STYLE AND CONTENT IN SELECTED KENYAN MESSAGE FILMS - 1980 to 2009

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Diang'a, Rachael
Style and content in selected Kenyan message
DECLARATION

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

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DEDICATION

To the late Prof. Francis Davis Imbuga whose passion for Kenyan cinema lives on through this work.
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OPERATIONAL DEFINITION OF TERMS

African Film - Motion picture on Africa or by Africans telling an African story or those that are made by Africans in major crew and cast positions.

Artistic film elements-In this study, these refer to film components that make up the *mis-en-scène*. These elements include costume, acting, make-up and directing.

Film - Although the term film is used in the study to mean audio-visual works in general, it also largely implies feature-length audio-visual electronic theatre. Film also refers to a film industry, whereby I use the term interchangeably with cinema. At some point in the thesis, it means the act of shooting a film in a specific location.

Kenyan film - A film made and shot in Kenya with Kenyan film practitioners in control of the major roles like directing, producing and (sometimes) funding.

Message film - Also referred to as development film or didactic film, this is a film made with an aim of passing across certain urgent information deemed important to the target population by the filmmaker. The information, or message aims at improving the life of the target audience by making them reflect on the message, thereafter, changing their lifestyle or approach to the issues of concern in the film.

Technical film elements - Film components that emanate from the work of the technical crew. Technical crew comprises director of photography, sound crew, lighting crew among others.
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<th>Form -</th>
<th>The combination of content and style of a particular film</th>
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<td>Style -</td>
<td>This includes the choice of technical and artistic film elements that sets a production a part. Style can be specific to a director, period, film genre, region or even a specific film</td>
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<td>Content -</td>
<td>This is what is found in a film’s narrative which emanates from the thematic concerns or plot of a film</td>
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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

AMPECA – American Motion Pictures Export Co./Africa
ASL – Average Short Length
BECE – Bantu Educational Cinema Experiment
CAFU – Central Africa Film Unit
CFU – Colonial Film Unit
FEPACI – *Fédération Pan africaine des Cineastes* (Pan-African Federation of Filmmakers)
FESPACO – *Festival Panafricain du Cinema de Ouagadougou* (Pan-African Film and Television Festival of Ouagadougou)
FGD – Focus Group Discussion
HIV/AIDS – Human Immunodeficiency Virus or Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome
IDP – Internally Displaced Person
KBC-TV – Kenya Broadcasting Corporation Television
KFC – Kenya Film Corporation or Kenya Film Commission
KIFF – Kenya International Film Festival
KIMC – Kenya Institute of Mass Communication
PEV – Post-Election Violence
*Pieces* – *Pieces for Peace*
PLWA – People Living with HIV/AIDS
POV – Point of View
SITHENGI – Cape town World Cinema Festival
STD – Sexually Transmitted Disease
*Unseen* - *Unseen, Unsung, Unforgotten*
VCT – Voluntary Counseling and Testing
WHO – World Health Organisation
ZIFF – Zanzibar International Film Festival
This study analyses style and content in Kenyan message films produced between 1980 and 2009. Anchored on the principles of Formalist, Auteurist, Postcolonial and Viewer Response theories, it narrows down to four films sampled through stratified random sampling. These are Sao Gamba’s *Kolormask* (1986), Anne Mungai’s *Saikati* (1992), Robby Bresson and Kimani Mburu’s *Pieces for Peace* (2008) and Njoki Mbuthia and Mona Ombogo-Scot’s *Unseen, Unsung, Unforgotten* (2009). The study draws from Postcolonial discourse to discuss the three possible initiators of message filmmaking in Kenya. It applies the *Auteurist* belief that the director is responsible for all the artistic and technical choices made during a film’s production. The study, however, dismisses as fallacious notion that having made the stylistic choices, the director can package meaning as he desires and pass it on to the audience. Thus, this research invokes the precepts of Viewer Response theory, acknowledging a viewer’s role in the process of meaning generation. Subsequently, the study goes ahead to examine the application of individual film elements in each of the sampled films. This study contributes to the growth of the rather young Kenyan film industry by emphasizing the importance of both style and content in message filmmaking. Its findings will be useful to film policy makers, researchers and funding organizations with an interest in Kenyan film. Being a qualitative study, the research methods applied during data collection and analysis were those that could elicit the respondents’ opinions about the topics of discussion. Primary data was therefore collected through focus group discussions with thirteen film critics, in-depth interviews consisting of open-ended questions as well as free observation. Two data collection instruments were used during data collection: Interview guides were used during the in-depth interviews and FGDs while observation guides directed the researcher as she observed the films. Secondary data came from literature and documentary films on the relevant topics of concern for each chapter. The study objectives were met and the study concludes that all the four films pass across certain social concerns. The films’ directors attempt to coat these messages with appealing stylistic manipulations – both technical and aesthetic. Nonetheless, hindrances such as time of a film’s production, filming and processing equipment used, finances and director’s creative oversights still mar most of these films.
CHAPTER ONE

