SET COMPONENTS AS A MODERN NARRATIVE: A STUDY OF SELECTED FEATURE FICTION FILMS ON THE GENOCIDE AGAINST THE TUTSI.

ROGER PHILBERT DUSABE (BCDes.)

M66EA/25077/2014

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JULY 2019
DECLARATION

This thesis is my original work and has not been presented in any other university for the award of a degree.

Signature ___________________________ Date 26/06/2019

Roger Philbert Dusabe (M66EA/25077/2014)

Supervisors

We confirm that the work reported in this thesis was carried out by the candidate under our supervision as University supervisors

Signature ___________________________ Date: 26/06/2019

Dr. Rachael Diang’a
Department of Communication, Media, Film and Theatre Studies
Kenyatta University

Signature ___________________________ Date: 26/06/2019

Dr. Shikuku Emmanuel Tsikhungu
Department of Communication, Media, Film and Theatre Studies
Kenyatta University
DEDICATION

To all movie-goers and to my family in particular, for a walk down memory lane; I dedicate this work.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I am indebted to almighty God for allowing me to reach this far in my studies and my life. May his Grace be forever upon me.

I acknowledge with gratitude Dr. Rachael Diang’a and Dr. Emmanuel Shikuku, my academic supervisors and mentors, for their guidance throughout the whole process of writing the thesis. Your knowledge and work ethics will live on.

I also extend my gratitude to my mother, brothers and sisters for their love and continuous support. You are the reason I persevered in times of turbulence. May God bless you abundantly.

Special thanks to Sostene Kubwimana and Honoré Mugisha, for their assistance throughout the phase of writing the chapters. Your support will forever be remembered.

I also acknowledge academic friendship I enjoyed with my colleagues at Kenyatta University. These include Derrick Muneza, my countrymate, collegemate and housemate; Antony Chege, Silvester Wang’ombe, Daniel Kariuki and others who we undertook the first year of masters studies together. May God bless your endeavours.

This study used copyrighted films whose directors I have acknowledged. These are Terry George’s Hotel Rwanda, Mike Caton-Jone’s Shooting dogs, Raoul Peck’s Sometimes in April, and Philippe Van Leeuw’s The day God walked away. in a special way, I acknowledge the help I received from Nick Hughes, the director of the film 100 Days; although this study did not use any of his films.

I secured a study leave from my employer the University of Rwanda to undertake this study at Kenyatta university in Kenya. For this, I am indebted to the vice chancellor for allowing me to take time off my duties.
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## ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

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<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>BCDes</td>
<td>Bachelor of Creative Design</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CRT</td>
<td>Cathode Ray Tube</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ETO</td>
<td>Ecole Technique Officiel (Official Technical School)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ICTR</td>
<td>International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MRND</td>
<td>National Republican Movement for Democracy and Development (Rwanda)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NACOSTI</td>
<td>National Commission for Science, Technology and Innovation (Kenya)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TV</td>
<td>Television</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UN</td>
<td>United Nations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UNAMIR</td>
<td>United Nations Assistance Mission for Rwanda</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WWI</td>
<td>World War I</td>
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<td>WWII</td>
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# OPERATIONAL DEFINITION OF TERMS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Term</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>1994 Rwandan Genocide</strong></td>
<td>This appellation is commonly used in academia and was the official appellation by the United Nations at the time of writing this research. However, the United Nations has changed it to <strong>1994 Genocide against the Tutsi</strong> (January 2018) which led the researcher to use the former to mean the later.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Cinema</strong></td>
<td>Term interchangeably used with other terms that carry the same meaning such as Film or Movie</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Feature film</strong></td>
<td>Films of a duration longer than 60 minutes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Mise-en-scene:</strong></td>
<td>Expressive elements which create meaning within a framed shot. It is a French word that translates into putting on scene or placing on stage and refers to the arrangement of everything that appears in the framing such as lighting, scenery, props, costume and behaviour of the figures.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Modern narrative</strong></td>
<td>A branch of narrative history that focuses on structures and general trends. The branch breaks down the chronological events and addresses the <em>how</em> they happened in their world.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Narrative</strong></td>
<td>Refers to a story- in this context, a film story.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Props</strong></td>
<td>Short form for property. This term refers to objects used on screen by actors; or vaguely, any movable object within the set. It can extend to costume and animals depending on the context.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Set components</strong></td>
<td>Scenery and props as arranged for shooting a film. Includes all elements present in a scenic design.</td>
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ABSTRACT

This study aims at making meaning of set components in historical fiction films on the 1994 Genocide against the Tutsi. The argument is that when it comes to historical feature films, emphasis tends to be put on the general theme that the films tackles, highlighting the major turning points of the depicted historical events at the expense of the world the event is set in. The research also adopts the idea that a society relates fully and retains knowledge of an event that happened long time ago, through understanding the conditions surrounding the event in question. This study strives to establish the validity of element of fiction films as historical sources by establishing the relationship between set components and the narrative structure in the selected films; describing the signs of historicity in the selected films using set components; and examining the socio-political and economic function of set components from selected films in the filmic depiction of the 1994 Genocide against the Tutsi. The study sampled films on the Genocide against the Tutsi that are feature and fiction due to the type of desired data. Making meaning of how style and technique are used to express the artist’s idea in film is the ultimate purpose of this study, a formalist approach guides the textual analysis and interpretation of the films selected which are Terry George’s Hotel Rwanda (2004), Michael Caton-Jones’ Shooting Dogs (2005), Raoul Peck’s Sometimes in April (2005), and Philippe Van Leeuw’s The Day God Walked Away (2009). The study finds that set components fulfill three (3) functions. The first is the role set components play towards highlighting other elements of the same artwork. The second function which is much larger is the specific role set components fulfill towards the artwork’s general themes and as a whole. The third function steps outside the artwork and involves the viewers as set components find meaning assigned to them in relation to the viewing audience in a certain context. The study argues the importance attached to accuracy in film and contextualizes the impact of anachronisms vis-a-vis the intended meaning.
CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

History is one broad area that needs to be understood by the society which can therefore learn from it (Little, 2016). It engrosses the past, informs the present and predicts the future. Historians have always stressed the importance of our past (Crabtree, 1993; Little, 2016). They argue that however much the past is the past; it can help understand present and future endeavours. Crabtree (1993) goes even further to suggest that a society that does not know where it is coming from, cannot know where it is headed.

Our history being of great importance, it seems to have always been finding a way to preserve itself through narration of past events. Literary works, seminars and other artistic forms of communication such as paintings or fiction films have all contributed to a memorable past, and as well did historical films which have then embraced a great role in the journey of film making.

Narrative history deals with story form but encompasses two different branches: traditional and modern narrative. On one hand, history can be told as a traditional narrative where the focus is merely on the chronological order of happenings, actions and reactions. On the other hand, history can also be told as modern narrative - a branch that would typically break down the chronological event and address the how it happened in its world (White, 1984). This study is interested in the “how” of the historical events rather than the “what” which would be a study of the traditional narrative.

Film has been considered by many as a mirror of the past (Carnes, 1995; Vonderau, 1999). However, the only type of film that has been considered of serious historical interest since the early 20th century are documentaries, actuality films, newsreels, and other visual versions of newspapers (Salmi, 1995). Little do historians consider that fiction film can also account for historical representation, since history exists as both memory and fiction (Salmi, 1995). Major developmental stages of our society have been fictively depicted on screen and it has proved to be a yardstick against which
generations of people measure their progress. These go from natural disasters to man-caused tragedies that have shaped the world as we know it.

All over the world, people tend to remember past events in their most summarized form as years pass by. This is not different from great historical social happenings. It appears that events such as World War One (WWI) can be identified merely by the Sarajevo assassination, which would trigger great omissions of the past; or that the existence and extinction of some ancient creatures such as dinosaurs could become mythic. It is paramount for present and future generations to understand the conditions surrounding historical happenings, to forestall reoccurrences (Little, 2016). There are claims that World War II did not start in 1939. Some historians argue that in as early as 1937, Japan had already invaded China, which is considered by many as the start of WWII (Maochun, 2013). Such a detail can prove costly in behaviour change and perceptive image of a historical event of such a magnitude.

History cannot afford to change, but it can surely be told in a more informative way. Films are known to have tackled historical happenings with the same conventional plot. There will be dozens of films about the unfolding of events such as WWI or WWII, national revolutions and pandemics. All these will be summarized by viewers from a bigger plot point of view but little attention will be given to the indescribable story within and surrounding the said events.

As a matter of example, the 1994 Rwandan Genocide - a social tragedy that is not even three decades old- will spark a general presumption -as the name itself suggests-, that year 1994 summarizes it all. In Rwanda, tensions had been rising since 1990, and Tutsis were killed, and the events could even go as early as 1959 when Tutsis were forced into exile (Staub, 1999). Some scholars even suggest that the roots go back up to the colonial period after WWI (Magnarella, 2002).

The context surrounding the tragedy appears to be of great importance in order to complement what happened through the how. Historical fiction films are often regarded for their non-fiction content, which the audience tend to relate with their knowledge of historical accounts. It is argued that set design can inform the physical, social, psychological, emotional, economic or cultural significance in film (Barsam & Monahan, 2015). Fiction films however, are believed to be set in a fictive world where components may not necessarily develop a serious historical reception (Salmi, 1995).
Film is perceived as a clean paper on which everything written is never coincidental but purely serving a purpose.

Components of film set, -that is the scenery and props as arranged for shooting a film-, appear to be of great importance in the filmic reconstruction of past events. These components are part of the greater Mise-en-scene, which is a technique that goes back in the early steps of cinema. Alongside cinematography and editing, Mise-en-scene has always been credited with the ability to influence the believability of a film by the viewing audience (Connell, 2012).

As much as Mise en scene -especially props and the scenic design- has been critical in the development of historical films, there have never been considerations of fiction films being regarded as truthful historical evidence (Salmi, 1995). This popular belief among film critics appears to be a result of comparisons between fiction and documentary films in terms of loyalty to written history (Rosenstone, 2001). The belief spawns from the idea that props and the scenic design among other elements of mise-en-scene such as lighting and costumes, can only serve a function of advancing the story and nothing beyond.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Historical films play a key role in the work of a historian which is to reconstruct history in the best way possible, and therefore have had history remain alive and exist as both memory and fiction. A yardstick against which many historical films are measured is their ability as a whole –and not parts-, to “inform the audience of” the past.

However, set components having been regarded as elements that beautify and merely act as containers for story development, it is worth studying whether they can equally serve as valid historical materials that can capture the audience and “inform them about” the past.

Of the many silent parts, set components speak volumes and are at the heart of this study which seeks to textually analyse Hotel Rwanda (Terry George, 2004), Shooting Dogs (Michael Caton-Jone, 2005), Sometimes in April (Raoul Peck, 2005), and The
Day God Walked Away (Philippe Van Leeuw, 2009) in order to describe and examine their functions towards a historical reconstruction of the 1994 Genocide against the Tutsi.

1.3 Objectives

This study sought to address the following objectives:

1. To establish the relationship between set components and the narrative structure in the selected films.
2. To describe the signs of historicity in the selected films using set components.
3. To examine the socio-political and economic function of set components from selected films in the filmic depiction of the 1994 Genocide against the Tutsi.

1.4 Research questions

1. What is the relationship between set components and the narrative structure in the selected films?
2. What are signs of historicity in the selected films’ set components?
3. What is the socio-political and economic function of set components of the selected films in the filmic depiction of the 1994 Genocide against the Tutsi?

1.5 Research assumptions

This study was based on assumptions that,

1. There is a relationship between set components and the narrative structure in the selected films.
2. There are signs of historicity in set components of the selected films.
3. Set components of the selected films can function towards filmic depiction of the 1994 Genocide against the Tutsi.

1.6 Justification of the study

A society that does not know where it is coming from, cannot know where it is headed (Crabtree, 1993). Natural disasters, slavery, Genocides, holocaust, civil wars, world wars, colonialism, terrorism, and others; are all major components that have
shaped the world as we know it. History is indeed a key player in a country’s present and future life and the world’s at large and the ability to understand our history shapes our decisions, which in return shape the future.

This study considered that history exists both as memory and emotions. Literary works merely point the audience to the emotions. People can learn from elements of fiction films which are credited with the immersive power that allows a connection to the past through the characters, events and situations depicted on screen.

This study will further assist historians to merge the public history together with academic history. It is hopeful that historians could consider set components in historical film in the same context as historical elements of literary works. Therefore, there is hope to provide a contribution towards betterment of theories and practice on the historicity of set components in fiction films. Genocide studies in general and 1994 Rwanda Genocide studies’ general readers in particular will benefit from this study as well.

1.7 Scope and Delimitations of the study

This study sought to analyse four films Sometimes in April (Raoul Peck, 2005), Hotel Rwanda (Terry George, 2004), Shooting Dogs (Michael Caton-Jone, 2005), and The Day God Walked Away (Philippe Van Leeuw, 2009) as the sample size, though it does recognize other films that met the selection criteria and could be equally good for the study such as 100 Days.

With a focus on fiction films, this study considered only full-length films on the 1994 Genocide against the Tutsi, leaving out shorts mainly because of their accessibility and low impact on the audience. Some scenes of these films may be set way before and after the 1994 Genocide against the Tutsi; however, only scenes set during the official duration of the calamity were of importance as the study pondered at what was the situation like from 7th April up to 4th July 1994 in Rwanda. However, there are few instances of consideration of scenes from the films that happen before the Genocide as expositions for events to follow.

This study acknowledges that there are other studies on the traditional narratives of the films under study. Traditional narrative is the study of the chronological events of
history in a work of art. This study departs from that kind of analysis and adopts the modern narrative approach. The modern narrative approach examines how components of a film manifest the narration in a work of art.

1.8 Limitations of the study

The study interest did not extend beyond setting and props among many other implicit formal elements of mise-en-scène such as lighting and actors. It understood the importance of mise-en-scène as a whole but purposively chose to focus on set components credited with creating the mood, time and place where themes evolve from.

During the stage of data collection and analysis, the researcher used an image capture software to extract figures from the film, which resulted in low quality pictures as opposed to the scenario where still pictures are provided by the film production company. The study was also limited by the availability and accessibility of copies of films on the Genocide against the Tutsi, whether online or physical stores.

1.9 Review of related literature

1.9.1 Historical film

Historical films are those generally based upon historical events and famous people. Although that appears to be the simplest definition that may accommodate different other genres into historical, Davis (1987) goes deeper to specify historical film as those in which the primarily plot is based on actual historical events, or in which an imagined plot unfolds in such a way that actual historical events are central and intrinsic to the story.

However, history being a vast and complicated discipline, there are still a large number of films such as war film, the epic or biographical film that fall under the historical brackets depending on the subject matter. Historical films indeed vary and can only be thought of in terms of how they render the past on the screen. Some films project history as drama -the oldest and most common of historical film-, others as document while there are even some as experiment (Rosenstone, 2001).
Even though the origin of historical films could be said to date back as early as the first steps of motion picture in the later days of the 19th century, different scholars credit the beginning and rise of historical films with the 1915 *The Birth of a Nation*, a D. W. Griffith blockbuster that changed the film industry as we know it (Burgoyne, 2007; Copeland, 2014). Prior to that, there had been a series of films released between 1910 and 1914, including Italian epics *Quo Vadis?* and *Cabria* which equally influenced the growth of film style and its publicity due to being full length features (Burgoyne, 2007).

