becoming a better family through forgiveness. The film relives the bombing of the American Embassy in Nairobi on the 7th August, 1998, in which many innocent people lost their lives. It tells of how Abu, a quiet and hard-working officer tried to stop the terrorist attack plot in vain. It also brings to our attention a young and rebellious artist by the name Tamani who is in a desperate search of her 'missing' mother who was killed in the bomb blast. In the scene when they are at home with her father after the death of her mother (see Figure vi).

In this shot, the young Tamani (Samara Migwi) is cuddled by her father Sam (Godfrey Odhiambo). Both father and daughter are positioned at the foreground, towards the left of the screen. The daughter is asleep on her father's laps while Sam is weeping, staring out off the screen. On the screen right are stuck some pieces of paper with letters of the alphabet, again adding to the aura of innocence. Coming towards the end of the film, this shot closely mirrors the one of Alia's death discussed earlier (see Figure i and ii). It evokes the sad memories of Fareed's suicide bombing that led to the death of Tamani's mother. Again, the violence of the attack is translated into social experiences which linger in the aftermath of the war.

Figure vi: A medium close-up shot showing the young Tamani cuddled by her father at home after her mother's death in the 1998 Nairobi bomb blast. The shot is a freeze frame from Wanuri Kahiu's film, From a Whisper, at time frame 01:06:17.

When we later see the older Tamara's distraught life after growing up without a mother, and the use of actual footage from the bomb blast, the film urges us to recall the trauma of the bomb blast. The disruption of the family through the death of the mother is provocative in the way it implicates random acts of attacks in the morality of life and death, and of the social structures like family upon which societies thrive. Using the tope of innocence, the films persuade the viewer to see terrorism beyond the act of violence that is instantaneous and fleeting, but to notice especially the trauma that it leaves in the lives of those whose families are affected. By this reasoning, then, *Eye in the Sky* and *From a Whisper* presents themselves as archival narratives of the social scars of terrorism.

It is also interesting when we see Abu washing his feet, a Muslim ablution ritual in which one cleanses themselves to make their prayers heard by Allah. There are

two variations, the partial cleaning known as Wudhu and the comprehensive cleaning known as Ghusl. In this case, Abu only carries out the partial cleansing of himself, only cleaning the feet just after the bomb blast, before proceeding to the Mosque. If this action symbolizes his desire to wash his burden of guilt arising from his failure to stop Fareed from bombing the embassy, the partial cleansing could be suggestive of his interconnectedness with the Muslim faith where he partially sees Fareed as a justified martyr, while on the other hand, the guilt of seeing Tamani's misery in life makes him reach out to her despite their religious differences. It is a dilemma that remains unresolved as Abu never really gets to divulge much about his character, apart from that he is easily persuaded by the teachings of his religion. In this section, the study has argued that innocence of the characters in these films, especially Alia in the *Eye in the Sky* and Tamani in *From a Whisper*, provides narrative propulsion and hence material basis for deliberating the ideological and moral aspects of terrorism.

However, since the films do not offer a conclusive moral rendering of the war on terrorism, this judgement is left to the viewer. As a guiding principle, one may have to seek an answer to whether the violence and deaths seen in these films seem to justify the greater good of the characters involves. In short, the morality of innocence is on trial, and there is a guiding debate which may help in shedding light on this enterprise. Pogge (2009) notes that:

> When the greater good an agent intends to achieve with her action will not be a good for the innocent persons this action will harm, then that good can justify the action only if it greatly outweighs the harm this action foreseeably inflicts. (This requirement is often thought to be especially significant when the harm to be inflicted is a means to attaining the purported good, rather than a foreseeable side effect.) For such a justification to succeed, it is further required, of course, that the harm be necessary for achieving the greater good in question, so that the same good could not have been achieved using any other less harmful means (p. 110)

Whereas *Eyes in the Sky* attempts to give moral justification for bombing the terrorists to the extent that the death of Alia seems justified, again, the moral story that lingers after the film has ended has to do with trauma and forgiveness. In an interview held on 19th January 2016 with From a Whisper director, Wanuri Kahiu at her Karen office in Nairobi, she opens up about her own terrorism film, pointing out that she targeted the "people who were affected by the bombing, and those who had firsthand knowledge of the bombing". She also alludes to the lingering impact of terrorism in her assertion that "there is also trauma that we go through as a nation that we do not process". She finally reveals that her message is hinged on the ability to forgive:

> Compassion… that two generations can help each other heal. The act of forgiveness…the ability to forgive someone who has truly hurt you…and that forgiveness is never ending. It is an active process as opposed to just being a word "I forgive you". It is in being able to see this person every day and say hi and the next day and the next… and move on without bitterness.