1.0 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background to the Study

From the inception of world cinema by the Lumiere brothers in France in 1895, all the way to the 1930s, film was silent yet it yearned to communicate to the audience through motion picture alone. Even though the narratives had no sonic component, the viewer was thrilled by the fact that the medium through the moving images showcased life in its real form; a form the viewer easily identified with. As David Robinson (1981:23), puts it, for the earliest exhibitors, what mattered was the phenomenon: the pictures moved. Their audiences as we know from contemporary reviews of film shows were so enchanted to notice that even the backgrounds moved, the leaves on the trees and the waves on the beach ... moved.

(1981:23)

As this audience was amazed by the Lumieres' film, Cinematographe, little did they know that it only marked the beginning of an art form that would later steadily progress towards a more advanced cinematographic venture. Cinematography has since evolved and many filmmakers have continued to move towards making their films' visual content look as natural as possible at every stage and age. This led to the introduction of colour and later on, chemical colour enhancement techniques in film.

Before audible dialogue was introduced in cinema, inter-titles were used to make it easier for the viewer to decipher what was going on in particular scenes. Even after the inclusion of the audio component, as film technology continued to evolve, the significance of sound and good script as elements of film communication was
acknowledged. It became clear that “aural images can expand the frame in terms of off
screen space and extend the meaning of what is being shown by using sound as metaphor.
When these images are an integral part of the story, they usually originate in the script”
(Cooper and Dancyger 2005:29).

Another area of the motion picture that has drawn remarkable interest of film critics over
the years is editing. Film cutting and editing came into critics’ focus during the Soviet
Montage Movement of the early 1900s. Here, editing was viewed as the most critical
element in a film’s communication process. Today, film editing is considered one of the
most crucial tools by which a director packages film content. Editing can help coerce the
viewer to view film in a certain way or manipulate his emotions.

It is evident, therefore, that film as a medium of communication relies on several
components like picture, sound, costume, make-up, colour, cutting and editing and
directing among others in order to communicate effectively to the audience. At this
juncture, it is worth noting that all forms of communication have their own language and
whatever the language used, it comprises certain codes and conventions. ‘Codes’ refer to
the particular methods employed in a language to communicate meanings while
‘conventions’ refer to the manner in which these codes are normally used. A good
example in cinema is the use of a close-up shot. The manner in which this code is used
may vary from film to film, but it is largely associated with intensity of emotion, action
or relation between the viewer and the characters or events in the film.
Film language has a range of techniques available for a filmmaker to tell a story. Therefore, the form of any film, “the manner in which content is presented” Rabiger (2008:201), is determined by the way the film’s story is told, and it comprises style and content. Content is the outcome of narrative while style is shaped by the film techniques employed (Diang’a, 2012). It is a combination of these two that produces meaning. The manner in which style and content are balanced for semantic reasons varies from one film to another, depending on the director’s choices and a film’s budget.

Meaning is integral in any communication process. Different film techniques, which are the activities taking place during the preparation, production and post-production phases of filmmaking, greatly influence meaning in film. These activities are subsumed under four major terminologies, namely, cinematography, *mise-en-scene*, sound and editing. Abram et al (2001:93) believe that *mise-en-scene* plays a big role in creating meaning in film. They posit that “significant part of the meaning produced by a film comes from the visual content – this is to a large extent how the story is told. What a shot consists of is therefore crucially important”. In trying to establish meaning out of *mise-en-scene*, a spectator pays close attention to setting, props, costume, performance, and lighting among other components of *mise-en-scene*.

It emerges that film requires well composed artistic as well as technical elements for it to communicate effectively. This constitutes the language of cinema. A film which delivers memorable impact usually has a form special to the story’s purpose so that in the end, the viewer gets informed while at the same time being entertained by a medium so close
to real life. For message films, sometimes referred to as development films or didactic films, this is crucial in two aspects. First, development films have, as their most important goal, the desire to deliver the message to the viewer. Secondly, the sender of this message has chosen to use the film medium to convey the message. So, cinematic language – or its codes and conventions – come into play. Therefore, this sender of the message has to find appropriate stylistic choices to ensure a viewer’s sustained interest while the message, well blended within the style, is passed across to the viewer without much strain from the latter. Thus, “style is just the outside of content, and content the inside of style, like the outside and inside of the human body – both go together, they can’t be separated” (Rabiger, 2008:209).