Whenever historical films are mentioned, historians appear to be mentioned too (Rosenstone, 1995). They are often disturbed mainly because of their sensitive regard to historical accuracy in different media. Literary form has always been the historians’ preferred way of representing history (Deshpande, 2004). Documentary sources have not been only the preferred, but also the sole reliable sources considered by historians. They claimed that historical films are mostly inaccurate and that they distort the past (Rosenstone R. A., 2001). However, over the recent past, film scholars have stressed the validity of film as history.

Film is nowadays being considered for historical account in different situations. The common example is how “historical films as teaching material” is an approach widely embraced in classrooms (Berg, 2008). Robert Rosenstone enlists another typical situation, like when people expect to find something the written words cannot offer (Rosenstone R. A., 2001). These situations are part of what fuelled the growing tolerance of historical films by professional historians. Then again, this tolerance does not extend far beyond the documentary type.

Deshpande (2004) and Rosenstone (2001) explore reasons that would explain that preference. They point out that historians’ preference for documentary over dramatic film is founded on the basis that documentaries are somehow loyal to written history as they both deliver facts of the past. Salmi (1995) is quick to note that variation of film as dramatic or documentary should not be a key factor for which a film is judged as true or untrue.

This “preference” concept can essentially be argued as seeing dramatic film in a narrow scope. It raises the questions of the reasons why we do revisit the past. Is it for factual recounting? Or, for emotional human experience? Scholars’ arguments such as Rosenstone’s which argues that the problem of history as document is in its obvious
historical materials and cannot be ignored: history is much more than that. It is not just about recounting what happened, but also and most importantly in which conditions it happened (Rosenstone, 2001).

All historical films exist to serve a purpose, which summarises a story that leaves the audience with a moral message and occasionally, a feeling of uplift. It doesn’t matter whether it is a story about the holocaust, slavery or colonialism, the main message to be conveyed is that things are getting better or have gotten better, Rosenstone (2001) alludes.

If the society has anything to learn from history, then there is no better teacher than dramatic films. This statement is further stressed by Rosenstone (2001) who claims that films have the ability to invite the audience to experience the events depicted on screen, something written history can hardly pull. Written history is often regarded as a type of material which just points the audience to the emotions, while the filmic immersive ability allows a connection to the past through the characters, events and situations on screen.

In the event of the society relying on historical films to learn history however, it is noteworthy to clarify that film cannot be seen as a window onto the past. Film -or any other documentation medium for that matter-, does not depict events of the past; it rather points to the events (Stubbs, 2013). Works of art such as Leonardo Da Vinci’s painting The last supper (1495-1498), or Gone with the wind (Fleming, 1939), and even printed texts; can only offer an approximation of what happened in the past. This means that there is no such thing as true depiction of the past situations.

Still, we can only make meaning of those historical works of art depending on already existing knowledge. For a film to be relatable or to even make sense, the audience has to be able to correlate ideas presented on screen with what they already know. In the event of people cut out of any civilisation and having not heard anything from anyone for their entire life, they can hardly make meaning out of historical films pointing to major historical events. Would a film like The boy in the stripped pyjama (Herman, 2008) speak to them without prior knowledge of the concentration camps? Pieces for peace (Bresson, 2008) without the knowledge of tribalism in Kenya? My neighbour, my killer (Aghion, 2009), Munyurangabo (Chung, 2007) or Long coat
(Bamporiki, 2009) without knowing what ethnicity is in general and the Rwandan case in particular?

Historical films therefore, same as other forms of history, do not exist in a vacuum: they are situated in a context of other works, for we judge films in terms of the knowledge of the past that we already possess.

1.9.2 Film set and its function

Film set refers to the scenery and props as arranged for shooting a film (Collins). It is an aspect of the greater mise-en-scene, a technique which has been used in motion picture since the early days of cinema.

*Mise-en-scene*, as put by David Bordwell and Kristin Thompson in their text *Film Art: An Introduction* (2008) is a French word that translates into putting on scene or placing on stage and refers to the arrangement of everything that appears in the framing such as lighting, scenery, props, costume and behaviour of the figures. However much this is the commonly used definition, different scholars have put forward different understanding of the concept. Some like Kawin Bruce include what would appear to be part of cinematography such as aspect ratio, and camera movement (Bruce, 1992).

Regardless of the differences in the understanding of mise-en-scene in the scholarly world, there is no doubt about how important the concept is to cinema. A film, like any other piece of art, is like a clean paper on which the director and his production team put everything together to form what we see. Gibbs (2002) and Dancyger (2006) put forward this idea that a frame through which the audience watches the film from is crafted from scratch. This crafting power lies in the director's hands as a whole lot of filmmaking steps are taken care of, including elements of mise-en-scene.

However, it is worth noting that all the decision-making responsibilities do not lie in the director’s hands alone. Bordwell & Thompson (2008) suggest that actors may add or improve a line on set, which implies that actors are artists to some degree. Same applies to the production team including the set designer and cinematographer. This statement discards the belief that film crew and cast are like props in the hands of a master puppeteer.

Of all the crafting done during filmmaking, mise-en-scene appears to be the most common technique that the audience grasps. We get to know this from Bordwell and
Thompson who go further and state that mise-en-scene represents indeed what the audience remembers as it may be difficult to recall all the cutting, high angles or camera movements (Bordwell & Thompson, 2008).

Mise-en-scene has always been responsible for our most vivid memories from all type of films, and that’s no different when it comes to historical films. Mise-en-scene fulfils this function whether it is a long time ago Gone with the wind (Fleming, 1939) adapted from Margaret Mitchel’s novel, with its most noticeable costumes that say a lot about the economic pedigree of the characters before and during the war; or a very recent old rusty car and sand in Kathryn Bigelow’s The hurt locker (2008), The boy in the stripped pyjama (Herman, 2008) which introduces a contrasting environment around Bruno and Shumel’s interactions through the wired fence.

Such a concept that holds this much power can only be understood when broken down. It can be split into four major aspects: setting, costumes, lighting and movement of figures (Lathrop & Sutton, 2014). This study’s interest lies in setting mainly as the most implicit of the narrative formal elements. Setting is a concept that has become much more to film than it ever was to theatre (Bordwell & Thompson, 2008). André Bazin (quoted in Film Art: An Introduction) suggested that setting in a film can exist independently to actors where even a light bulb flickering or a window’s loose movement can heighten the dramatic effect. Setting can therefore not be seen as a mere container where human events unfold, ever since it can enter the narrative action (Bordwell & Thompson, 2008). This statement allows setting to fulfil its function which consist of creating the mood, time and place where themes will evolve from (Pramaggiore & Wallis, 2005).

Setting -whether built from scratch or partially adopted from an existing location-, is still controlled by the filmmakers. A shoot on location may offer less control than the one done in studio but in the end, every component -as negligible as it might seem-, is in the filmmaker’s intentions (Dancyger, 2006). An outdoor shoot with the wind blowing on trees or a rainbow at the horizon, derives from the filmmaker’s intents and can contribute to an over understanding of the story action, a concept Bordwell & Thompson (2008) allude to.

Whenever discussing cinematic setting and the understanding of story action, another element comes into perspective: props. A prop is an object used on screen by
actors; or vaguely, any movable object within the set. In the art of filmmaking, props fulfil a function too. They are on set to contribute to the story. Props could be argued to even be an extension of the character’s personality and they could direct the audience on how to feel about certain characters or situations (Bordwell & Thompson, 2008)

Nevertheless, props ‘presence on set can have nothing to do with characters’ personality. They could be serving a different purpose, such as the authenticity of the reality being portrayed. A cup of coffee in a coffee shop can be an allegory about the economic status of the film locale. Such meaning from a simple object is dependant on the technicality, such as its placement on set which is essential to conveying the intended meaning (Bordwell & Thompson, 2008).

We can argue that setting and props are highly regarded for their contribution to the themes which are central to the film. As historians and critics have started to consider historical films as carriers of history and its turning point, this favour doesn’t extend to the core components that make the turning points turn. Setting is often criticized for possible historical inaccuracy. However hard filmmakers try to be as believable as possible; critics and historians question the representation of the past in fictional works, but more often than not in the setting. Such critiquing is fair since film was never meant to be a perfect replica of history, something which is even ideally impossible.

Even *Gone with the wind* (Fleming, 1939), regarded as one of the greatest films of all time, is not immune to errors as there are scenes in the film that raise disbelief, such as when street lights have electric bulbs or when a character interacts with corded lamps yet the film is set in a time period when such technology does not exist (Rosenstone, 2001).

However, those critics fail to acknowledge that such components of film set like setting and props can equally encompass enough historicity to qualify films as historical sources. The setting in *Gone with the wind* (Fleming, 1939) is mostly what people relate to that period of American civil war in their most salient memories, on top of any major civil war turning point such as the burning of Atlanta. With such power over the audience’s memory, it is paramount to examine and make meaning of how set components can contribute to the historicity of a historical film.
1.9.3 Theoretical framework

This study aimed at making meaning of set components in historical fiction films and was guided by Formalist film theory which is mainly interested in how style and technique are used to express the artist’s idea in film (Balázs, 1952). The theory evolved in Russia in 1910 but was officially recognized in 1923. Russian critics, Roman Jakobson (1919) and Victor Shklovsky (1917) are regarded as the main proponents of formalism. This theory started as a form of literary criticism and credited much of the Russian formalist work to Ferdinand de Saussure.

According to Victor Shklovsky who theorised the distinction between the story (fabula) and plot (Syuzhet) towards what was coined as “literariness” by fellow critic Roman Jakobson (1921), a formalist approach to film considers that a film has two sides: form and content, and that none can exist without the other. However, a key argument to this study is that content is never new, as it appears to be the same thing done differently (Erlich, 2012). Formal elements of film such as set components are credited with immersive powers and can communicate and cause the audience to feel a certain way, on the basis that a formalist approach to film reflects on how ideas, emotions and themes are communicated through style instead of focusing on themes themselves.

Defamiliarization or estrangement - a term coined by Victor Shklovsky in 1917 as part of his essay “Art as Device”-, is a concept that consists of pulling the audience away from the text in order to highlight the importance of the art’s existence as a unique piece of art which deserves to be perceived in the new light, as opposed to how they are known (Shklovsky, 2016). This tenet becomes central to the analysis and interpretation of data gathered in this study, in the sense that formalist film theory considers that there are no accidents in film, that everything exists to serve a purpose.

It is possible that some components of film might appear out of order; however, they can also be artistic results of a defamiliarization technique aiming at raising questions in the viewing audience. The theory suggests that even when a structure appears to be illogical, one must establish the logicality of that illogicality. This notion guided the data analysis process by considering the existence of every component more rather purposeful than coincidental.
1.10 Research methodology

1.10.1 Introduction

The aim of this study was to examine the contribution of set components in a filmic historical reconstruction of the past. This chapter expounds on the methods that were used throughout the study.

The nature of this study revolves around meaning and interpretation. It consequently used a qualitative textual analysis of selected feature films on the 1994 Genocide against the Tutsi. As McKee (2003) notes; textual analysis can bring meaning and make sense of the world we live in, through interpretation of texts.

1.10.2 Study area

The study was not particularly carried out in a certain continent, region or country because it involves a textual analysis rather than a field research on selected films.

1.10.3 Target population

Due to the interest in understanding the historical reconstruction of the 1994 Genocide against the Tutsi, the target population of this study consisted of feature films on the 1994 Genocide against the Tutsi. With the majority of the films on the 1994 Genocide against the Tutsi being shorts and documentaries, there was a population of approximately 40 films that are feature and fiction, as of 1st January 2017 (Chacon, 2017).

1.10.4 Sampling techniques

The study used a consecutive sampling technique where texts that met the desired criteria were selected until the desired sample size was reached (Bowers, House, & Owens, 2011).

This study is period-delimited within the approximate 100 days during which the 1994 Genocide against the Tutsi happened. The researcher therefore considered feature films that focused at least 75% of the running time between April 7th and July 4th 1994. The study mainly focusing on reconstructed set components of film, the selected films had to be fictions, at the expense of other forms renowned for historical reconstruction such as documentaries.
Other sets of criteria included language of the film being English, or the idea of all films belonging to the same time period -not more than ten years apart-; were considered by the researcher as preferences.

1.10.5 Sample size

The sample size for this study was four feature films representing 10% of the entire population. This study being qualitative in nature, and focusing on rather silent aspects of film such as set components, it was believed that a higher percentage of the target population would provide essential data required for the benefit of this study. The consecutively selected texts until the desired number was reached are *Sometimes in April* (Raoul Peck, 2005), *Hotel Rwanda* (Terry George, 2004), *Shooting dogs* (Michael Caton-Jone, 2005), and *The Day God Walked Away* (Philippe Van Leeuw, 2009).

1.10.6 Research instruments

This research utilised a textual analysis data matrix during the data collection and analysis phase (*see appendix I*). This instrument proved useful as the researcher reduces his material in order to get common theme from coded data.

Image processing utilities such as “Snipping tool” were used to capture screenshots from the film, which were used as supporting material where necessary. For watching films, the preferred method was “VLC media player”, a video playing utility that enables the viewer with different features such as freeze, speed up, slow-motion, frame-by-frame as well as the ability to screen-shot important compositions from the film.

1.10.7 Data collection techniques

Primary data of this study emanated from reading, analysing and interpreting the 4 selected films. The researcher watched the film texts several times before making any form of analysis, but with a view of dissecting the texts with a formalist perceptive.

Secondary data came from scholarly works of other researchers who had tried to approach related topics to this study such as film set components and their functions, historical films or Genocide against the Tutsi in film. Libraries were vastly visited for most of secondary data, but also electronic and the Internet sources such as e-books, reports, journals, reviews, blog posts and websites were consulted as well to broaden the knowledge on the study.
1.10.8 Data analysis and presentation

Data gathered for this study was qualitatively analysed for meaning and interpretation, in line with the study objectives. A formalistic approach to the texts guided an analysis with a view to making meaning of set components and their functions.

The results were presented in three chapters, where the first focuses on research objective number one consisting of a relationship of set components with the narrative structure in the selected films. The second chapter covers findings of research objective number two, a description of the signs of historicity in the selected films’ set components. The third chapter deals with the third research objective which consists of the function of set components of the selected films in the filmic depiction of the 1994 Genocide against the Tutsi.

For the final thesis compilation, these chapters were complemented by an introductory chapter which houses the proposed study, and a concluding chapter which provides summaries, conclusions and recommendations of the study.

Data sourced through reviewing related literature was presented across the document.

1.10.9 Ethical considerations

Content from the selected film texts such as images or any other graphical information were only used for the purpose of this research and were not in any way used for personal or commercial purposes. They remain the properties of the respective entities.

Secondary data’s authors were acknowledged through proper citation and had a respectable interpretation and analysis to avoid zeroing other people’s work. Other relevant inputs towards the fruition of this study were equally acknowledged.

Prior to commencement of the field work the researcher sought a valid research permit from NACOSTI (National Commission for Science, Technology and Innovation) of Kenya, appended in this report.
CHAPTER 2

SET COMPONENTS AND THE NARRATIVE STRUCTURE

2.1 Introduction

Components of sets, as crucial as they are to the audience experience; can never exist in a vacuum. There has to be a platform through which their existence makes sense to the viewer.