Without offering to resolve the moral dilemma of forgiveness in post-

traumatic narratives such as seen in these films, the study shall proceed to the next section where the study discusses the films' view on religion and violence. This may perhaps offer equally important clues that can aid this moral puzzle.

Religion and Ideology of Violence

For a while now, the history of global terrorism is tied to a discourse of radical Islam. The proliferation of this generalization has upset various discourses of society, including, and especially, those about production of citizenship. But more importantly, it has given rise to global narratives which have in turn seemed to justify later narratives of war and counter war. Speaking about war on terror, Soueif (2009, p. 28) notes that "Amnesty has rightly described this 'war on terror' as a war on human rights. It is also a contest of narratives: stories that the protagonists tell about themselves, about their enemies, and about what is happening now". Such narratives are the building blocks of competing worldviews, which, as seen in the films that the study has used in this chapter, have made their way into contemporary cultural discourses.

Eye in the Sky teaches us the power of what Morrow & Torres (2002, p. 99) terms as "normative discourse". These scholars further assert that the "problematic of modern democracy is thus closely linked to the formation of subjects capable of citizenship". During focus group discussions of Kahiu's film, *From a Whisper*, various issues emerged. One was that the "would-be bomber believes that through religion, he will be able to make some revenge" This statement, coming from a viewer, flags an important social and ideological agenda that is at the center of the film. There is the view that violence is a redemptive tool from both sides of terrorism. On one hand, the suicide bomber, Fareed, believes that he is fulfilling his religious duty to defend Muslim holy lands from occupation. In this sense, his violence becomes a route to war and to his in which death is the ultimate path to his perceived heroism. On the other hand, when we read Kahiu's film alongside Hood's *Eye in the Sky* which deals with the same issue of redemptive violence, counter terrorism is also seen as a violent process. Just like Fareed's conviction of heroism and saving the world of Muslims from danger of Kafir occupation, the joint American and United Kingdom drone mission is based on a firm believe that it is their duty to exterminate terrorists to protect civilians. Their bomb attack in Eastleigh is thus seen as an act of heroism, which easily mitigates the aura of war with a humanistic mission.

Gavin Hood's film offers an important starting point for discussing the increasingly central role of films in narrating social issues. In this film, though it seems like drone warfare on global security networks working against terror threats is the main subject of narration, what is in question is the discursive morality in combating global terror. Innocence is brought to bear on decisions of military operations to the extent that it elicits a moral debate of drone war on terrorism and what it means in the eyes of civilian casualties. On one end is the decision to kills her fellow United Kingdom citizen turned terrorist, Susan Danford aka Ayesha Al-Hady (Lex King), while on the other is the need to preserve the life of Mo'Allim who lives next door to the terrorists' compound. This juxtaposition of moral obligation to defend and to preserve life at the same time bundles nihilistic efforts against global terrorism with moralistic decisions of civilian casualties. The question of terrorism, whether it is only when radical groups harm civilians, or whether it must encompass actions of governments who endanger or kills civilians while combating the actions of these indi-

viduals is highly emblematic of the tactic of social negotiation that permeate all spheres of public discourses, including national security.

When we look at the character of Colonel Katheirne Powell (Helen Mirren), we see how civilian obligations are imported into the discourse of citizenship. In her capacity as the mission commander, she is faced with the duty to supervise United Kingdom citizenship in the sense that her pursuit of the radicalized Susan Danford, now known with her Islam name Ayesha Al-Hady, represents a national interest in managing citizenship. The idea of extremist ideology and Muslim fundamentalism that is at the center of the film serves to legitimize intolerance among radical citizens. But the take home from this mission to capture, and later to kill Ayesha Al-Hady is not that she dies before the seeming preparation to carry out a terrorist attack is implemented. It is rather to be observed that she is bundles together with Muslims. Kenyan Somalis, the inhabitants of the Eastleigh estate where the film's diegesis is set, are predominantly, if not exclusively Muslim. The choice of this community and associating Eastleigh with a dominantly Al Shabab ideology of violence recalls into question the idea of Islamic morals, and the religion upon which those morals are founded. Hood is therefore selectively associating Somalis with radicalism, and thus perpetuating a view of Islam as a religion of terror.