1.2 Statement of the problem

Since the 1990s, filmmaking has continued to gain roots in Kenya. This is evident in the number of filmmaking firms that have recently sprung up, the increased volume of films produced per year and the emergence of film scholarship in Kenya. All these explain the recent rise in the local population’s interest in the Kenyan film industry. However, the growth of a stable film industry depends on the kind of films the filmmakers produce. The quality of productions can be improved by ensuring that filmmakers underscore the importance of both style and content in a film production. In an interview with Beti Ellerson, Wanjiru Kinyanjui, a Kenyan film director feels that African cinema has a long way to go. She finds Anglophone cinema (up to the year 2000, when the book was published) quite “development-oriented,” restricting the viewer to a world full of suffering Africans. She asks:
Where are the films which can make us laugh, which appeal to our emotions and which show us who we are? I feel the same as a filmmaker (I forget who it is) who said that the greatest appreciative comment for him would be “that one is behaving just like my neighbour next door.” ...African cinema should also produce films which not only portray life as it is, but have characters whose world is accessible to us today.

(Ellerson, 2000:155).

For Kinyanjui, African audience can hardly identify with the films their society produces. This is a hindrance to the growth of an audio-visual culture in East Africa which is lagging behind in terms of cinema as compared to other regions of the continent. This study contributes to this growth by emphasizing the importance of artistic and technical elements of cinematic communication process, which relies on both content and style of a production.

Message films are widespread in Africa. They tend to focus on passing across a particular developmental or social concern (content), viewed by the filmmaker to be of critical importance to the target population. Given the significance of content in such films, and the importance of stylistic choices in filmmaking in general as seen above, this study set out to examine how the filmmakers of the four selected Kenyan message films balance between style and content in order to communicate effectively to their viewers. The study focused on the following films: Sao Gamba’s Kolormask (1986), Anne Mungai’s Saikati (1992), Robby Bresson and Mburu Kimani’s Pieces for Peace (2008) and Mona Ombogo-Scot and Njoki Mbuthia’s Unseen, Unsung, Unforgotten (2009).
1.3 Objectives of the Study

1. To trace the origins of didactic filmmaking in Kenya
2. To establish the thematic concerns of the selected films
3. To identify the artistic style of the selected films
4. To identify the technical style of the selected films
5. To analyse the key issues that influence the use of artistic elements of film in the Kenyan audio-visual industry.
6. To analyse the circumstances that surround and/or influence the use of technical film elements in the Kenyan film industry.

1.4 Research Questions

1. What are the roots of didactic filmmaking in Kenya?
2. What themes do the selected films focus on?
3. What artistic film elements identify the style of the films selected for this study?
4. What technical film elements identify the style of the films selected for this study?
5. What influences artistic elements in film in the Kenyan audio-visual industry?
6. What are the circumstances that surround the use of technical film elements in Kenyan cinema?
1.5 Research Assumptions

The study is based on the assumptions that:

1. Didactic or message filmmaking in Kenya has roots in certain historical, social economic or political experiences of the country.

2. The selected films focus on certain themes presumed to be significant to the target audience.

3. The selected films employ artistic film elements in order to enhance meaning.

4. The selected films use technical film elements to enhance meaning.

5. There exist certain factors that shape the use of artistic film elements in the Kenyan film industry.

6. Certain forces influence the application of technical film elements in the Kenyan audio-visual scene.

1.6 Rationale and Significance of the Study

This study was worth undertaking as its findings will be useful, specifically, to the Kenyan filmmakers in improving the form of their future productions. With improved local productions, Kenyan film could successfully compete with the foreign (mainly Western, West African and Indian) films currently predominant on the Kenyan theatre and home screens. This success would also be of great importance to the Kenyan viewership who would find in the local productions quality films with which they can identify. Film being a powerful medium of communication, the success will also lead to local message films appealing more to the viewers, delivering their subject matter in a more entertaining way and leaving a lasting impression on the viewer.
Film scholarship being a new area of interest in Kenya, and with little documentation on Kenyan film, the findings of this study can provide researchers and other stakeholders in the industry with documented information on the Kenyan film industry hence triggering further research in the area. Kenya Film Commission, film funding organizations and film policy-makers will also benefit from this research by getting insights on how to better their services. For instance, Kenya Film Commission holds film training workshops throughout the country every year. This study’s conclusion on the importance and use of various film elements offers insights for KFC to identify areas of concern in filmmaking in Kenya. The commission may then strengthen its trainings on these key areas. In a nutshell, this study will greatly contribute towards the growth of Kenya’s film industry.

1.7 Theoretical Framework

This study is guided mainly by the Formalist film theory. Formalist thought in cinema has its roots in the 1920s in the Soviet Union, its main proponents being Sergei Eisenstein and Rudolf Arnheim. The theory “emphasizes film’s potential as an expressive medium. The available film techniques are of central importance – use of camera, lighting, editing (among others)” (Abram 2001:113). Formalists believe that film should not just record anything that is before the camera. It should, however, be able not just to produce meanings by showing the spectator what happens in the plot of a film, but it should also express the meanings of the events through shot content, the way the shots are edited together through the dialectical process between the shots and by producing the relevant
associations from the shots. All these call for the viewer to make sense of what he sees and think through a sequence of shots. Formalist approach positions the film medium as a vehicle for personal expression that the director uses, through its numerous elements, to express his ideas to the viewer.