This section tackles the first objective of the study as it introduces the context in which set components fulfil their functions, through an overview of the narrative structure of films under study and its relationship with set components within the same films. The narrative structure serves to understand the content and the form of a story (Poyntz, 2000). This generally involves presenting the story and the plot. Poyntz (2000) explains that while the story will be about how dramatic actions unfold in chronological order, plot will refer to how the story is told. The narrative structure could be said to be comprised of elements of fiction such as character, plot, setting, conflict and point of view (Lee, 2012). However, in this chapter emphasis is put on plot and characterisation as key elements for the general understanding of set components and their functions.

2.2 Plot overview

A plot overview is a condensed description of the story in any piece of storytelling such as literary works or films. It serves as a starting point to understanding any piece of work by laying down the sequence in which narrative points are arranged to make a story. It is by no means a form of analysis or interpretation of what the artwork represents but rather a mere description (syracusecityschools.com, 2003).

A plot mainly focuses on the idea of cause and effect to advance a story –that is, presenting what happens in a story and how it happens (Erlich, 2012). Chatman (1980) goes further and simplifies the term by stating that plot is basically the order in which the reader becomes aware of what happens. To describe a story plot and its numerous parts namely exposition, rising action, climax, falling action and denouement; there has to be a technique adapted in order to fully immerse the audience. Plot techniques can quite be numerous, but they are generally categorised into the following: suspense,
foreshadowing, flashback or surprise ending; and at times, they can be used simultaneously (Korner, 2004). Suspense plot technique often resulting in a tense experience is a technique that keeps the audience on their toes, raising feelings of excitement or tension as the plot unfolds. Foreshadowing technique involves some kind of puzzling the audience, where clues given earlier on in the story somehow manage to influence events that occur later in the story. This technique not only engages the audience throughout the story but also puts the audience in the writer’s seat as they discover their ability to decipher mysteries.

Flashback technique, as the name suggests, uses stories that happened at an earlier time to complement the main story (Korner, 2004). This technique is quite interesting as it draws parallels with the natural ways of telling a story. It is more often than not that when telling a story, we recall events of the past to better present our current story. Korner (2004) also notes that “surprise ending” technique in fiction film, is a technique that purposes to catch the audience off guard with something unexpected. This technique involves measuring and twisting the audience’s feelings as the writer releases them moments before the final shock.

In the film plot descriptions that follow, emphasis is mainly put on the parts of a plot and the technique used to tell the story.

2.2.1 Sometimes in April (2005)

Raoul Peck’s Sometimes in April (2005) is a story about Augustin Muganza (Idris Elba), now a school teacher; who struggles with himself trying to find closure about events that happened 10 years earlier when he was still a captain in the Rwandan army. The story centres on Augustin and how he lost his entire family during the 1994 Genocide against the Tutsi (wife Jeanne and children Yves-André, Anne Marie and Marcus) is unfolding in 2004 -10 years after the tragedy- with large scales of the story being flashbacks of events that led to the death of his family members. Augustin’s story is complemented by his brother’s Honoré (Oris Erhuero), now a detainee for genocide crime and in a trial at the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda (ICTR), but formerly a famous radio presenter during the genocide.

Prior to the genocide, Augustin lives a good life with his wife and kids, and has a good job as a captain in the Rwandan army. However, the story reveals how everything is not alright when we learn that Jeanne (Carole Karemera) is of different ethnic group...
from her husband, stamping her with a label of “enemy of the regime”. Tension of killings and hate speech that had been boiling over the past few months, threatening Tutsi people such as Jeanne and moderate Hutu such as Augustin, reach a point of no return when the plane of the President Habyarimana is shot down, triggering a killing spree of any undesired entity. More worrying for Augustin and his family is that he’s been listed on the famous lists of pre-determined “victims”.

The family which didn’t have their daughter Anne Marie at home because she was at Sainte-Marie -a boarding secondary school 150Km west of Kigali-, is scattered even more when Augustin decides to stay as a move to increase their survival chances. The story from there creates three important sub-stories with three different groups of characters. Augustin stays behind with his best friend and workmate in the army Xavier (Fraser James), who is also on the “spy-victim” list. Jeanne and the boys together with Felicie -Xavier’s fiancée-, are entrusted with Honoré mainly due to his popularity among the killers, as they embark on the quest for a safe place. The third subplot which is told with some kind of foreshadowing technique involves Anne Marie and Martine Kamanzi (Pamela Nomvete) -the head matron at Anne Marie’s school, who currently lives with Augustin and bears his child.

All these stories develop simultaneously as the film goes back and forth from the past to the present. These flashback stories contribute to Augustin’s current quest to go through the painful Month of April that torments him every year. This particular year however, is somehow special as he attempts to take a big step towards healing the wounds of yesteryears. He sets on a journey to attend a court hearing for Honoré, who is on trial at the ICTR in Arusha. This, however, only happens after reading a letter from his brother who has come to terms with his past mistakes.

As the killings intensify, each group’s chance of survival diminishes. What seemed like a safety card for each group is somehow becoming obsolete. In Augustin’s group, the fact of both of them being Hutus is no longer of great use as Xavier has been widely publicised to the killers as a Tutsi spy. Jeanne’s group, which had hoped that Honoré’s fame would help them pass through the checkpoints faces a challenge when Honoré realises that the boys guarding the checkpoints keep rotating, with no chance of them all knowing him. Anne Marie’s story, taking place at a catholic girls-only secondary school under the tutelage of a catholic priest (Francis Imbuga), becomes complicated
when a conflict arises: the head priest believes it is best to hand over “rebels” in order to protect the rest. All these conflicts arising propel their respective stories into a state of uncertainty, with characters facing choices that will define their survivals.

The groups will eventually lose members, with only one person surviving in each group. Augustin will see his best friend Xavier executed in front of him, with all attempts to save him amounting to nothing. Honoré will hopelessly see his nephews Yves-André and Marcus shot dead, but will succeed to elongate Jeanne’s life from the barbaric hands of killers, only for a few days until she heroically takes her life together with that of assailants at the sainte-famille church, where hundreds of wounded survivals had sought refuge.

Anne Marie’s story involves a mass shooting of more than 50 teenage girls who, thanks to their solidarity, had chosen to stick together even when killers had given a few of them some lifeline tickets on condition of identifying themselves as Hutus; but together with Martine their matron, were inflicted fatal bullet wounds with only Anne Marie, Martine and Victorine making it out alive. Martine who was seemingly unscathed mainly because of her passing out before the shooting, takes the two survivors with her, but end up losing Anne Marie due to lack of treatments to her body wounds.

The three main characters, Augustin, Martine and Honoré are facing different hardships in present days, though with a high level of similarities in their ultimate goals as they are all resolved to move on. Augustin, who has lost his wife and 3 children, lives with Martine and is about to be a father again, however he hasn’t had the courage to take off the engagement ring of his previous wife, simply because he hasn’t found closure of how his family perished, well apart from Anne Marie who she heard from Martine.

Martine, on the other hand, has not gotten the courage to testify against the killers of Sainte-Marie high school as one of the two survivors. She eventually decides to travel 150km west of Kigali to offer testimony on what happened, not only to incriminate the killers, but also to offer closure to dozens of family members of the deceased teenagers.

Honoré on the other hand, is also facing some kind of inner battle, much similar to the previous two. In order to get the peace of mind, he has finally come to terms with
his role in the events that led to thousands of lives perishing in a short period. After hiding all over the world, he was arrested in Italy and has spent the last 7 years in jail. Part of the redemption of his soul is -Honoré believes- telling Augustin what happened to his family, helping his brother to finally cry for his own.

2.2.2 The day God walked away (2009)

The Day God Walked Away is a Philippe Van Leeuw feature film that centres on a Tutsi woman’s struggle -Jacqueline (Nirere Ruth) - during the 1994 genocide against the Tutsi in Rwanda. The 2009 story is a single story from start to end, with Jacqueline the key character.

Jacqueline, a young mother of 2 is introduced to us as a maid to a European family residing in Rwanda. Jacqueline’s life in the genocide takes a swift detour when the European family she was working for is to be evacuated from Rwanda which has now become a murderer’s den. With too many connections with the title of the film “The day God walked away”; the film uses the concept of “walking away” even more explicitly, when her employers eventually did. At that moment, she knew that the shield she was hiding behind was no more. Killers lurking in the neighbourhood impatiently waiting for when the foreign family leaves in order to finish off “the job”, storm immediately into Jacqueline’s workplace, looting and purposing to find any hidden Tutsi in the house.

Jacqueline, who was told to hide in the attic by the couple because she would be killed immediately if she was to step outside the house, stays hidden for at least the time being. This situation changes though, with baby cries and gun shots outside the house becoming the common sound in her ears. This leads her to ponder between staying hidden or going to check on her two children who she knows well wouldn’t be safe without her. The mother instinct wins as she courageously manages to step out of the house for the first time in many days, having been surviving on water alone.

The plot that delivers the story from a first person experience proceeds with Jacqueline and her journey towards reuniting with her children. At the village, all she passes by are dead bodies on either side of the road, before she reaches her home only to find her children lying down breathless.
Shocked by the untimely death of her kids, she can’t even scream loud as she holds them and their bloody body. Emotionally collapsed, she sits down and starts to clean up the dead bodies until a woman appears and chases her away, claiming that the house is no longer hers, threatening to call killers on her if she stayed. Jacqueline leaves in tears, homelessly hiding in the village’s dense bushes. At this point, there haven’t been many discussions since the departure of the European family; mainly because Jacqueline -the main character-, hasn’t met another key character or because Jacqueline is too aggrieved to speak.

The story eventually takes a different turn of events, when Jacqueline while hiding in the bushes, notices a man being chased by a machete-armed group of people. She sets on a quest to find him but to no avail. When standing at the riverside, having lost it all and no longer finding a reason to keep going, Jacqueline decides to end her life. She hears coughs of an individual around the place, which turns things around as she seemingly finds another reason to go on with life. We are led to believe that the wounded man (Afazali Dewaele) is the man we saw earlier being chased by killers.

The story enters a phase of calmness with less drama such as killings but emphasis is put on the relationship between the newly founded pair of survivors. Jacqueline’s compassion is shown when she nurses the wounds of the wounded man, going extra length to “sterilise” his wound that would have killed him. As the man recovers at the riverside, Jacqueline applies her immense survival skills, trying to start a fire and collecting rain water in order to avoid river water that had been contaminated by floating human bodies. She will eventually carry the man on her back every time troops of killers get nearby, taking him and his weight into a less exposed corner.

The final battle of Jacqueline’s story is much more a battle within than against people chasing her. After she had discovered her ounce of hope through the prospective company formed with the wounded man; all hopes vanish when his inhumane behaviour is much comparable to that of those who are chasing Jacqueline. This torments her and almost renders her insane as she discovers that there are no safe places, even in the woods.

The wounded man’s monologue constantly reminds Jacqueline of the ordeals that she had chosen to forget in order to move on. On top of him seemingly unbothered by the life in the woods -or should I say-, his immense capability of coping with the
situation; the talk of his past life involving wife and kids hurt her even more, knowing she had just seen both her children being dragged like bags of waste and thrown inside a pick-up car. What breaks her mental strengths however, is the fact that the person she saved from an eventual death is the one that hurts her most by raping her. The battle inside her pushes her to the limit as she willingly exposes herself to a villager who calls the killing brigade on her.

Having lived in the woods for now quite some time, they manage to hide from the group of dozen people chasing them, with Jacqueline trapped in the muddy pond where no one can escape without assistance. This works to her advantage though, as the one man who closely ran after her can’t reach her from outside the pond. The man attempts to deceive Jacqueline by lending her a helping hand which she refuses and chooses to rather die drowned than raped and then killed by her predator. When it gets too late in the day, the man guarding his “prey” abandons thinking that she will eventually die. The wounded man who was lurking by intervenes and saves Jacqueline from the pond.

This incident of mentally giving up however is not the last one as she remains tormented throughout the film. She will even go to an extent of holding a machete in her hand, contemplating the idea of murdering the wounded man while asleep. She can’t resolve herself to a decision though as the old-self and the new-self appear to be battling it out inside her.

Finally, she realizes that staying hidden in the woods, right next to the man who raped her is as good as being dead. This pushes her towards her final action of foolishness, storming towards her village with a machete in her hand. As she approaches the village, with people seemingly at work and chatting in the background, it seems as if she is walking straight into the lion’s den; until through a plot technique of unexpected ending, we learn that the villagers are not the same as the ones that have been lurking around the village waiting to find anyone to kill. It is alleged that the genocide had been long over as they chatter standing around Jacqueline who has collapsed: she had lost counts of time in the woods.

As the villagers stand around her trying to know who she was, a few suggestions arise including saving her because she could have been epileptic or let her die because she was that Tutsi woman they knew.
2.2.3 Shooting dogs (2005)

Michael Caton-Jones’ *Shooting dogs* (2005) also known as Beyond the gates in some parts of the world, is a 115 minutes drama that centres on events that happened at the Ecole technique officielle (E.T.O -Official technical school) Kigali-Rwanda during the genocide against the Tutsi in 1994.

The film that was also shot on location Rwanda , begins a few days prior to the assassination of the then Rwandan president Juvenal Habyarimana, on the night of April 6th , which is considered as the “trigger” of hundreds of thousands deaths that followed for a 100 days. E.T.O is introduced as a school managed by a European catholic priest, father Christopher (John Hurt) and his only teacher Joe Connor (Hugh Dancy) also of European descent. The school is also seen as a hub for United Nations (UN) peacekeeping troops led by captain Charles Delon (Dominique Horwitz), which were deployed in Rwanda to “monitor” the situation as tensions had begun to boil in the wake of the Arusha accords. The scenes that followed focus mainly on the lives of father Christopher and teacher Joe Connor as they make choices that not only impact their lives, but also those of people around them.

Father Christopher is introduced as a social person who get along with his students and their families, his employees and even local authorities. He has a great sense of humour as he is seen joyfully chatting with the nuns at “his” convent, and latter seen teasing Joe about a student who may have developed a crush for him.

At this point, we equally know enough of Joe Connor, a young French man who has a special connection with his Rwandan students and driver François, with whom he runs daily errands around the town. They have acquainted well to the point of paying random quick visits to François’ parents. Joe also seemingly has a connection with one student in particular: Marie Mutagoma (Clare-Hope Ashitey), a female teen whose story development is quite important to the film as a whole. She is a Tutsi and a runner, and her future will ultimately be decided by the latter than the former.

Another important story development is that of Charles Delon -captain of the peacekeeping troops deployed at the E.T.O. As his story evolves, he seems to be battling with his conscience about the right thing to do, weighing between his job as a UN soldier and his desire to honour his grandparents’ legacy of heroism. This seems to be a trend throughout the movie, when characters are constantly faced with choices that
could define their lives. When the massacre begins right after President Habyarimana’s plane was shot, father Christopher is the first one to take a bold decision as he opens wide the gates for hundreds of people who were seeking refuge inside E.T.O, as the Kigali neighbourhood was becoming increasingly hostile.

Joe, a humanitarian worker who doesn’t understand what is going on, quickly follows suite trying to put everyone to safety. He makes a bold move and goes beyond the gates to look for Marie’s family – knowing that he didn’t have guarantees of a safe return. His burning desire to help goes as far as offering his furniture to hundreds of cold people in order to make some fire.

Overwhelmed by lack of action by the international community to stop the killings, Joe sets on a journey to raise awareness of the horrors at the place. His plan involves getting the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) reporter Rachael to broadcast the event for the world to see.