Drawing from the discourse of Islamophobia and hauntology associated with the Muslim character, Kahiu attempts a moralistic, even humanistic presentation of the Muslim in a manner that refuses outright generalization of the character of the Islam, while highlighting terrorism as an act of ideologically misguided individuals and not merely an authentication of a murderous view of Islam. One of the highpoints in Kahiu's film is when Abu (Ken Ambani) is imploring Fareed (Abubakar Mwenda) not to get involved in the bombing of the American Embassy. Here is a transcription of his words:

> Fareed Hakuna chochote kilicho chetu duniani hii. Si ardhi, rasilimali, wala maisha ya mwanadamu yeyote. Mwenyezi Mungu mwenyewe atuambi akatika Quran: 'Kwa yeyote yule atakaemuua mtu ambaye hajaua wala hajafanya ufisadi katika nchi basi ni kama kuwa huwa amewaua watu wote. Na ikiwa kuna mtu atakayemwacha mtu hai, ama amsaidie mtu kuishi, nikama amewapa uhai watu wote'.
>
> (Fareed there is nothing in this world that is ours. Not land, possessions, or other people's lives. It is written in the Quran: 'He who kills an innocent man who has never been corrupt, then he is killing all humanity. And if someone helps save another or helps them to live, then it is as if he has saved all humanity'.)

The words of this conversation are drawn from Quran 5:32 and they provide useful cues of the spiritual dimension of terrorism on one hand, and the sanctity of life on the other. What Abu tries to achieve is to point out not just the meaninglessness of loss of life through suicide bombing, band also the vanity of the action on the part of the bomber who loses his life in the same action. Abu then tries to create a reciprocal chiasmic link between the teachings of Quran in Islamic religion and the social impact of the interpretations of the teachings of this religion. One of the biggest ideological walls that the director attempts to crumple is the question of Islam-

ophobia. Whereas mainstream discourses show the Muslims as a suspect community (see, for instance, Miller (2009)), Kahiu seems to borrow Breen-Smyth's (2014, p. 223) view that ""suspect community" is not an embodied community, but an imagined one, whose boundaries are permeable and shifting and in the eye of the beholder". Through Abu, whose character is an antithesis to Fareed, we are faced with a divided view of radicalism, and of the sense of humanity upon which radical dialogues are based. Abu challenges a blanket 'othering' of the Muslim community which is associated with religious outlaws like Fareed. Based on this view, then, violence by or against Muslims is a meaningless tool that not only contravenes the religious doctrine upon which it is founded, it also cancels out the justification by liberation that it promises its perpetrators.

The viewer is faced with an ideological imperative to question the moral narrative espoused in this apposition of characters; Abu who confronts the morality of his religion, and Fareed who immerses his immorality in skewed religion ideologies. By embedding these ideologies in religion, Kahiu flags down how "constrained cognitive possibilities" (Morrow & Torres, 2002, p. 99) play a part in propelling individuals towards a particular direction. These constraints are represented in Kahiu's film in the through the metaphor of the sky. In this film, the sky is both a reference to a higher deity, and hence a signifier of the spiritual presence of that deity which is the basis of Islamic faith, and a signifier of the relationships that are possible between subjects and higher authority. These two references, articulated in these films, are the basis of the moral debate in the films.

For Hood, the sky is the upper perimeter from where street-level experiences can be challenged. The film, using drone (see Figure i), caricatures the hierarchic power upon which moral decisions can be effected. While terrorists seem in control of the ground surface where armed religious fanatics go around Eastleigh reinforcing Islamic beliefs of dressing, this patronage is challenged by America's aerial superiority. It is then, upon this basis, that the film also construes a view of America and United Kingdom as 'gods' over the Kenyan sky. For Kahiu, the sky is a void from where the unknown can articulate its presence through a subjective gaze of the ground. One, it establishes a top-down gaze that flattens Nairobi city's horizontal geography (see Figure vii) from point of view of the sky. This wide-angle aerial shot of the city is important because it obliterates the notion of boundaries. This is important because boundaries, in the form of spiritual fissures and moral beliefs, later becomes central to fomenting the film's narrative of a city contested by varying moral camps.