Formalist film theorists generally focus on the synthesis of the several film elements at hand as well as the emotional and intellectual effect of the synthesis. The synthesis could take two forms: first, a critic might pay attention to how the presence or absence of a particular element affects the film’s meaning. For example, such a critic may focus on how continuity editing in a film creates a comforting effect compared to jump-cut editing. Alternatively, a formalist film critic may synthesise several elements of film such as editing, shot composition, sound and music, considering how these work together in producing an effect. This study employs the second option. This is because the study examines several film elements present in the selected films. At some points in the study, absence of certain elements or their use in a particular way is mentioned as a suggested alternative.

Formalism recognises both ideological and auteurist branches of criticism. In ideological formalism, the focus is mostly on how the socio-economic forces create a particular style of filmmaking. Auteurist formalism, on the other hand, looks at “how auteurs put their own stamp on the material.” For formalist critics, the main concern in film criticism is style and how it communicates the ideas, emotions and themes in the film. For example, the classical Hollywood cinema has a distinct style comprising continuity editing,
massive coverage, three-point lighting, "mood" music, dissolves, among others. This style has been viewed by critics to emanate from Hollywood's desire to make as much money and to appeal to as many ticket buyers as possible. Therefore, style can differ from nation/region to another.

*Auteurist* formalism, however, highlights the director and how his personal decisions and preferences or style manifest themselves in a film. This school of thought was spearheaded mainly by François Truffaut supported by his less mentioned colleagues with whom he wrote for the film criticism magazine, *Cahiers du Cinema*. *Auteurism*, as seen by these critics, sought to free cinema from its not-so-well-defined position between theatre and literature, and to elevate the auteur to the level of a novelist (and not the typesetters or editors) or a painter (and not his assistants who help make the work a success). It sought to make film be viewed as a product of a particular individual: a director.

This study employs both *auteurist* and ideological approaches within the formalist thought. The study's objectives call for the researcher to pay close attention to the influence of both the director and socio-economic environment in which a film is produced and consumed.

Other than Formalism as the main theoretical backing for the study, Postcolonialism and Viewer Response approaches to film analysis also provide recourse for theoretical underpinnings in this study. Postcolonial approach, initially instigated by Edward Said in
the 1970s, draws its essence in the nature and impact of cultural interactions between the Western imperialist forces and their colonised subjects from the moment of the initial colonial contact to date. This theory complements Formalism in this study by giving the study insights into issues beyond the text that require an understanding of the culture that produces the films under study. Formalism is handicapped as it only locates meaning and relevance of a film in the text and not beyond. Specifically, discussions in chapter two and three draw immensely from concepts such as 'cultural displacement', 'híbride' and 'cultural crisis' (Homi Bhabha, 2004; Ali Mazrui, 1986), cultural negotiation, resistance and hegemony (Bhabha, Ibid; Nayar, 2008 and Kolker, 1999).

Viewer Response also adds to formalist film theory by invoking the active participation of the audience in meaning generation. Even though a film director may manipulate both the scene content and shot content in order to present meaning to the viewer in a particular way, the active viewer's input into the meaning transmitted cannot be overruled. Viewer response largely draws from the literary Reader Response theory. Reader response generally focuses on the reader and his experience of a literary text as the location where meaning resides. In film studies, the contribution of the viewer to meaning was first recognised by Hugo Munsterberg (1970) when he expressed the idea that film operates in the mental sphere. Stuart Hall (1980) later fully applied Reader Response theory to Media Studies. Later studies such as Kaer (1988) modified Hall's notions to find their relevance within Film Studies. Viewer Response approach often takes into consideration the varied backgrounds of viewers defined by social class, gender, race, and sexual orientation among others. The variegated backgrounds of
different audience groups play a role in how these audiences perceive cinema. This study echoes one of the main tenets in Viewer Response approach to film criticism: A film text has no univocal meaning and viewers’ interpretations may vary from the director’s intended meaning.

1.8 Review of Related Literature

In this section, the available works in the areas of Message filmmaking in general, Kenyan film, style and content in film are reviewed analytically. The section is divided into two parts. First, is a review of studies on the Kenyan film industry and the second part comprises works on style and content in African film.

1.8.1 Review of the Works on Kenyan Film

In “Beyond Tradition and Modernity,” Mukora (2003) widely discusses the problem of and need for identity through creative works; basically, literary and cinematic creations. She bases her argument on Wanjiru Kinyanjui’s feature film, The Battle of the Sacred Tree (1994) and Anne Mungai’s Saikati (1992). The two films revolve around women who find solace in traditional values yet engage in “modern” practices. She finds in the post-independence films what post-independence novels too struggle to represent; the indigenous experience. Mukora focuses on the experiences of the post-colonial African woman. She examines two issues: First, she dwells on how the two films inscribe women within the antagonisms of tradition and modernity, within the contradicting and complex nature of these two forces. She also looks at how women strive to accommodate their
individual experiences within the changing socio-cultural circumstances while avoiding conflict between the two.