Rachael is represented as a war reporter who has been to Bosnia a few years before where atrocity of killings affected her emotionally. She confesses the “white supremacy syndrome” when she reveals that she felt more emotionally concerned of the Bosnia killings because she could relate the victims to her own family members. This is somehow what drives her when she chooses to help Joe who had just mentioned that there are a dozens of Europeans at E.T.O, arguing that it would make a “better” story than “hotel Mille Collines” or “church Saint famille” which equally have thousands of people seeking refuge. Her choice is a trending subject even in other films such as Sometimes in April; where Europeans’ lives were valued highly by fellow Europeans on the ground.

An intriguing emotional response from father Christopher to captain Charles is seen when ten Belgian soldiers who were guarding the prime minister are reportedly missing. This response is triggered by the fact that their well-being is from now on threatened. What was now a massacre of Rwandans by Rwandans – as Racheal put it – was becoming more of a bigger plan that would eventually lead to the UN soldiers being ordered to vacate the premise of E.T.O and retreat to the airport for an extradition. This turning point however, is not without precedents. The story evolves simultaneously with different characters realising how powerless they were in a situation that they could
have impacted. Joe is the first to realise that when him and his BBC friends haplessly witness cold-blood killings at a roadblock.

What crushes him even more is how his driver and friend François (David Gyasi) is part of the killings. Same would happen to father Christopher when, on a quest to seek medicine for a new-born that he had just delivered under unfavourable conditions in the camp, he realises that people he met every Sunday for mass celebration at his chapel, people he knew very well in the neighbourhood were doing something he never imagined they could do.

The “gates” of E.T.O prove to be the only thing that separates life and death when a group of Tutsi refugees decides to run away and seek new refuge. This is in anticipation of a possible withdrawal of UN forces; right after trucks had evacuated Europeans from E.T.O. The attempted escape however, results in a massacre of whoever was beyond E.T.O’s gates as the militiamen were just lurking nearby waiting to slaughter any escapees. The lady who had given birth to a child a day before is among the victims as Joe watches hopelessly on the other side of the fence.

Joe and father Christopher face their biggest test as they are driven to decide whether they stay and possibly die, or leave knowing that most of their friends at ETO will die. When the UN eventually orders the only thing that had kept all the people inside E.T.O safe -the soldiers- to evacuate to the airport abandoning thousands of defenceless people, the story reaches its climax as characters’ choice define not only their fate but that of people surrounding them.

Captain Charles is presented with the hardest choice when the group of Tutsi refugees begs him and his soldiers to kill them in order to grant them a quick death -a request he rejects. The group insists with him helping with the kids at least quoting how they wouldn’t wish to see their younger ones being slaughtered by the machetes. This equally goes in vain as captain Charles refuses and proceeds with evacuating his troops.

Joe Connor’s resilience has seemingly reached its limit as he boards one of the cars leaving the camp. His conscience is checked by the look in Marie’s eyes who believed he would never leave her.

Father Christopher, who has spent decades with the people about to be left to the mercy of the ruthless killers, can’t come to terms with the idea of leaving them in order
to save his life. He takes a big decision of staying behind; knowing that his skin colour might not be enough to save him since the armed feared men were just leaving. In doing so, however, a brilliant idea of courage strikes him as he plans to use the school truck for turns of transporting a few kids off the camp. He hides a dozen kids under a large cover and successfully drives outside the camp.

When he reaches a roadblock, he realizes that the already drunk parishioners who are thirsty for blood won’t let him go. He attempts to make sound arguments in order to reason them but realises that that ship has long sailed: consciousness is no more. When the local vendor shoots him after a heated argument, he falls down and realises that, Marie –having noticed the impasse they were in-, has led the other kids quietly out of the truck and sent them into hiding.

A courageous Marie who runs away grants father Christopher a satisfying death knowing that the kids could have a chance at survival. Marie, whose running initially started for fun, now runs for her life. She is revealed five years later as having survived when she visits a church in Europe where father Christopher grew up as a priest, to meet Joe Connor who now serves as a chorister.

2.2.4 Hotel Rwanda (2004)

Hotel Rwanda is 2004 Terry George film depicting events of the Genocide against the Tutsi in 1994. The film’s focus is on the events that ensued at the Hotel des Milles Collines where Paul Rusesabagina (Don Cheadle) was a caretaker manager.

Starting on 5th April -2 days before the commencement of the genocide-, the film sets off on a slow pace of events, taking the audience into the lives of various characters before the horrors begin. Paul is introduced as a visionary who knows how to forge relationships with various entities, from business partners such as George Rutaganda (Hakeem Kae-Kazim) to political figures such as Army chief General Bizimungu (Fana Mokoena). He is also introduced as a family man not only through his love for his wife and children but also his friendship to other relatives.

The film takes its time to expose the complex relationships between characters, something that will drive the whole narrative as conflicts arise. The complex phenomenon of inter-marriages is brought forward through Paul’s family where he -a
Hutu- is married to a Tutsi woman Tatiana (Sophie Okonedo). On top of that, his brother-in-law Thomas (Antonio David Lyons) and wife are equally Tutsis, something that adds to Paul’s responsibility of protecting his own. Paul’s circle goes beyond family members and reaches work where he has a Tutsi worker Dube (Desmond Dube) with whom they share a friendly relationship.

The slow tension building up between armed forces and people listed as “Tutsi spies” takes a drastic turn when on the night of 6th April, the president’s plane is shot down. Mass killings ensue which instils fear in the Tutsi community around Paul. Dozens of people leave their homes to hide at Paul’s, a place they believe will be safe because Paul is a Hutu and a renowned good neighbour who wouldn’t turn them in. Such becomes Paul’s responsibility as he tries to negotiate their survival on the way to the hotel.

Favours that Paul had stocked up with various people for a rainy day and his negotiation skills come in handy as he secures safe passage to the hotel through monetary means. Milles Collines which is a four star Hotel becomes populous even in the staff quarters mainly because it was perceived as a safe place due to The United Nations Assistance Mission for Rwanda (UNAMIR) troops who were stationed at the hotel when the genocide began.

Paul’s focus becomes much wider than his friends and family -now at the hotel-, when the film constantly throws challenges at him from inside and outside of the hotel. As the man in charge of the hotel, right after the general manager had left him in charge, Paul has to deal with managerial duties with a scared and demotivated staff, together with survival challenges emanating from outside the walls of Milles Collines. The story inside the hotel centres on Paul’s family and their safety while the story outside broadens on the whole survival quest, with Paul having to face the likes of George -head of the militia-, General Bizimungu -head of armed forces-, and Colonel Oliver -head of UNAMIR troops.

When the French and the UN troops evacuate the premises of the hotel -together with all the peoples of European and American descent-, the apparent shield that had stopped the Interahamwe militiamen from storming inside the hotel to kill all the refugees was no more. Colonel Oliver who had stayed with a few of his troops when the UN army withdrew -together with Paul-, attempt to sneak refugees out of the hotel
by means of the UN trucks. Their attempt however, is unsuccessful mainly due to Gregoire (Tony Kgoroge) a hotel employee and a Hutu extremist who has fallen out with Paul’s leadership.

After running short of bribes and following a weakening of his initial threat about the fact that there were American satellites watching over the hotel, which in return made General Bizimungu guard the hotel against the militiamen; Paul takes matters in his own hands and a notch further in what seemed like a mutually respectable relationship between the two. To prevent militiamen -who were out of control as the war progressed between the armed forces and the rebel army-, from entering and slaughtering everyone at the hotel; Paul confronts General Bizimungu, obliging him to chase the militia away in the hope of Paul’s favourable testimony -should there be a court hunt for a responsible of the horrors. General Bizimungu’s intervention, coupled with the rebel army’s advancement at the hotel, helps the refugees and Paul’s family to head towards the safe zones where they would eventually reunite with Thomas’s orphaned children.

2.3 Set components vis-à-vis the narrative structure

2.3.1 Set components and the plot

Set components, much like other elements of mise-en-scene such as lighting, behaviour of figures and others; contribute greatly towards how the story builds up (Lathrop & Sutton, 2014). They can influence the plot direction, inform the characters behaviour or dictate how themes evolve from the story. The plot -key component of the narrative structure which is all about causality-, depends on set components in such a way that the latter can be the turning points themselves. Turning points are major players in good storytelling as they entirely and abruptly change the direction the story would be taking. A scene where machetes drop from beer-containers as shown in Fig 2.1 is considered a determinant factor in the relationship between both characters. The mood in the beer store changes from chatty to calm in Fig 2.2 as there is a sudden knowledge of existence about something that wasn’t supposed to be.
According to Kampis (2002), a coherent story has to be logical and rational. Logical in the sense that in the alphabet, B follows A; and rational because it conforms to the basis of what we acknowledge as rational. There could be debates however, about what is considered logical and rational since a narrative could as well be the consequence as much as the source. The popular discourse on the causality could be likened to the egg-hen mystery. Regardless of what science books will prove, there will always be a way in which people make meaning of the world based on popular beliefs.

It could be presented as a strong case that B comes before A in the alphabet; however, popular beliefs and our decoding ability dictate that humans see things in a particular way. If a candle or petrol lantern is lit in one shot (Fig 2.4) and in the next the electricity goes off (Fig 2.3) the audience struggles to make meaning of what is presented in front of them. It could be seen as a deliberate act of switching off the lights after one has identified the alternative source of light. This loses its meaning towards the whole story as the audience could misread it as an ambiance-related gesture rather what it is supposed to be.
By having the cause and effect in the reverse order, with the lights going off first before attempting to light candles or lanterns later, the audience deduce a power outage and grasp the story as an emergency instead of deliberate move. Indeed, the human brain subscribes to the Gestalt theory of perception guided by principles of laws of proximity, closure, continuity similarity and connectedness (Hamlyn, 2017). Alongside its primary notion arguing that the whole is greater than individual parts, it also suggests that when people are given a logical and rational sequence such as A,B,C they are likely to follow with D,E,F and the rest of the alphabets. When a character stumbles in film, the audience expects the fall to be anything downwards. In the event of other scenarios, the plot embarks on a different path that would suggest the characters possessing some super-abilities or that the event happening could be paranormal.

The use of umbrella (Fig 2.5) coincides with the change of scenery in the right order. However, in this case, it is the latter that influences the former. Rain showers outside the entrance of Hotel des Mille Collines build up to the scene where Paul, seemingly overwhelmed is standing outside. Without the rain, the scene doesn’t convey the same image of the mental state in which Paul doesn’t even care about hiding from the rain (Fig 2.6).

![Figure 2.5 Paul uses an umbrella as he heads towards the buses.](image1)

![Figure 2.6 Paul is rained on as he watches the buses evacuate non-Rwandans only.](image2)

2.3.2 Set components and characterisation

Characterisation is the process by which the writer reveals the personality of a character. It could be through direct characterisation where the audience is told what the character’s personality is or through indirect characterisation where the audience sees things that lead to understanding a character’s personality. Of the many methods
through which characterisation can be achieved such as speech, thoughts, looks and many others, set components appear to play a distinctive part.

Props, by definition are objects that characters interact with in a film, and one of their primary functions is to drive the characters personality and actions. When Bordwell and Thompson (2008) suggest that props can even be an extension of characters personality, they literally allude to such scenes as when a priest holds dear a bible, somehow seeming inseparable.

**Figure 2.7** is a shot from *Shooting dogs* which establishes Father Christopher as not only a priest by profession, but also as a man of faith who actually believes in what he preaches. Such realisations can equally be made on characters that hold machetes on the roadblocks (**Fig 2.8**) whether the machetes are in use or not.

![Figure 2.7 Christopher getting his bibles ready to be used as firewood, an indication of his emotion state right after he lost hope in his parishioners](Courtesy of *Shooting Dogs*)

![Figure 2.8 Militiaman at a roadblock verifying an ID in one hand while holding a machete in the other hand](Courtesy of *Sometimes in April*)

The props have become part of their personality that one cannot separate them from the character, lest they become incomplete and convey an empty feeling to the audience.

The art of creating information and conveying them to the audience can take different shapes. One aspect of indirect characterisation can be the surroundings of the characters. Indeed, characters can never exist in a vacuum. The home place, workplace, where they eat from, where they meet people from and other places that constitute their routine; can contribute to their personality as a whole from the word go. *Sometimes in April* and *Shooting dogs* introduce Augustin (**Fig 2.9**) and Joe (**Fig 2.10**) against school backgrounds. The mere scenery surrounding these characters already drives the
audience into guessing what their occupation could be, way before any direct characterisation begins.

When Jacqueline of *The Day God Walked Away* is presented in a kid’s room full of coloured drawings covering the walls, combined with her holding one of the toddlers in her arms (Fig 2.11), an idea of what might be her job emerges from an audience which hasn’t been presented with much info yet.

The formalist approach to film considers that there can’t be accidents in film, that every object that appears on scene is intentional and that it contributes to the story as a whole. Even for films shot on location, random appearance of objects cannot just be coincidental. The drawings on the wall in Fig 2.11 could be thought of to be any random
combination of toddler’s drawings, but the subject choice could be more than any random subject. According to Malchiodi (1998), the drawings ranging from a toddler’s to a kid’s, may indicate how long the family has been living there. The film begins with Jacqueline’s apparent special bond with her kids, something that extends to kids that she takes care of at her workplace, especially to Sandrine who finds it hard to leave her behind. Jacqueline character is therefore seen through the eyes of Sandrine and her departing gift of a bracelet watch.

A more common function of scenic design on characterisation is the ability to dictate actions, as characters face one conflict after another. A conflict is any challenge main characters need to solve in order to achieve their goals (Korner, 2004). Without a relevant world where the plot evolves from, conflicts couldn’t be regarded as obstacles worth facing. For example, a blind man or a character with vision problems would understandably struggle to direct a key inside a keyhole, even when other variables such as light are favourable.

The level of difficulty of a challenge is what builds up suspense or interest from an audience, triggering a guess game of whether the characters would achieve the goals presented to them by the story. Dead bodies in scenes on the road are mainly what pushed characters such as Jacqueline of *The Day God Walked Away* and Marie of *Shooting Dogs* to run for long without taking a break.

The scenery presents with them a hostile environment that cannot allow them the luxury of resting until they get to safety (Fig 2.12 and Fig 2.13). The constant threat that there might be a killer around is what informs their actions. From there, the audience gets connected to the characters’ mental strength and desire to go on as they suppress the body’s request to give up.
Actions and inner thoughts are connected for each character. What one character thinks, without saying it constitutes to their personality (Korner, 2004). When the audience is immersed in a filmic experience, it attempts to decipher the characters’ inner thoughts as they relate personal experience with that of characters on screen. But how does one read through a mind that is on the other side of the screen? How would a production crew convey characters’ inner dialogue without the need for characters to say it out loud? This inner dialogue -that is just the speech from a character to the self-, is indeed “heard” by the character and the audience. However, this is by no means of ears as the human organs responsible for hearing, but by means of seeing and making meaning of diverse character’s reactions and expressions.

This experience -however much of character personality that is presented to the audience through their inner thoughts-, cannot be considered as fully revealing due to the human nature of partially concealing some information. Nonetheless, it serves great a deal towards understanding the characters’ behaviour in a given situation. This is because an inner thought is considered as an honest voice. While other characters might not see everything from how a certain character behaves in their presence, -say indifferent; the audience might be able to realise that the same character is indeed caring.