In this shot, the *mise-en-scène* of the city comprises some high-rise buildings and a street in the middle of the frame. The shot is accelerated, so that we see it as a time lapse where cars move in staccato phase. What is peculiar in this shot is the way it is composed to obliterate the people within the city, so that we see the city as a uniform space. The lack of humans can be read a signifier of absent relationships, judgements, or capacity for ideological participation. But, as it becomes apparent in subsequent sections of the film when we start to see humans, the city is a tentacle that blends many opposed human activities and relationships, at which point we can think of this initial framing as an act of concealment. This concept is key to analyzing the city's ideological events which are concealed through a variety of strategies. Fareed camouflages himself with worshippers in the mosque while the older Tamani (Corrine Onyango) camouflages the nostalgic void in her life with clandestine graffiti and improvised painting studio.

Figure vii: An aerial shot of Nairobi city seen at the opening sequence of Wanuri Kahiu's film, *From a Whisper*, at time frame 00:00:26.

Another possible reading of this shot relates to the way the city is narrated in the context of religious radicalism. Kahiu seems to poise the question of which, between the general city space and the values of cohesion that are presumed in this aerial shot, and the Islam religion which is introduced as a secluded, boxed practice, takes precedence in the narrative of ideological violence. Again, such a reading is not premised on any superior adjudgment of either the city or the Islamic faith, but on how the director deploys montage and cinematography as tools of ideological narration. Whereas the film starts with these aerial images of the city, towards the end, we see equally significant views of a mosque.

The static shot of the city uses accelerated motion to generate anxiety in the streets. Further, the high camera positioning framing the city from an aerial view adds on to the ignominy of the shot, so that we are faced with a discourse of erasure. The city is quickly passing away, metaphorically giving way. In a total reversal of this cinematographic style, in the shot of the Mosque (see Figure viii), the director uses a low camera position, thus amplifying the power of the Islamic religion to which the Mosque is a signifier. Also, the shot uses slow motion so that we see Abu moving slowly into the Mosque. This contrast is important cue of how the director posits the power of religion in the city's ideological events. We can make several deductive arguments form this comparison.

Figure viii: A low angle shot of Abu and the Mosque in Nairobi city seen near the end of Wanuri Kahiu's film, *From a Whisper*, at time frame 01:03:51.

One, that the idea of the Mosque as a superior space that overshadows the city, or has the capacity to influence the events of the city coerces the viewer to notice the power of religion in Nairobi's ideological discourses. Furthermore, the viewer is also confronted with this discourse of superiority through characterization. The characters are dominantly Muslim, with Abu, Fareed, and their associates taking center stage. Sam and his daughter, Tamani are the only Christians. Clearly, these numerical differences imply a domination of one religious discourse over the other. The other distinction is based on professional influence. Whereas Abu oversees security, and hence able to monitor and influence the operations of radicalized individuals, Sam is just a worker who has no access to such information. This narrative typecasting frames the narrative's premise of hierarchies, and hence of power, which is what is being recalled in this low angle image of the Mosque.

Just before the conclusion, it is important to point out something intriguing that is noticeable in these two films; the reversal of victimhood. Whereas in Kahiu's film Muslims seem to be the perpetrators and Christians the innocent victims of terror violence, in Hood's film, the Muslims are the victims of violence against terror. There is a pun in the manner that both construe a reversal of violence, and hence constituting an enigmatic view of the ideological dimension of violence. The question then is, can the two films, and the discourse of violence which they narrate, be adjudged from a religious dimension, or should it suffice to only analyze this discourse of violence from only the social impact, which does not seem to rely upon any religious grouping. The approach here has been to analyze the films from only the ideological perspective. The reason the study points out this other possibility is because it could be a good basis for further studies of the films.

Conclusion

In this paper, the study has made three discussions in support of the reading of Hood's *Eye in the Sky* and Kahiu's *From a Whisper*, both films dealing with terrorism, as ideological narratives. First, that cinema as a medium lends its language and stylistic conventions in the service of subtle ideological messages. The study made a theoretical case that film narratives, when subjected to theories of image reading, supply cues of how the medium can deliver ideological messages, even if only subliminally. Second, the study has also argued that the idea of innocence is widely exploited in these films to articulate terrorism as an ideological discourse. This means that beyond the violence and technology of this violence, whether perpetrated by suicide bombers or anti-terrorist government agencies, is subject to a humanistic or moralistic reading, which, again, takes us to the ideological dimension of terrorism. Third, and this is the final argument, the study has highlighted the central role of Islamic religion in incorporating the discourse of violence within these films. The films give heavy emphasis that radicalization of Muslims, and the global effort to defeat this radicalization, are both efforts which leave social scars in the form of trauma. The conclusion then is that both Kahiu and Hood are ideological activists in the sense that they articulate salient ideological issues through their films.

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