Basing its arguments on the postcolonial film theory, Mukoras’s study pays attention to the content and context of the two texts but not their style. This study looks at both content and style and also gives room for contextual understanding of the selected films. The study also differs from Mukora’s study in that it only analyses message films. *The Battle of the Sacred Tree* is not overtly a message film, hence the study will make much reference to it. *Saikati* is a message film and has been sampled for analysis in the proposed study. The researcher may made reference to Mukora’s study from time to time as parts of her analysis gave critical insights to this study.

In “Dangerous Affair: Narrating Popular Experiences in Kenya,” Sipalla (2004) examines ways in which Judy Kibinge’s film, *Dangerous Affair*, outlines popular experiences within the urban sphere. This film explores the lives of young elite urbanites in Nairobi. It revolves around the lives of two women, Rose and Wangui, who are caught in a love triangle with Muraguri. Confused, Muraguri takes too long to choose between the two women. Reality dawns on him only when Wangui divorces him because of infidelity. To Sipalla, *Dangerous Affair* is a popular film inasmuch as it has the ability to give the public a sense of the familiar. Her study further delineates the contribution made by *Dangerous Affair* to the whole body of visual works in Kenya. However, *Dangerous Affair* is not within the scope of the proposed study. Being a popular film, it could not fit within a study on message films.
Moggi and Tessier (2000), in “Media Status Report: Kenya,” provide an overview of issues surrounding filmmaking in Kenya. They point at legal, political and economic hindrances to filmmaking in Kenya. Some of these hindrances, they posit, are already being worked on either by the government or by independent filmmaking firms.

Diang’a (2005), in “The Status of the Kenyan Film,” gives a historical account of the rise of filmmaking in Kenya. She critically looks at some of the major issues in the Kenyan audiovisual industry including: foreign filmmaking in the country, prominence of Kenyan filming locations and its impact on the foreign film shooting. She also looks at the various developments that have taken place from early 1960s all the way to mid 2000s. Diang’a also addresses the problems faced by the film industry and highlights some of the recently proposed solutions and innovative ways of promoting the growth of the local film industry. Considering Diang’a (2005), Moggi and Tessier’s (2000) findings gave this study general background information about the Kenyan film industry.

Nyamwaya et al (undated article) give a general overview of the activities of the then active Kenya Film Corporation. The corporation was formed in 1967 mainly to coordinate film importation and distribution in the country, as a local step towards decolonizing film distribution in Africa (Kerr, 1995). The report finds the government at the core of the slow growth of the Kenyan film industry. This position risks viewing the government as the ultimate panacea to the hindrances in the growth of film industry in Kenya. The recent upsurge in local filmmaking has taken more of individual initiatives complemented by government support. Most of the problems facing the industry, as per
the report, are similar to those outlined by Moggi and Tessier, hence they are being
worked on. They call for Kenyan films that promote Kenyan indigenous experiences yet
should be "up to international standards." Promoting Kenya’s "indigenous experiences"
and satisfying "international standards" may not be easily achievable. However, the
report was a good resource for the current study given that it represents some of the
earliest attempts at not only documenting interest in relevant content and desirable quality
(or style) of the Kenyan film, but also appreciating local cinema. This report, having been
written prior to the production of Kolormask, and one of its authors, the late Sao Gamba,
being the director and scriptwriter of this film, a critical analysis of the report together
with follow-up in-depth interviews with the film’s assistant director highly enriched this
study, especially in understanding the socio-political environment that necessitated the
film’s production.

Diang’a (2007) in "A History of the Kenyan Film: the evolving Image of the African"
focuses on the depiction of the African in the Kenyan Film as a response to the image of
the African as presented in Western films. She examines the negative attributes with
which the African is identified in Sidney Pollack’s Out of Africa and Harry Hook’s The
Kitchen Toto. She then critically analyses the authenticity of the Kenyan filmmakers’ bid
to "correct" the negative image assigned to the Africans in the Western films shot in
Kenya. In conclusion, she finds it misleading for one to assume that since the African
finally gets to control his image on the screen, a more positive portrayal of the African is
ensured.
Sharing her experience as a mainstream filmmaker working with amateur Riverwood filmmakers, Wanjiru Kinyanjui (2008) expresses her views on the style of Riverwood filmmaking. Riverwood is the journalese word for the amateur video-making business in the areas bordering Nairobi’s down town River Road. Kinyanjui’s cooperation with Riverwood resulted in the production of two films: Manga and Bahati. She gives keener attention to the formal content of Riverwood productions, which she equates to Nigeria’s Nollywood films. She further posits that “the technical quality (of the Riverwood films) is rather on the poor side... They are shot with an improvised story rather than a script. There is no director to worry about cinematic techniques. The stand-up comedians just do their act without repeating anything” (Kinyanjui 2008:57). Kinyanjui’s sentiments indicate that it is important for a filmmaker to give attention to cinematic techniques, which add semantic value to a film.