Jacqueline of *The Day God Walked Away* sits hours attending to a wounded man, seemingly worried about his fate as she attempts extreme measures to salvage his life. From setting fire on ([Fig 2.14](#)), to sterilising his wound ([Fig 2.15](#)); we see a Jacqueline who is overly concerned by the only “friendly human” she has seen since the chaos began, she sees him as a future companion in her journey, as she has spent days without talking to someone.

![Figure 2.14 Jacqueline trying to make fire](#)  
(Courtesy of *Sometimes in April*)

![Figure 2.15 Jacqueline attempts to sterilise her friend’s wound.](#)  
(Courtesy of *Sometimes in April*)
However, her actions do not suggest compassion to that extent, especially from the wounded man’s point of view. The props she interacts with hopelessly trying to pass time also propel the audience into the state of her mind on how she lost the count of time. The inner thought experience can also be helped by the setting of a scene, as it reveals character’s motivation. As an example, a character staring at a naked wall for hours conveys little to no information about where the thoughts are leading them while a wall full of features could easily guide the viewers deep into the world of the character.

Jacqueline depicted on Figure 2.16 is helped by the nature of her surrounding in order to hide far away from the killers but also close enough to monitor the situation at her former village (Fig 2.17).

Would a scene in plain view have allowed the director the freedom to execute the same? The choice of components of set indeed contributes greatly to the overall insight into a character’s personality and cannot be perceived as a mere container for the story to evolve.

2.4 Conclusion

This chapter sought to meet the first objective of this study, consisting of establishing the relationship between set components and the narrative structure in the films under study.

Generally, the chapter finds that set components in all the four films have their nature stretching beyond their mere definitions. The relationship between set components and characterisation is the most pronounced, with all the films using props
and setting to establish the characters’ personality. Additionally, *The day God walked away* provided a platform that offered glimpses of the unspoken world of characters.

This chapter lays foundation for an exploration into the second objective of this study which consists of situating the same set components into time and space.
CHAPTER 3

SET COMPONENTS AS HISTORICAL ELEMENTS

3.1 Introduction

In the process of making historical films, setting becomes an element of serious interest as it houses components that carry the film’s historicity. The historical film’s underlying value therefore lies in its validity as a historically plausible story (Rosenstone, 2001).

Fiction in its simplest form, does not need facts least they become harmful to its structure. The same can hardly be said on a fiction story evolving within a historical context. Indeed, historical fictions are often dependent on the level of historicity that they encompass as far as the historical tag is concerned. Navarro (2008) as cited in Champomanes (2015) categorises historical films into two: -those that use history as a context, and those that try to be like direct representations of a particular historical period, place or personality. This study focusing on the Genocide against the Tutsi is bound to elicit some sense of accuracy both in the period and time in which the event occurred. It is important to note that historicity of a film is sometimes measured based on memory: what we remember or consider as history.

This chapter focuses on set components’ re-presentations as historical evidence, by locating them in time and space. The chapter addresses the second objective of this study and serves as a foundation study towards understanding the functions of set components vis-à-vis the historical period which the films represent.

3.2 The setting factor

Setting refers to the time and place in which the film’s story happens (Korner, 2004). Often credited with housing film set components, setting is an essential element of film that contribute to the greater mise-en scene, which in return builds to the total image of film (Bordwell & Thompson, 2008). For a story to make sense to film goers, a few set of guides have to be established in space and time. These sets of guides could be the temporal aspect of the film that places the story in a certain time period; or the geographic aspect of the film milieu, which informs a lot about the physical location
and its characteristics. They could also be anything that informs the social structure and economic aspect of the milieu, or the rather perceivable moral attitudes and behaviour codes of a certain people. All these aspects of setting can greatly contribute to other elements of narrative such as character, plot and themes.

Historical fictions -of all types of films-, take care of temporal aspect diligently as they mostly depict real life events of the past onto the screen (Stubbs, 2013). A historical period within which an event occurred is essential when the audience tries to remember something that was, but is no more. Some of the events of the past such as the Great depression or the World wars are visited as memory as years go by. This is probably due to the fact that a century is a long time for a human being to remain alive; and in rare case of extreme longevity, the memory faults as it cannot retain everything heard or seen decades ago.

As much as historical fiction film does not purpose to replicate the past on screen, it tries in its own way to re-present past events in the most realistic and believable way possible (Deshpande, 2004). Filmmakers employ setting to create a resemblance of reality and a feeling of being projected into the time and place where events are taking place. When an audience is immersed in chilly raining scene, it is normal that they equally feel the chills even when the weather in their current time and space does not suggest that (Grodal, 1999).

Paul of Hotel Rwanda (Terry George, 2004) being rained on as he witnesses Europeans being evacuated in front of hotel Mille Collines (see Figure 2.6) is an example of how the audience can be teleported into the time and space where the scene is occurring from. When the audience watches this particular scene, they can feel particularly chilly all of a sudden -not because there is rain involved as they may have watched hundreds of films where rain is a feature-, but because this time the filmmaker had used this specific setting not just as a weather phenomenon, but for sheer visual impact.

Paul being rained on summarized his state of mind at that particular moment when every hope of saving the refugees was lost. He was out of options in regards to how he would cope with the militia. Paul could have chosen to take an umbrella with him as he stood hopelessly in rain, but as effectively suggested by the rain, it was the least of his worries.
Parallels can be drawn with Jacqueline of *The Day God Walked Away* portrayed on figure 3.1 passing through a rough night of hiding from the killers, which left her with no other option than to lie down in a swamp. Jacqueline is pictured sitting in the same swamp the following day, guarding his newly found companion with the mud on her face drying up as the sun rises (Fig 3.2).

Despite all the apparent discomfort on her face, she doesn’t even attempt to clean it up, making it look like the least of her worries – well below “hiding”. Looking at her through the screen, the audience cannot help but feel their facial skin being virtually stretched. Human reflexes in such a situation point towards instinctively removing anything that sticks to our faces; but at this particular moment, Jacqueline’s reflexes are submersed by her desire to stay alive more than anything.

Many historical films covering the same events tend to be situated within the same temporal brackets, which also applies to films on the Genocide against the Tutsi. This historical horror is delimited between April 7th and July 4th of 1994 (Hintjens, 1999). However, it is important to note that there are no catastrophes without precedents. Even a tragedy which looks random such as tsunamis or volcanic eruption can be traced back to an initial catalyst. Roots of the genocide in Rwanda can be traced back to centuries before the country was even inhabited, same as the aftermath can be contained in time and space, as it can affect distant societies in centuries to come.
However, for as long as the tragedy in question is concerned, people tend to remember past events in their most actuality-form possible. 7\textsuperscript{th} April 1994 was indeed the beginning of the Genocide. All the four films under study have starts set a few days before the beginning of the genocide in order to expose the back story when things were in order. Ideally, the establishing shot is set at a period right before 7\textsuperscript{th}. Sometimes in April and The Day God Walked Away open on a calm environment portraying the natural beauty of the Rwandan mountains, calm green surroundings intertwined with rivers and lakes right before the inciting incidents that get the stories moving (Fig 3.3 & Fig 3.4).

Hotel Rwanda and Shooting Dogs open in cityscape with activities such as trade, sport and education going on, suggesting a “normal business day” in a country that was going to be torn apart (Fig 3.5 & Fig 3.6). All these are rare portrayal of how the situation looked like before the genocide or would have looked like in the event the Genocide did not happen. It sets the audience mind at rest as it offers a glimpse of what could be equated to normality.
Another form setting can take is the geo-physical boundaries of the event depicted. The 1994 Genocide against the Tutsi happened in Rwanda only and this is an aspect that all the four films strive to bring forward.

As the directors navigate through this historical fact in different ways, *Hotel Rwanda* offers an aerial view of Kigali hills with Paul driving all the way from the Kigali international airport which is the only airport that links Rwanda and other countries (*Fig 3.7*). This is to introduce the audience to the home of events that are about to occur.

Similarly, *Sometimes in April* introduces Rwanda as a container of events to occur by narrowing down from the world view to the country view. This is shown through a sequence of zooming into a world map and highlighting Rwanda in the middle of Africa right before the film establishes the hilly side of the country (*Fig 3.8 & Fig 3.9*). With this emphasis on delimiting the film, the mood is set for the audience to locate and project themselves in a place they understand.

![Figure 3.7 An aerial view of hilly Kigali as Paul drives through]( Courtesy of Hotel Rwanda)

![Figure 3.8 World map highlighting Rwanda, locating the events to occur within the regional context.]( Courtesy of Sometimes in April)

![Figure 3.9 Inside the map of Rwanda]( Courtesy of Sometimes in April)
Ideally though, there could be an argument about *Sometimes in April* being set in post-Genocide Rwanda and Tanzania (for the ICTR scenes). However, psychological setting propels the audience -together with the protagonist Augustin-, in an imaginary world of Rwanda 1994. This sentiment is echoed by Talib (2004) when he discusses that setting can also be internal and psychological in nature. He argues that it could be a reflection of what a certain character feels or thinks at a particular moment.

This indirect presentation of setting is what we see in *Sometimes in April* when Honoré is recalling from memory how the events surrounding the mysterious death of Augustin’s wife and children occurred. The problem with memory is the issue of reliability. It could be that after a few years of incarceration, Honoré had forgotten or rewritten the scenes that happened long ago; but fact remains that this is not something the audience can be sure of unless there are clues of a possible distortion. The audience therefore gets immersed into the indirect world -together with Honoré-, and perceive it as the actual physical setting.

### 3.3 Historical content of set components

#### 3.3.1 Set components as historical evidence

Before one can validate set components as historical evidence, it is paramount to first understanding the complex concept of what constitute set components. Set components go beyond the mere definition of scenery and props (see 1.9.2 *Film set and its function*). Indeed as much as props can be any objects movable by characters, they can overlap and become one with other elements of mise-en-scene such as costume or animal (Hart, 2017).

This is primarily the role that a particular item is fulfilling on stage. For example, a live animal is usually perceived in the same department as live humans as long as it eats or does something that requires casting; however, not always are animals’ presence and actions justifiable by their sole existence but instead, the sole existence and reactions of the characters in the film. *Shooting Dogs* utilised dogs not as typical animals performing certain and specific tasks, but rather as the centrepieces for the story to evolve.
When captain Delan is faced with an option to shoot the dogs feeding on dead bodies instead of actually being given permission to shoot the real culprits, the scene heightens the internal ordeal that he’s facing -knowing that his hands are tied. Moreover, the dogs portrayed in this scenario are not “humanised”, same as the killers in *The Day God Walked Away* are not granted humanity. The films purposely choose not to slap a personality on either the killers or the dogs because the intended message is way beyond their personification. The killers in *Shooting Dogs* however, are given an identity through François who the audience interacts with and has a curve of his own: from a joyful and cheerful man to a cold blooded killer (**Fig 3.10 & Fig3.11**).

![Figure 3.10 Killers walk by the riverside in a group. They disclose close to nothing in terms of the other part of their personality.](image1)

**Figure 3.10** Killers walk by the riverside in a group. They disclose close to nothing in terms of the other part of their personality.

**Courtesy of The Day God Walked Away**

![Figure 3.11 François sharing a laugh with Joe as he unexpectedly drives him to pay a visit to his father before they can continue with their errands.](image2)

**Figure 3.11** François sharing a laugh with Joe as he unexpectedly drives him to pay a visit to his father before they can continue with their errands.

**Courtesy of Shooting dogs**

Props which are housed in the scenic design can indeed take any form from all elements of mise-en-scene, but they always have one common denominator which is to enhance the story and the characters in particular. Whether props are on set to be used by the character or not, they will always be categorized according to the character’s action. When props are manipulated by a character, they are immediately known as hand props (Hart, 2017).

The act of interacting with the object by a character is believed to draw the audience’s attention to that particular object. When characters from the four films manipulate machetes -an ever-present prop in these films-, it adds to their personality as the audience get to know them. The machetes which should normally be considered as agrarian tools as it will be discussed in 4.4.1 *Agrarian Economy*, take a different form and fulfil a different function, heightening the characters motives throughout the stories.

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François’s handling of a blood-stained machete (Fig3.12) when father Christopher attempts to save the kids in *Shooting Dogs*, confirms the killer-status that François had acquired. This is without the film showing him actually killing victims but the simple handling of a machete -now a weapon-, conveys the idea that he may have killed. Such is the power of hand props when it comes to defining characters.

On the other hand, Jacqueline’s handling of a machete has a different meaning. Towards the end of *The Day God Walked Away* when Jacqueline storms out of the bush and heads towards the nearest village where killers have been living; without a machete in her hands, it portrays her suicidal instincts to the audience as she attempts to put an end to her cavalry. Unlike François who used a machete as a sign of strength and power, she uses it as a symbol of powerlessness, an act of giving up on life (Fig3.13).

Beneath this category, there are also costumes. These are props worn by characters to accentuate their personality. Ideally, costumes should be an independent aspect on their own, but sometimes they become one with the characters that it can be difficult to stand out on their own. Costumes can still be considered as costume when they are used in a generalised manner such as hotel uniforms for receptionists (Fig3.14), school uniforms for students (Fig3.15), but when the outfit is personalised, it serves the role of props and is often talked of as “propstume” (Hart, 2017).
In the opening scenes of *Sometimes in April*, when captain Augustin –now a school teacher-, is having a questions-and-answers session with his students after screening some material on the Genocide; Venantia -one of the students- stands out not because of her questions alone, but also because she is one of the very few who did not wear school uniforms. The choice of not wearing a school shirt is deliberate from the filmmaker and not coincidental. On the surface, we could notice that few other students did not equally have the full uniform -heightening the financial status of the society and survivors in particular-, even a decade after the 1994 Genocide against the Tutsi. It could also hint on the status of the education system after schools were heavily destroyed.

However, the fact that she is not the only one not wearing a uniform top is of great importance, as the audience gets drawn to the choice of colours and patterns on her top. Her question to teacher Augustin about whether the Genocide could have been stopped, possibly changing the past and the future -indeed her future-; represents the dreaming state of mind that she is in as she struggles to move on and deal with the aftermath. This state of what “could have been” is heightened by the dark blue top that she is wearing, complimented with white spots which look like stars in the dark sky. A close up shot on her sad face when other students are laughing up a joke made by their teacher reveals more distant thoughts scattered in the universe.

The top, which looks like the universe from the earth point of view (Fig 3.16 & Fig 3.17) – or at least what the world thinks of it-, helps the audience to get into Venantia’s world as they grasps a portion of what might be going on in her mind.
Hart (2017) argues that depending on how the characters interact with props besides handling them, they can range from set props to trim props. Set props include all those props such as tables and chairs or any furniture on set; while trim props include all the wall hangings such as pictures, paintings or calendars (Hart, 2017). It is important to note however, that all these types of set items could belong to the category of set dressing. This is indeed the actual definition of set dressing – any item or object on the set that the actor doesn’t handle. However, Hart (2017) insists that lines between set and props become blurry when characters -despite not handling objects like in the previous discussion about machetes-, interact with an item in a way equally intense as handling them.

A desk calendar or a family picture on a desk could be just that: to fill up the desk. But when a character stares at it for some times, it drives the audience into the characters’ mind, decoding characters’ actions which might be a result of the sole sight of that desk item. Whether desk calendars, machetes, ID cards, car number plates or any other meaningful components of set that is to be credited as historical evidence, it has to be measured against some form of common historical knowledge (Salmi, 1995).