1.8.2 Review of Works on Style versus Content in African Film

Nell and Harper (1998) in their “Images of Yesterday: Filmmaking in Central Africa” give an account of early filmmaking in Africa, specifically, in Northern Rhodesia (Zambia) and Nyasaland (Malawi), between 1948 and 1963. Their study brings to the fore the activities of the Central African Film Unit (CAFU) whose initial support came from the British government. The study reports that films made in this era targeted African audiences and were meant to promote the federal government. Nell and Harper’s study tends to unearth some of the early attempts at message filmmaking in Africa which started with the British’s Bantu Educational Cinema Experiment (from 1935) and later on Colonial Film Units in East Africa (from 1939). Colonial propaganda filmmaking marked
the beginning of message filmmaking in the region. A further understanding of their was crucial for the researcher as the activities of the CAFU highly informed the study in locating and understanding some of the early forms of message filmmaking in East Africa, if not Kenya.

In his paper, "Southern African Cinema: Towards a Regional Narration of the Nation," Mhando (2000) focuses on cinema in Mozambique, Tanzania, Zimbabwe and South Africa, leaving out most of the region's countries like Lesotho, Botswana, Angola, Malawi, Swaziland and Zambia. Mhando enunciates the "implicit common innuendoes in the histories, aesthetics and the direction in the national cinemas of these countries."

He further observes that African cinema is concerned with information brought to the light and not so much with the formal techniques. He finds a need to question the aesthetics and praxis of African cinematic narration partly due to its pedagogical (or message) nature. He says "the pedagogical imperatives are often foreground in African cinema."

Mhando's study played a significant role in this research as some of its findings were used to further develop the current study. For example, as observed in Mhando's study, the foregrounding of the message at the expense of aesthetics or formal considerations in African cinema became an area of interest to this study. It was important to find links or disconnects that Kenyan films studied here share with what Mhando refers to as "African cinema."
From the above review, most of the studies have paid attention to various aspects of film in Kenya which all informed this study at different levels. For example, Moggi and Tessier (2000) and Diang’a (2005) gave this research good background information on the activities in the Kenyan audio-visual industry. My research needed such a background in order to embed itself strongly in exploring the style of the Kenyan message films. Given that the current study involves selected directors’ experiences in the industry, Kinyanjui’s (2005 and 2008) studies were useful as examples of a film director’s experiences in the industry.

Research methodology applied in some of these studies was applied in the current study. For instance, the methods of data collection and analysis employed by Sipalla (2004), Diang’a (2007) and Mukora (2003) were useful for this study. On the other hand, none of the above studies focuses on the style of the Kenyan film; the studies on the Kenyan film reviewed above present a critical analysis of the content of different Kenyan films, neglecting its style. The proposed study paid attention to both style and content. Even though Mhando’s study mentions style versus content in African film, this is not the sole focus of his study. Also, his study looks at film industries in southern African countries and not Kenya. Therefore, this study focuses on the Kenyan situation.
1.9 Research Methodology

1.9.1 Research Design

This study engages a qualitative research approach. The choice of this approach emanates from the nature of the research topic. Since the study's crux is an analysis of content and style, the study calls for methods that give room for an in-depth investigation of the processes that work towards creating meaning in the selected films. Qualitative research approach does this.

1.9.2 Population, Sample Size and Sampling Techniques

Although every step in research requires some kind of sampling, the term, generally, refers to "the selection of a research topic, the research site, the people to be studied, the concepts and variables which are used, the data which are collected and methods employed, and the relationships on which the analysis is focused" (Peil et al, 1982: 21). In this study, sampling was done mainly in selecting the primary texts to be studied and selection of interviewees.

Out of a population of over seventy-three Kenyan feature films, the study was interested only in the message films, which total to about twenty. Other genres like popular films and feature length documentaries were not considered. For sampling, this study relies on a sampling frame found at the Kenya Film Commission’s archives.
Out of the twenty films, the researcher employed stratified probability sampling technique to select the films for analysis in this research. Given that the population is quite small, simple random sampling would have been employed but since the study needed to be as comprehensive as possible, stratified sampling was preferred as it gives room for consideration of such variables as period of production, (1980 – 1989, 1990 – 1999, 2000 – 2005 and 2006 – 2009); thematic inclination (Gender inequity, affirmation of indigenous culture, HIV/AIDS and healing the impact of post-poll violence) and the sex of the director. From these three strata, films were selected based on their possession of as many of the three variables as possible.

As a result, the following films were selected for this study: Sao Gamba’s *Kolormask* (1986), a film on affirmation of indigenous culture, directed by a man; Anne Mungai’s *Saikati* (1992), a female directed film about the strength of African women; Robby Bresson and Mburu Kimani’s *Pieces for Peace* (2008), a film directed by two men which focuses on healing the post-poll violence wounds and Mona Ombogo – Scot and Njoki Mbuthia’s *Unseen, Unsung, Unforgotten* (2009), a film about HIV/AIDS directed by two female directors. Stratified sampling is useful where there is need to “maximise variation between groups and minimise variation within groups” (Peil et al 1982:37). It therefore became the most suitable method for this study as the researcher focuses on films that are not homogenous even though they all fall under the larger bracket called ‘message films.’ Also, the selected films fairly represent the existing population of message films in Kenya.
1.9.3 Data Collection Procedures

Both primary and secondary data were used in this study. This is due to the complementary nature of the two types of data. Secondary data helped validate the information gained from primary data. At the same time, it provided prior knowledge of how the various elements of film work towards meaning generation.

a) Secondary Data

Both literature and non-fiction films with information pertaining to the Kenyan film, film history and criticism, filmmaking, formalist film theory and message filmmaking, constituted sources of secondary data for this study. In collecting secondary data, the researcher consulted several libraries with material relevant to the study. A lot more secondary data were accessed online from several online books, journals and blog posts. Reading through secondary data gave direction on what other researchers had found out in related areas of study. This enabled me have a better grasp of the current debates on the areas of African film and film form.

b). Primary Data

The first source of primary data was the four films sampled above. The researcher gathered primary data by observing the selected films being guided by an informal observation guide. The researcher watched the sampled films severally to decipher any meaning inherent or related to the events in the film texts. Information gathered through observation included scripting, constituents of mis-en-scene (such as characters, set design, continuity, props, etc), editing techniques, camera operations, directing and use of sound. Although the researcher was guided by an observation guide focusing on the
above techniques, she engaged in free observation so that any useful information outside the observation guide was recorded and considered during data analysis.

Other than observation, the researcher relied on interviews to solicit more primary data. Combining research methods “give added dimensions to the research project,” says Moore (1987:11) in *How to do Research*. After watching the films and reading through secondary data on film elements and their use in meaning generation, the researcher held in-depth interviews with the directors or assistant directors (henceforth referred to as directors for convenience) of the sampled films. Only *Kolormask*'s assistant director was interviewed in place of the director, who is deceased. According to Moore (1987:27) in-depth interviews, also known as informal interviews enable the interviewer to get qualified responses by prompting and probing the interviewee to explain their points further. Given the aesthetic nature of filmmaking, interviewing directors required an approach that would elicit complex information containing a lot of personal opinion, attitude and experience. In-depth interviews were best positioned to give this. For some of the films studied, follow-up interviews became necessary. These were conducted through email, phone call or scheduling of follow-up in-depth interview sessions.

This study was contented with interviewing only the directors as the study is partly guided by *auterist* formalism, believing that the director is responsible for a film’s form and content. However, the directors largely multi-tasked and talking to them inevitably elicited some information about scriptwriting, editing, acting and producing.
In understanding *mise-en scene*, a creation of the director, the researcher required to get an in-depth understanding of the choices made by the directors and their implication on the film’s meaning. This justifies the researcher’s decision to interview the directors as part of primary data collection. Information gathered from interviews with the directors of the selected films made the researcher consider what influences meaning in film during the production stage.

In film, as a communication medium, both the filmmaker and the audience play significant roles in completing the communication circuit. As such, getting the opinion of the viewers is paramount in any film analysis. This is why the study also gathered data from a focus group of thirteen purposively selected spectators who have a background or scholarly interest in film criticism. This group was composed of film critics, mainly film scholars, students and film enthusiasts who had no professional links with the films studied. The study settled on thirteen respondents since there was need for small manageable group that would ensure active participation of all. At least two focus group discussions were conducted for each of the primary film texts. The spectators watched the films together with the researcher then the researcher lead the discussions, being assisted by one research assistant for each session. Focus group discussions were preferred for this study since they are more economical than individual interviews. This is because they enable exploration of a range of subjective responses in relation to one or more topics in a short period of time. The benefits of this data collection method can be summarised as follows:
Advantages of focus groups relate to the benefits of group interaction such as the extent to which the cross-flow of communication sparks ideas that would not emerge as easily in a one-to-one interview. Groups also take the pressure off participants to respond to every question. Hearing others talk about their experiences, in a supportive environment, may enable participants to feel comfortable about sharing their own experiences.

(Darlington and Scott, 2002:62)

In this group, fair representation of different backgrounds including gender, experience as a film critic and education levels of the group members was ensured.