The aim of this measuring is not to claim truth in fiction films however, but to authenticate historical films as possible carriers of history. History lives as a memory and cannot be fully replicated, but through memory -which is about the way individuals or societies choose to remember past events in their history-, history can be represented. A replica of an aircraft of the 30’s during WWII can hardly be the exact same as any used in that period; but it gives a glimpse of what aircrafts of then looked like without
claiming that it is the exact same item. Stubbs (2013) alludes that fiction indeed, has never claimed to replicate reality - it merely points to it in a manner that the intended audience will understand.

This notion of “intended audience” brings up the idea that the past we remember might be dependent on how we remember it, which is at the core of history. While films may differ in terms of how they portray the same historical event, they seem to treat conditions surrounding the event in question seriously. Shooting Dogs and Hotel Rwanda may have re-designed the Rwandese identification card of then in a totally different manner and untruthful to the real ID cards that were used in Rwanda of 1994, but both films excel in bringing to life the most important feature of the cards which is the ethnicity (Fig 3.18 & Fig 3.19).

![Figure 3.18 Joe checking François’s ID as he point out the ethnicity on it.](image1)

Courtesy of Shooting dogs

![Figure 3.19 Paul’s ID which clearly indicates his ethnicity.](image2)

Courtesy of Hotel Rwanda

There could be arguments that the font on the ID does not match the actual font that was used on IDs of 1994, but the simple fact that ethnicity of the holder was present fulfils the function that the ID is meant for. In their most vivid memories, the audience will remember the IDs by this feature, and this alone could remind them of the period when ethnicity was part of their identification.

Set components in film can be granted historicity through external records such as other documentary works, or through internal records within the film itself (Sorlin, 1980). This is common in historical films that span across both inside and outside the period in which the event happened. Sometimes in April offers this possibility of authenticating components of set by comparing and contrasting what is portrayed in flashback events of 1994 and the present time which is 10 years later.
A prominent example which occurs in *Shooting Dogs* as well as in *Hotel Rwanda*, is the car licensing plate which changes gradually as we shift from the flashbacks to present times. When the Genocide began in 1994, Rwanda used a different method of vehicle registration (worldlicenseplates.com, n.d.). The figure 3.20 below shows Augustin and Xavier around Augustin’s red car with license number ”AC.27.27” in the format LL.DD.DD (L for Letter, D for Digit) which Rwanda registration institution used then, while we see on figure 3.21, the same Augustin 10 years later driving a “RAA 365B” which is in a different format RLL.DDDL (R for Rwanda, L for Letter, D for Digit).

Car models could be different from the one found in Rwanda in 1994 and people cannot remember every car that existed then, but this feature alone can assist the audience as they remember how cars looked like in 1994 and later on this creates verisimilitude.

Whereas this is the ideal situation of counter checking the historicity of set components within the same film as argued by Sorlin (1980), it appears to be a rare phenomenon whereby fiction films can “auto-validate” themselves. More often than not, external benchmarking will be required to pit one instance of occurrence in a film against another in a different film; or more commonly, against any other form of documented history.

The films under study approach the 1994 Genocide against the Tutsi in a way of their own, tackling different themes. The films even have less in common in terms of
production houses; and even though they have been all shot in Rwanda, they hardly share locations.

In spite of all the differences in production period -from 2004 when Hotel Rwanda was released, to 2009 when The Day God Walked Away was released; these films manage to have similarities and more interestingly, on details such as set components that could have easily been neglected.

The television sets in both Sometimes in April and Shooting Dogs are identical in the sense that they are still Cathode Tube Ray (CRT) television sets (Fig 3.22 & Fig 3.23). CRT TV set was the most common display type in TVs and computer monitors, until when the advent of Liquid-Crystal display (LCD) TV sets kicked off in the early 2000’s. With technology advancement, it could have been possible to forget the timeline of TV history at the time of shooting and carelessly incorporate an LCD TV. But with an emphasis on wanting to remind the audience of how audio-visual contents -either good or bad-, were delivered to them, the set designers and prop managers go an extra mile and secure CRT TV sets to represent what the world of broadcasting looked like back in the days.

In some instances, and to revive the memories of that fateful night of April 6th 1994 when the plane of the former president Habyarimana Juvenal was shot -which the films use as their inciting incident; the TV sets in both Sometimes in April and Shooting Dogs are both broadcasting the African cup of nations (AFCON), a continental football competition that was being held in April that year (See 3.22 & Fig 3.23). When the news broke that the plane of the president had been shot, at around 8:30pm, many people around the world were probably watching this prestigious competition. This

![Figure 3.22 CRT TV set at ETO, broadcasting live soccer.](Courtesy of Shooting dogs)

![Figure 3.23 Augustin watching soccer on a CRT TV set.](Courtesy of Sometimes in April)
feature alone could propel the audience into a world with 6th April 1994 set as the current date.

This phenomenon is also observed in at least 3 of the films, with the type of telephone used being corded ones. These rotary dialling phones shown in the pictures below (Fig 3.24 & Fig 3.25) were popular all over the world and had been in use for over 50 years.

![Figure 3.24 Augustin making a phone call with a rotary dialling telephone.](image1) ![Figure 3.25 Rotary-dialling phone – Popular in for over 50 years after its invention.](image2)

Courtesy of Sometimes in April  

Courtesy of Shooting dogs

They remained relevant even when “cordless phones” and “touch tone phones” (Fig 3.26 & Fig 3.26) were introduced to the market decades after the very first rotary-dialling phone. However, with the explosive growth of “cell phones” otherwise known as mobile phones, rotary dialling phones became less relevant to the extent it would be difficult to find one at the time of shooting these films. Nevertheless, filmmakers managed to remain true to history as they avoided use of mobile phones in numerous “phone-call” exchange scenes that happened throughout the films.

![Figure 3.26 secretary Bushnel making a phone call through a cordless phone.](image3) ![Figure 3.27 A Touch tone phone, invented after the rotary-dialling phones.](image4)

Courtesy of Sometimes in April  

Courtesy of Hotel Rwanda
Another way of validating historical evidence in a fiction film -on top of checking within the same film and counter checking with other films tackling the same event-, is about relying on other documentary works outside film (Sorlin, 1980). Historians indeed perceive other types of documentary works such as literary work as the most faithful to historical accounts. This form of history is even often understood as common knowledge.

When one states that Rwanda was a Belgian colony, because they have read it in history books or heard it from a documentary film about the history of Rwanda; very few will -if any- contest the element of truth in that statement because it has gone from being a possible “truth” to the “common truth”. Common knowledge is indeed of great impact in this situation where evidence of historical happenings can exist both as memory and history.

A few components of set in the four films need not come out as a pattern across all films in order to auto-validate themselves, but their sole existence rather justifies their historicity claims. Country flags are something which is somehow on par with country names in terms of being easily recognized by people all over the world. A few years after the genocide, Rwanda changed its national symbols -that is, national anthem, coat of arms and the national flag.

Current Rwanda’s national flag could roughly be described as a blue-yellow-green flag, whereas the former flag was a red-yellow-green combination. The latter is what is seen throughout films such as Hotel Rwanda when the Interahamwe militiamen are marching in the streets of Kigali, chanting songs (Fig 3.28).

The same approach can be applied to Shooting Dogs’ currency (Fig 3.29) which is the exact same bank note that was in circulation around 1994 as archived by Banknotes.com (2018), considering that bank notes have changed a number of times after the genocide. The bank notes alongside the national symbols were used in the films with regard to the importance attached to them when one is trying to recreate a period piece.
However, this perceived common knowledge about a place’s history does not only concern those props which get a bit of attention mainly because the characters interact with them; it also extends to the set dressing which at times can go unnoticed as it is commonly used as a backdrop where stories develop.

*Shooting Dogs*’ commitment to accuracy takes a larger step when father Christopher celebrates a Mass inside the school chapel, during the period which is believed to be around Easter. Easter celebrations - a religious feast in Christianity, celebrating the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ - is an annual event that occurs around March and April. In that year of 1994, Easter happened a few days before the start of the genocide, on Sunday April 3rd. Tuesday 5th April - when father Christopher celebrated that Mass - Easter celebrations were still fresh; a fact that explains the existence of a banner on top of the main entrance which reads “Pasika nziza”, “joyeuse pacques”. These are Kinyarwanda and French words (Rwanda’s national languages of then) for “happy Easter” (Fig 3.30).
As the camera sends the audience inside the chapel, one can only notice this feature that gives the Mass a concrete meaning. Only then, one can locate and place other memorable events that happened around 7\textsuperscript{th} April, when the genocide began. This approach indeed serves to delimit the horrors of those 100 days with contrasting memories on either ends.

### 3.3.2 Anachronism: a case of sets components in historical films

While one sets on a journey to explore the possibility of historical evidence in set components presented by a historical fiction, it is inevitable to discuss the concept of a history as one comes across elements that are out of time and place. Anachronism in film is a chronological inconsistency in some arrangement, especially a juxtaposition of persons, events, objects or custom from different periods of time (Literary Terms, 2015).

In regard to this study, the type of anachronism of interest would be about objects on set, whether used by characters or not, rather than other forms of anachronism such as languages, customs, attitudes between 1994 and other eras. It is important to differentiate anachronisms with the greater “historical inaccuracy”, which would encompass even misrepresentation of concepts which do not even have anything to do with a chronological order of things (Literary Terms, 2015). These historical inaccuracies would be for example a portrayal of an amicable relationship between two characters whereas they are supposed to have had a heated one.

Anachronism can impact a historical fiction depending on their magnitude, -that is the role they play in the development of a story. Rosenstone (2001) argues that *Gone with the wind* -one of the greatest films of all time-, has a few anachronisms of its own. Technologies such as corded lamps or street light which have light bulbs having not been invented by the time the American civil war erupted; are presented in a non-chronological order. However, this presence of negligible details cannot overshadow the themes explored throughout the film whether it is that of perseverance or that of survival; nor can it undermine the effect of the greater setting which the audience remembers in their most vivid memories.
As much as anachronisms can be considered as tarnishing or damaging to what would ideally be a great film, they can offer something quite unexpected. Bowdoin (2013) advances the idea that sometimes, anachronisms can be intentional depending on what the director wants to communicate. They can be artistic and aesthetic in the sense that they can even be used as a style for challenging the audience into thinking about what the intentional anachronisms could represent. They could also be used for comic purpose, with a view to create a humorous effect, but in the event set components in historical fiction are going to be regarded on par with other source credited with historical evidence; chronological inaccuracy will have to be of lesser impact towards the whole function of setting.

*Hotel Rwanda* has chronological flaws of its own. The figure below illustrates characters Paul and Dube driving through the streets of Kigali. As they pass through the busier centre of the city, a billboard of MTN Rwanda—a mobile telecommunication company that wasn’t operational in the country until 1998—shows in the scene (Fig 3.31).

![Figure 3.31 MTN billboard misplaced in 1994](image)

*Courtesy of Hotel Rwanda*

This can be seen as a major eyebrow raiser for the local audience or other audiences equipped with the telecommunication history of Rwanda. However, due to the camera work that doesn’t seem to dedicate any particular focus on the billboard, unlike in the situation of *Shooting Dogs* which highlights the message “happy Easter” as discussed early (see Fig 3.30), this anachronism can be perceived as uneventful towards the process of filmic immersion into the period and place when the event occurred.
3.4 Conclusion

This chapter sought to meet the second objective of this study which was about describing the signs of historicity in the selected films using set components.

On the formalist basis that there are no accidents in film, the chapter generally found that all set components present in the four films belonged to a specific time and place whether in time or out of time. The chance of finding the same component in all the selected films was quite high because all the films were about the Genocide against the Tutsi, while a few others were quite unique to specific films because of each film’s general theme.

Validation of set components within or outside the films was a key moment of this chapter, as it varied from film to film. Sometime in April through the use of flashback technique offered subtle yet important means of situating its set components in time and space.

This chapter served as a starting point for a study towards meeting the third objective consisting in examining the socio-political and economic function of set components from selected films in the filmic depiction of the 1994 Genocide against the Tutsi.
CHAPTER 4

DEPLOYMENT OF SET COMPONENTS IN THE PORTRAYAL OF POLITICAL, SOCIO-CULTURAL AND ECONOMIC EVENTS IN THE FILMS ON THE GENOCIDE AGAINST THE TUTSI

4.1 Introduction

The Genocide against the Tutsi has been a subject of filmic depiction for over the past two decades, initially in the form of documentaries and later in the form of fiction. A happening that was once fresh memory could then be depicted and live as fiction. As any other historical horror, the genocide against the Tutsi has many faces of the same coin which constitute what the world is able to remember. These façades range from social-cultural, political and economic conditions and are depicted through a variety of film elements. Set components, alongside many other key components of fiction; can function towards creating meaning in film.

As artists cannot control what meaning is deciphered from their artworks, so can’t the filmmakers. Meaning does not reside in film, but is a result of interaction between the film and its viewers. This is the role of set components towards viewers as they offer a possibility to people to create meaning out of complex codes and implicit signs.

The discussion below addresses the third objective as it explores the function that set components in historical fictions play towards depicting all facades of a historical event.

4.2 Set components and the socio-cultural aspect

4.2.1 Entertainment

For films that explore horrific scenes, it can be quite challenging to depict the aspect of entertainment in the daily lives of characters. All the four films under study start on a quick note, jumping right into the scenes of chaos a few minutes into the film. However, there appears to be certain elements presented at the very beginning in the
films that could be perceived as an indicator of what the society considered as entertainment.

Entertainment is any activity credited with the ability to hold the attention and interest of an audience. It is a way of relaxing, something Shooting Dogs and Sometimes in April adopt and depict in the form of TV.

Father Christopher is a character who seemingly has more rough days than easy ones, with the responsibility of handling the school affairs, societal affairs with his parishioners, and administrative affairs with local authorities and the UN peacekeeping troops residing at his school. Every need from the people surrounding him amounts to the overall challenges that he faces on a daily basis. When he joins the soldiers watching soccer and celebrating, father Christopher appears to be entertained, before shortly walking away, isolating himself from the group (Fig 4.1).

![Father Christopher enjoys watching soccer with UN troops.](image)

Figure 4.1 Father Christopher enjoys watching soccer with UN troops.

Courtesy of Shooting dogs

This temporal glimpse into father Christopher’s escapade from daily hardships serves to heighten the other side of his personality. Even though it lasts a few minutes before he drowns back into his worries of the wellbeing of everyone around him, it adds an element of “ordinariness” to his character until the horrors begin. Like father Christopher of Shooting Dogs, captain Augustin of Sometimes in April faces difficult daily challenges. From work to home, everything revolves around the tensions building up in the country. With his colleague at work, his superiors and even his family at home; everyone wants answers -something he is unable to provide, or at least to the satisfaction of people around him.
Augustin’s escapade comes in the form of watching soccer on TV. Much like father Christopher who walks away from the group as he is celebrating, captain Augustin appears to be thoughtful and lost in a distant world, evidenced by the absence of reaction when a goal is scored in the game he is watching (Fig 4.2).

![Figure 4.2 Augustin’s lack of reaction as a goal is scored in football match on TV.](image)

Courtesy of Sometimes in April

The inclusion of TV sets and watching football could have been any random scene that occurs in a film. However, the act of contrasting the scenes on TV screens and the mood of the characters -Augustin and Christopher-, is an intentional act offering the audience a possibility to navigate through both characters’ minds as they appear to be far despite the fact that they are in front of a TV set physically.

Football in Rwanda was the most viewed sport by far and is still the most viewed nowadays (Keim & De Coning, 2004). As set components can perpetuate modern myths or popular misconceptions about the past; football might have been used in this context, and not just as the most viewed sport. There appears to be a misconception about football in the parts of the world where it is the most popular sport; that when one mentions sports, another directly thinks of football. This can become quite confusing; especially to corners of the world where the most popular sport is a different one. It is quite interesting that of the four films sampled, two chose football of all sports. However, there could be reasons outside the “popularity ranks” that could explain this preference such as the ongoing continental live competition, but then again it is pretty much evident that countries like Angola where basketball is arguably the most popular sport could have been broadcasting something else.
In fact, it doesn’t matter which sport is broadcast on TV, what matters most is the togetherness it creates amongst viewers. Football was indeed used to accentuate the relationship between friends.

When Xavier was about to leave after coming from work with Augustin, Jeanne begs him to stay, saying that the football game was live on TV. Similar dialogue would be heard when Joe of *Shooting Dogs* asked Roland –Marie’s father-, whether he would watch the football match that night. Football was indeed a popular form of entertainment in Rwanda of 1994 with the African Cup of Nations hosted in Tunisia around March and April, together with the World Cup to be hosted in the United States of America fast approaching. To some extent, it might have been even the most popular form of entertainment, considering a scene in *Sometimes in April* when captain Augustin and Xavier are supervising the militiamen training, using a soccer ball on a mannequin to represent a human head.

The soccer ball (Fig 4.3) traditionally made from used plastic bags is a popular alternative to the industrial soccer ball; especially in countries which have football as a main sport. The ball which could have belonged to the militiamen *Interahamwe* could only add to the meaning of the word *Interahamwe* (those who strike together) considering that football is a team sport that requires individual input of every team member in order to create a whole which is bigger than the sum of individual efforts.

![Figure 4.3 A soccer ball at the militiamen training camp used on a mannequin to represent a human head.](image)

*Courtesy of Sometimes in April*
4.2.2 Religion

One aspect of society and culture which is often explored in films is religion. Even though this comes in varying degrees, especially in contemporary films which are dominated by technology; religious undertones have always found themselves into popular film. This is probably because the world at large is considered as predominantly religious and therefore relates to certain themes evoked in films with personal experiences.

Religion is considered as a foundation for morals and beliefs. It offers a possibility of having a set of guidelines which an individual can live by. However, it’s not religious individuals who possess a moral compass only; even non-religious people have a set of guidelines that govern their choices. The simple fact that they are non-religious makes them religious in their own way (Pew Research Center, 2012)

These sets of guidelines indeed shape us and determine what we see as right or wrong, they embody our hopes and fears, they drive our success and failings. In the filmic world, these same guidelines are what will guide characters’ moral and ethical motivations for their actions; without which, the viewing audience wouldn’t engage in the right manner in the conflicts and resolution presented on screen. Religious sacred places have always been considered as safe havens -a place of refuge or security-, and this goes back to ancient times. Christianity as one of the major religions has perfected this concept of safe haven. As a matter of example; criminals of the 4th century could be acquitted of their wrongdoings by seeking refuge to churches (Shoemaker, 2011).

This popular belief about churches has travelled to the modern era, but in a rather spiritual way, that one can escape his misery and societal hardships through a communion with sacred places (Sharp, 2010).

*Sometimes in April* explores this concept by having characters seek refuge inside churches; -mainly with hope that their persecutors wouldn’t dare commit horrors inside the sacred places. This smart plan however, turns out to be a rabbit trap as depicted in Figure 4.4, where Jeanne and many others who had sought refuge in churches are being handpicked daily to be raped or killed. Churches which many had believed to be their safe haven had turned into death camps.
Parallels can be drawn in *Shooting Dogs*, when father Christopher is conducting a church service; mainly as a decoy to allow the UN soldiers to leave E.T.O secretly without causing chaos among several hundreds of people who were relying on the UN soldiers, as the only thing separating them from the killers working outside (*Fig 4.5*).

![Figure 4.4 Mass at ETO chapel while the UN troops evacuate the premise in secrecy.](Image)

*Courtesy of Sometimes in April*

![Figure 4.5 Inside Sainte Famille church – Soldier picking out names on the list of people to be killed.](Image)

*Courtesy of Sometimes in April*

Deception in safe havens has been utilized to punctuate the challenges that surrounded the victims of the genocide against the Tutsi, as it addresses the glaring questions of whether there couldn’t have been a place respected by killers which could have served as a shelter.

Besides sacred places in religion, religious symbolism is another concept that finds itself too many a times in film. All the major religions of the world such as Christianity, Hinduism, Islam, Judaism and Buddhism, have adopted symbolism centuries ago and they are still relevant in today’s societies. Such symbols and signs have gained popularity to the point that the initial meaning of what they might actually mean gets lost in the process and become a simple representation of its religion (McDowell, 2016).

The *swastika* below (*Fig 4.6*) which is usually thought of as the symbol of the Nazi regime during WWII is actually a Hindu religious symbol dating as far back as the Paleothic era. This symbol which was commonly used to symbolize good luck could hardly be seen in the same light after World War II (Atkins, 2018).
However, there are still other symbols that can still be used as an iconic representation of a religious concept within a given religion. When a cross is evoked, people will think of Jesus Christ and Christianity, regardless of the fact that the initial symbolization for Jesus Christ was *Ichthys* (fish) (fig 4.7) which early Christians wore (McDowell, 2016). The cross was initially a symbol for oppression in relation to Jesus Christ and apostles being crucified by the romans, but it turned into Christianity symbol of hope and salvation (McDowell, 2016).

*Figure 4.6 Swastika, a Hindu symbol also used by the Nazi regime in WWII*

*Figure 4.7 Ichthys –A Christian symbol meaning fish.*

*The Day God Walked Away* uses the Cross in this context particularly with Jacqueline holding dear of her cross necklace. This symbolizes her hopes of light at the end of the tunnel, from when she is laying on her back, staring at the sky as and moving the Cross of her necklace to place it on the front of her head (**Fig 4.18**). This shot which lasts more than a few seconds can only trigger attention from the viewing audience to the presented religions undertone. In Christianity, the sky (**Fig 4.9**) symbolizes heaven; which in return translates into a better place devoid of all hardships (Aveni, 2005). That idea of a possible happy ending is what justifies her actions to move on; even when all hopes seem lost.

*Figure 4.8 Jacqueline POV as she lays down*  
Courtesy of *The Day God Walked Away*

*Figure 4.9 Jacqueline puts her necklace cross on her forehead.*  
Courtesy of *The Day God Walked Away*
This happens to be the state of Jacqueline’s mind, up until she loses all hopes of a better future. After going through the worst - such as seeing her dead kids thrown into the back of a pick-up car like garbage or being raped by the man she saved -, she gives up on life - or the promise of a better life. In a film which has less dialogue, this is symbolised by Jacqueline brutally yanking the necklace from her neck and throwing it away (Fig 4.10).

![Figure 4.10 Jacqueline yanks away her cross necklace.](image)

Courtesy of *The Day God Walked Away*

This religious undertone can be similarly observed in *Shooting Dogs*, where father Christopher faces the same challenges, not in the sense of physical harms but in that of spiritual harm. Father Christopher had always had hope that his parishioners could benefit from his biblical teachings and live a life bound by Christianity values. With this kind of hopes, he continued to celebrate Mass with people who had sought refuge at E.T.O., even when the country had become a bloodbath. However, when he realised that the parishioners he had taught for the last 30 years were committing murder without the slightest remorse, he was devastated and gave up. This led him to offering bibles to be used as firewood since all the teaching inside the bibles had proved to be of no use to the parishioners (see Fig 2.7).

In Christianity, the Bible is considered a sacred book with divine teachings (Christian Texts, 2015). It can dictate a way of life since it houses Christianity values and morals. It is indeed the most precious item in Christianity. To have a number of
them burned would symbolize unimaginable chaos and despair for the viewing audience, especially in Christian societies and cultures.

4.3 Set components and Politics

4.3.1 1994: The state

Many major historical happenings that have shaped the world today could be said to share a common aspect of civilization: the political aspect. While other happenings such as extinction of ancient creatures may have had nature play the main role with the human race playing an observation role; there exist other significant happenings such as the world wars or genocides which had people as the main instigators. Humans have been primary actors of many of their failings, despite all the establishment of law and order to live in harmony. The concept of politically organised community has been the norm for ages; but despite all the measures taken to maintain order, societies have succumbed to war atrocities (Rosen, 2009).

The state - which Salmond as cited in Frame (2007) puts as a society of men established for the maintenance of order and justice within a determined territory, by way of force; - can sometimes fail to fulfil its premise. The level of state failure in a given disaster can be directly linked to the level of damage caused.

While depicting historical happenings, films often explore the extent to which chaos has established itself. This is mainly depicted through components of set since it can quite become insufficient to reveal the extent of the status quo in other elements of film.

*The Day God Walked Away* explores this concept in an interesting way, despite the film not depicting state authorities - or any other authoritative figure in its entirety. Dead bodies lying all over the streets for days are a great indication of how there is no single institution of power that can restore order in that particular moment, but more telling are dead bodies floating around rivers’ edges.

This is critical because in Jacqueline’s world, these rivers represent major sources of water - a resource she needs most to keep moving. When she ventures down the river and sees a wounded man, she uses the river’s water to clean his wound. However, the moment she realises that the river’s water has been contaminated with floating dead
bodies, she immediately looks for a way to harvest mountain water -which she uses to rehydrate herself and her new companion. *(Fig 4.11 & Fig 4.12)*

Similar depiction of the absence of order in a country that is being torn apart by losses of thousands of lives can be seen in other films under study, commonly in numerous scenes depicting dead bodies everywhere with no one to bury the deceased. But more appalling is the symbolic use of dogs in *Shooting Dogs*, to heighten the status quo of the nation.

Dogs, much like scavenger birds such as ravens or vultures-, have been used in post-apocalyptic films such as *The book of Eli* (Hughes & Hughes, 2010) or to accentuate the state of emptiness that societies had become. Right before father Christopher returns from outside E.T.O where he had gone to look for medicine that could help the newly born infant, the camera pans on dogs outside the gates of E.T.O feeding on human bodies *(Fig 4.13)*.

*Figure 4.11 Jacqueline cleaning wounds with river’s water*  
*Courtesy of The Day God Walked Away*  
*Figure 4.12 Jacqueline harvesting clean rain water*  
*Courtesy of The Day God Walked Away*  

*Figure 4.13 Dogs outside ETO feeding on human dead bodies*  
*Courtesy of Shooting dogs*
Shooting Dogs - unlike The Day God Walked Away -, depicts a sense of authority in its beginnings through counsellor Sibomana’s frequent visits to father Christopher as the man in charge of ETO. This sense of state administration however, does not impact the restoration of order, mainly because counsellor Sibomana is the one supervising the implementation of chaos. At the end of the day, all four films through the similar depiction of dead bodies lying everywhere across the country, manage to underline what the political situation was like during the genocide against the Tutsi in Rwanda, which could be described as dysfunctional. Even the few instances where there seems to be some kind of orderly initiatives to move the deceased (Fig 4.14), it is conducted in a way that does not look any better than disposing garbage to a common area - an inhumane treatment.

Figure 4.14 Trucks carrying human bodies.

Courtesy of Sometimes in April

4.3.2 Political affiliation

Affiliation in simple terms refers to the state or relation of being closely associated with a particular person, group or any organized entity (Merriam-webster, n.d). When people are affiliated to a certain group, they subscribe to the beliefs and values that the group represents. Religious, political, cultural or other forms of organized entity present a specific profile which in return determines the level of popularity vis-à-vis other groups addressing the same social phenomenon. It could be about divine faith or even about the way of life.

Political parties are an integral part of political countries. Rwanda of 1994 - a political country-, had quite a number of political parties right around the transition from kingdomship to republic in 1962 when the country gained independence from Belgium (Golooba-Mutebi, 2008). The multi-party system is often credited with creating a competitive society where constructive ideas emerge from the diversity of
beliefs and values which political parties subscribe to. However, the imbalance in political power can be quite appalling, with a particular party in total dominance over the other player of the multi-party system.

The National Republican Movement for Democracy and Development (MRND, formerly known as the National Revolutionary Movement for Development between 1975-1991) had enjoyed total dominance in Rwanda; especially that the country had been declared as a one-party country since 1975 by President Juvenal Habyarimana who doubled as the leader of the ruling party (Desforges, 1999). Desforges (1999) also notes that dominance happened to be a key player in the events that unfolded before and during the genocide. Despite the fact that since 1991, the single-party system had been abolished in favour of a more competitive multi-party system; MRND dominance continued to show in all sectors. This concept of political dominance is particularly explored in films under study through set components.

*Hotel Rwanda*’s use of MRND party symbols in non-political situations highlights the total dominance of the party. When Paul and Dube drive from the airport and encounter mass rallies of militiamen Interahamwe -a youth army of the party-; Paul uses the Interahamwe uniform as a “pass” in order to be left alone by Interahamwe who had started to molest, thinking they might be Tutsis (Fig 4.15). This act of exhibiting the party uniform which leads to being granted freedom serves as an initial reveal to the audience, who are projected into the unrivalled power of MRND.

![Figure 4.15 Paul exhibits the uniforms to confirm their affiliation, granting them security.](image)

*Courtesy of Hotel Rwanda*

Further projections come when Paul enters an office of his business counterpart George Rutaganda who manages a warehouse, whole selling various goods Paul often needs to run Milles collines. Across the room there are quite a number of MRND outfits
ranging from dresses to hats— all in MRND’s green, red and black colours. On top of a cupboard in a certain corner and on the table, there are flags of the same party, which makes the overall office appear like an MRND headquarter.

George—who dons a multicolour shirt like the one of the Interahamwe—hands another to Paul while asking him to join “his people”; citing politics to be the same as power. MRND’s reach and dominance does not only emerge in the form of social rights like when Paul and Dube have to “belong” in order to be granted security, or in the form of business booster like when Paul’s only supplier -George, who he deems worthy of his cohiba cigars-, attaches strings to their business relationships; but also in the form of political authorities.

When counsellor Sibomana makes one of his usual visits to father Christopher in Shooting Dogs, he appears to be wearing a medallion on his costume depicting an image of president Habyarimana who had just been assassinated (Fig 4.16). These medallions are commonly used in presidential campaigns and therefore depict political affiliation rather than the country’s presidency. It is evident that however much counsellor Sibomana was a government official, he identified himself as an MRND official too and was using the medallion in the sense of hero worship.

The film’s use of the medallion is quite interesting as Sibomana doesn’t appear to be wearing one during his first brief visit to father Christopher (Fig 4.17). However, in the second visit when Sibomana is mounting pressure on Christopher about the UN soldiers at his place, the medallion can be seen as a symbol of power allowing Sibomana to hold the upper hand in his leverages concerning the missing 10 Belgian soldiers, which leaves father Christopher no other choice than processing his request.
4.4 Set components and the economy

4.4.1 Agrarian Economy

The economic status of a country is an important factor of its people’s daily lives. This aspect of society appears to be one that films can’t do without, given that it informs characters actions as it sheds some lights on their motives. The scarcity or availability of resources in a given setup will often guide the audience about what characters can or cannot do. It will explain why certain situations spawn in a particular way as it sets boundaries by which all the filmic key players abide. Economies come in different styles for different societies. Rwanda of 1994 was predominantly running on agrarian economy, something that could still be considered as the case today despite the country’s effort to move from an agriculture-based economy to a knowledge-based economy (Golooba-Mutebi, 2008).

Films under study might have considered the fact that around 80% of the population were farmers who derived their survival from agriculture, making it the most important economic activity in the country. The use of “machetes” is quite telling in all the four films, as this tool has been the most used weapon in the Genocide against the Tutsi. On top of the tool being renowned for the killings due to its blood-stain features; it is also an agricultural tool that was commonly used by Rwandans for decades before the genocide.

Various characters handling of a machete is something that happens often in the films and at times, we see other types of agricultural tools. Shooting Dogs’ depiction of axes as killing weapons (Fig 4.18) highlights the availability of these tools in an average household. In fact, anything at the killer’s disposal was seemingly used as a weapon, but one cannot fail to notice how agricultural tools stand out more on top of other diverse tools.

Figure 4.18 A Killer with a blood-stained axe

Courtesy of Shooting dogs
Sometimes in April’s reference to agriculture being a primary activity for the Rwandans is less subtle. When colonel Bagosora was visiting the training camp where captain Augustin was assigned, he opined that the machete stock gotten from China were for the multitude of farmers out there who needed to go “work” (Fig 4.19). Of course “work” here turned out to bear a different meaning, something counsellor Sibomana of Shooting Dogs brought to light when he ordered his militiamen to start “work”, referring to killing thousands of people who had sought refuge inside E.T.O (Fig 4.20).

One cannot discuss tools of agriculture without highlighting the land where those tools are used. Depiction of farms and farmers at work carries a great meaning in the representation of an Agrarian state. To an extent, crops in the market can also bear a meaning in terms of what is grown in the country.

The Day God Walked Away depicts an agricultural activity with a woman working in her small farm when she notices Jacqueline hiding upper hill (Fig 4.21). The farm which she is taking care of is not considered big enough to provide for more than her needs, which brings forward the idea of agriculture for subsistence. Even the fact that her farm is located next to her residence does speak volume, as it cannot be land dedicated for farming only.

Shooting dogs’ depiction of a market is quite informative in the sense that the market is mostly filled with fresh produce from the farms (Fig 4.22).
These perishables were often sold in small quantities, meaning that farmers did not produce them on a larger scale. A farmer could be hoping to sell a few plantains, one or two buckets of fresh beans and a small quantity of corns because that’s how their produce looked like: A variety of crops in the same farm. This is unlike the organised farming that Rwanda might have adopted in recent years trying to maximize the harvest according to which geographical location favours particular crops,

Availability of crops across the country also justifies the large percentage of the population living off agriculture. *The Day God Walked Away* depicts this abundance of crops through Jacqueline’s ability to harvest a considerable quantity of sorghum seeds -while still in hiding- and makes flour out of it which in the end she uses to cook some paste *(Fig 4.23).*

The films under study trigger interest in the audience towards the agricultural aspect of Rwanda of 1994, through the portrayal of all agriculture-related components such as tools, farms, farmers and produces.

*Figure 4.21* A farmer working on her small land with plantains and other variety of crops.  
*Figure 4.22* Fresh produce sent to the market in small quantity.  
*Figure 4.23* Jacqueline preparing sorghum for a meal  

Courtesy of *The Day God Walked Away*  
Courtesy of *Shooting dogs*  

Courtesy of *The Day God Walked Away*
4.4.2 Infrastructure

Economic infrastructures are basic services that represent a foundation tool for the economy of a nation, region or city. These can include transportation, technology, communication, electricity, and clean water among others; as they support the basic livelihood of a people (BusinessDictionary.com, nd). Technology has not always been an important indicator of a country’s economy, but it found itself at the centre of the world’s development as centuries went by -and even more in the 20th century. Great inventions that boosted the economy of the world in the last century include energy and communication. Technological advancement in the use of energy has seen a quick rise with the invention of electricity, enabling societies not to over-rely on wood.

Electrical systems have indeed contributed to the betterment of societies, same way telecommunication did. Information that used to take forever to travel from one location to another has seen an increase in its delivery as communication tools keep getting better (Fischer, 1988). But all these societal advancement did not happen overnight: they happened at a specific place and time, which would explain why in a certain culture some process would still go through old technologies while other places had already adopted newer ways of doing things.

Filmic depiction of a certain era in time, especially those classified as period dramas, approach the details of the time period in which their stories are set with great caution. This is because the world changes fast and there cannot be a day which is similar to the next one in terms of novelty. Depicting a historical era can be quite rewarding, with enough historicity assuring that the audience will be drawn to the era represented -if at all they make a good connection with what they believe that era looked like.

*Sometimes in April* and *Hotel Rwanda* explore the state of telephonic communication through the use of corded phones such as rotary-dialling phones, which served numerous times whenever there was need to communicate with people from a far. These types of phones, as discussed in 3.3.1 Set components as historical evidence were popular in the world at the time of the Genocide. However, the simple fact of seeing a rotary dialling phone in almost each household of the main character, does not point to their availability in other households, considering the fact that each of the households.
depicted in both films could be qualified as well-off compared to the average household. Captain Augustin and his wife Jeanne who is a nurse, together with hotel manager Paul, could not be considered as average citizens since they were arguably in the upper class and therefore could easily afford a home phone.

There are more telling features of this telecommunication aspect however, like “publi-phones” -short for Public phones-, which are seen in Sometimes in April (Fig 4.24) around the road blocks. More at the central of action, Shooting dogs let’s Joe Connor use one at the market as he makes a short international phone call to his mother, briefly reporting on his situation in Rwanda before the call is cut (Fig 4.25).

The use of publi-phone in this context and especially its placement at the market, emphasize the importance it has to the people who gather around the market as one of the crowded locations. One could have expected to have seen one on the road as they drove from E.T.O to the market, but it is until they reach the common market that we see one.

Similar to telecommunication, the films adopted the same approach to energy at the time of the Genocide. Electricity has been the primary source of energy mainly for lighting households, predominantly in the capital city and on an average scale due to the fact that its predecessor -petroleum lantern-, was still in the frame. The lanterns, used mainly in rural areas of the country, were still significant even in the same households which could afford to own a home telephonic system. Candles at this time,
might not have been cost-effective, as they were used less frequently compared to petrol lanterns, but what matters most is how these alternative options to electricity are highly relevant.

*Shooting dogs* presents quite a number of lanterns when the generator runs out of fuel exactly when father Christopher was assisting a woman to deliver a child (see Fig 2.4). The number of lanterns presented points at a higher frequency of usage which would be due to electricity going off often. Indeed, the filmic depiction of electricity is more about the economic struggle in the energy sector, which the Rwandan society was still facing in terms of production versus consumption.

### 4.5 Conclusion

This chapter’s interest resided in meeting the third objective of this study which was about examining the socio-political and economic function of set components from selected films in the filmic depiction of the 1994 Genocide against the Tutsi.

This section generally realised that set components present in the films under study carried a meaning essential to the main theme of each film. This meaning however, was found to be very much dependent on the decoding audience’s experience.

With all the films attempting to lure the viewing audience onto the screen as a window to the past, the chapter found an interesting pairing from the films under study with *Shooting dogs* (2005) and *Sometimes in April* (2005) using social happenings such as Easter feast and football, while *Hotel Rwanda* (2004) and *The Day God Walked Away* (2009) preferred the use of natural happenings such as seasons and altitude.
CHAPTER 5

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Introduction

Making meaning of set components in historical fiction film was the main objective of this research. Through a series of specific objectives, this study validates the idea that set components of historical fictions can contain enough historicity which would – in return- qualify the said films as historical materials.

Set components –much like any other component of an artwork- could be said to fulfil three functions. The first is the role set components play towards highlighting other elements of the same artwork. The second function which is much larger is the specific role set components fulfil towards the artwork’s general themes and as a whole. The third function steps outside the artwork and involves the viewers as set components find meaning assigned to them in relation to the viewing audience in a certain context.

The section below summarizes findings of the set objectives and offers a conclusion to the study. It also highlights recommendations to various entities deemed related to the outcomes of the research.

5.2 Summary of findings

The findings of this research are summarized in relation to the three objectives of the study.

The first objective of the study sought to establish a relationship between set components and the narrative structure of the films under study. Overall, this study realised that set components are key players that contribute greatly towards how the story builds up. The study understood that when looked at from the narrative structure point of view, set components played various roles. First, set components appeared to dictate the causality compound in all the films, proving the logicality between sequential scenes. Second, set components appeared to behave as an extension of
characters’ personality at times, especially *The Day God Walked Away* (2009) which offered the audience glimpses into the unspoken world of characters.

The second objective sought to describe the signs of historicity in the selected films’ set components. When shooting on location, minor details are bound to be ignored but have to be incorporated with caution. For historical fictions, the attention to details is taken even more seriously since slight misrepresentations can cost the film in terms of credibility. The study findings while attempting to validate the historicity of set components were quite diverse.

Firstly, the films being set at a different era than the present one, the scenery appeared to be a key element that the filmmakers used to teleport the audience into the time and period of the event on screen. *Shooting dogs* (2005) achieved this feat through a number of artefacts that helped in the quest for verisimilitude. Contrasting findings were recorded in *Hotel Rwanda* (2004) with its instances of anachronism. This experience allowed the audience to connect with the characteristics of the setting on screen creating a bond between them and the characters’ challenges.

Secondly, set components were used to locate an event depicted in time and space. In this context, the study found that setting was used to delimit the genocide geographically while props were used to delimit the event in time. *Sometimes in April* (2005) gave a rough idea of the surface area of the genocide through the use of flashback techniques, subtitles and distinctive props i.e. components such as cars used throughout the films changing gradually as time passes; delimiting the genocide both spatially and temporally.

Thirdly, the study realized that the importance of accuracy of set components depends on the attention it is given in the film and the role it plays. This notion raises arguments that for films to be validated as historical evidence, the focus shifts from the presented story to the intended meaning.

The third objective sought to examine the various socio-political and economic functions of set components from selected films in the filmic depiction of the Genocide against the Tutsi. Findings for this objective emanated from an exhaustive analysis of the roles played by each set component in the films. Basing of the notion that every present set component on screen was a result of a deliberate action from the filmmakers,
the study found that while other elements of film could work towards perpetrating the
film’s general idea; set components could work in the background, proving as the back
bone for the said idea to take shape.

The study also found that while meaning could be deciphered from various
depictions of set components such as machetes, cross, hills or telephones; it didn’t
reside in film, but was rather a result of interaction between the film and the audience.
Indeed, meaning proved to emanate from the audience memory or rather simply, from
the already existing knowledge. How the world remembered past events -whether
truthful of mystic-, appeared to be determinant of how set components were used in
films based on popular beliefs.

_Shotting dogs_ (2005) and _Sometimes in April_ (2005) utilised the existing knowledge
on social phenomenons of the past such as football or Easter celebrations, to lure the
viewing audience onto the screen as a window to the past. _Hotel Rwanda_ (2004) and
_The Day God Walked Away_ (2009) preferred an emotional connection with the audience
by re-enacting the geographical conditions of yesteryears such as seasons and altitude.
The study explored different aspects of a society and found that through the good use
of set components, a full scale replica of a society can be envisioned, -something that
can hardly be achieved from other fiction elements alone.

### 5.3 Conclusions

This study’s interest to understand set components towards a possible validity
of fiction films as historical content, led to conclusions that set components are indeed
indispensable if historical fiction are to be regarded on par with other historical
documentations. If anything, their connection with the audience’s ability to recall past
event in the simplest form possible is the key to crediting any work of fiction as serious
history.

This study concludes that while it understands the need to have historical films
committed to accuracy in order to be regarded as historical evidence, it regards the mere
presence of some anachronisms as not determinant in the quest of a film being credited
with historical validity. With respect to historical research, the study values the context
of present anachronisms highly as it argues that a few misplaced depictions cannot outweigh the many highlights of the past.

5.4 Recommendations

5.4.1 Recommendation for film critics

Historical fictions can be harmed by the level of misrepresentations they encompass. However, the study urges the film critics to look beyond the mere errors presented on screen, often in set components; and consider their context in which their presence affects the general themes. The study understands that historical fictions never claim to be a replica of the past and this is a notion that should be embraced more often, especially by film critics who hold a tough stance on the matter.

5.4.2 Recommendation for filmmakers

This study is significant to filmmakers in the sense that a film that goes through all the production stages -from pre to post production-, would better be previewed in order to eliminate all possible inaccuracies and anachronisms. The importance attached to set components in a given film is determinant to its success amongst the audience, especially when the film revisits the distant past that is no longer fresh memory.

5.4.3 Direction for further research

While the study explored the historicity of set components in historical fictions to estimate its importance to the viewing audience, there is a need to extend the understanding to the various selection of set components vis a vis a specific audience. Societies are different and so are norms. How a certain idea is perpetuated by a people depends much of their unique way of life. It is in this context that further studies on the designated depiction of set components can broaden the idea of history as memory and emotion.
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## APPENDICES

### 1.0 Appendix 1: Matrix for textual analysis

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<th>Codes</th>
<th>Basic theme</th>
<th>Organising theme:</th>
<th>Main Theme</th>
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<td>Sports</td>
<td>Entertainment</td>
<td>SOCIAL-CULTURAL ASPECT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>Rituals</td>
<td>Religion</td>
<td>POLITICS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trucks, Ethnic ID, Money</td>
<td>Symbols and artefacts</td>
<td>Death variables</td>
<td>1994: The state</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dead bodies, Dogs, Roadblocks</td>
<td>Chaos</td>
<td></td>
<td>ECONOMY</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interahamwe, UNAMIR, Rwandan forces, Medallions, Vestments, Flags</td>
<td>Forces vestsments</td>
<td>Political affiliation</td>
<td>Agrarian economy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Machete, Axe, Hoe</td>
<td>Symbols</td>
<td></td>
<td>Infrastructure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lakes, Bushes, Sorghum, Rain, Publi-phones, Rotary dialling phone</td>
<td>Crops/Land/Geography</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hotel, Schools, Training camps</td>
<td>Telecommunication</td>
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<td>Car Plates, Electricity, Petroleum Lantern</td>
<td>Technology</td>
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2.0 Appendix 2: Research permit

NATIONAL COMMISSION FOR SCIENCE, TECHNOLOGY AND INNOVATION

Ref No: NACOSTI/P/18/86789/21702

Dusabe Roger Philbert
Kenyatta University
P.O. Box 43844-00100
NAIROBI

RE: RESEARCH AUTHORIZATION

Following your application for authority to carry out research on “Set components as a modern narrative: A study of selected feature fiction films on 1994 Rwandan Genocide” I am pleased to inform you that you have been authorized to undertake research in Nairobi County for the period ending 13th March, 2019.

You are advised to report to the County Commissioner and the County Director of Education, Nairobi County before embarking on the research project.

Kindly note that, as an applicant who has been licensed under the Science, Technology and Innovation Act, 2013 to conduct research in Kenya, you shall deposit a copy of the final research report to the Commission within one year of completion. The soft copy of the same should be submitted through the Online Research Information System.

DR. STEPHEN K. KIBIRU, PhD.
FOR: DIRECTOR-GENERAL/CEO

Copy to:

The County Commissioner
Nairobi County.

The County Directors of Education
Nairobi County.