The in-depth interviews and focus group discussions were guided by separate interview guides, which directed the discussions. The interview guides ensure that the interview sessions did not lose direction as it is very easy to divert attention from the point in focus during open-ended interviews or discussions.

Apart from interview guides and observation guides, the researcher used a third data collection instrument; recorders. During the interviews, the researcher tape-recorded and also video-recorded the interviews to ensure that the entire talk was captured such that no information from the interviews was left out. This information was re-visited from time to time in case the researcher failed to capture some points during the interviews. Conversely, the recorded information could have also been used if a situation arose whereby the notes taken during the interview could not be accessed.
1.9.4 Data Analysis

As the study is basically qualitative, data analysis methods applied were also qualitative. These included text analysis of the sampled films as well as a close examination of the recorded interview sessions with different film professionals. All the interview sessions were first transcribed. The researcher read through the transcribed data, identifying patterns in the responses. This enabled the researcher link certain tendencies with respondents who have particular qualities. For example, directors who multi-tasked tended to be those whose films were produced earlier in history. A close review of the interview notes and observation notes taken during data collection also constituted data analysis process. From the interview notes, answers given with a lot of enthusiasm and confidence were marked as more certain than those answered in half-hearted way or in a few words. For observation notes, features or certain use of elements of film were repeated severally in a film. This meant a more conscious application of the style compared to a feature used, say, once in the entire film. This procedure was very useful in identifying a director’s commonly used techniques.

1.9.5 Conclusion

This chapter has outlined the basic introductory information that in a nutshell, characterise this study. The main point in this chapter is to identify the motivation and lacunae for the study. The objectives set up in the chapter are central in shaping the chapters that follow as each chapter that follow this addresses at least an objective already identified in this chapter.
CHAPTER TWO

2.0 ROOTS OF DIDACTIC FILMMAKING IN KENYA

2.1 Introduction

In this chapter, possible historical and cultural backgrounds that may have helped shape the didactic stance taken by *Kolormask*, *Saikati*, *Pieces for Peace* and *Unseen, Unsung, Unforgotten* are explored. Even though the chapter focuses on the Kenyan film industry, it draws a lot of its arguments from the experiences of other countries in Africa. This is because the Kenyan cinema is quite a young industry, with scanty research work on film. As such, an understanding of didactic film in other parts of the continent will richly inform the findings of this chapter.

In film and other arts, the didactic approach as expressed by scholars such as Philip Sydney and Samuel Johnson, reflects a relation to the philosophy that cultural artefacts including film, literature and theatre are universal communicators of some important information. These art forms were, until the 19th century, viewed as instructors in moral affairs while performing other aesthetic functions as well (Casement, 1987:101). This is one of the principles that inform didacticism, a theory of the arts that gives more weight to the instructional than the artistic role of cultural products.

Several factors may have worked towards the rise of the message filmmaking style in Africa and particularly in Kenya. Most of these could be directly or indirectly attributed to the circumstances surrounding individual productions. These may include a film’s
budget, the intents of the producer or the producing company and the nature and the needs of the target audience as perceived by the producer or director. Nevertheless, three main factors seem to cut across as the main initiators of this sub-genre in African cinema in general. With deepest roots - of the three - is the indigenous oral cultural tradition in the African continent. This tradition has been in existence for as long as the continent’s populace has existed. The others are the impact of colonial contact and its aftermath.

Colonial aftermath, though much newer, has drastically intertwined its way into the continent’s cultural fabric.

A significant portion of what constitutes African cultural, symbolic and intellectual thought and practices – be they oral, written, dramatic, visual, or filmic, - can be characterised as responses to, and interventions in, the factors and forces that have shaped Africa over time (Cham 2000: 48).

For Alamin Mazrui (1986) and Kwame Nkurumah (1964), these factors are largely categorised as indigenous, Arab/Islamic and Euro-Christian. These forces have defined different regions of Africa in varying degrees. For example, the impact of Euro-Christian factor is much less felt in Northern Africa much as the Arab-Islamic factor least affects the Southern African countries. How these factors interact and coexist amid many tensions and conflicts emerging from this coexistence have resulted in the cultural shape of Africa as we know it today. The society shapes the cultural artefacts it produces. Filmmakers, like the other artists, strive to produce what is relevant to their target audience. Therefore, this multifaceted background of the continent dictates what the
filmmakers produce for their audiences. Kenyan cinema is influenced by this diversified background. Euro-Christian and indigenous forces are more prominent in this industry due to the depth with which the Kenyan society has encountered them. Indigenous forces are deeply rooted in the people's lifestyle as it can be viewed as inherent. Encapsulated in the indigenous oral traditions, this force finds an artistic mandate to creep into the country's cinematic culture.

2.2 Film Experience in Colonial East Africa

The didactic filmmaking mode in Kenya can be clearly understood against a backdrop of the role British colonial government envisaged that film should play in the colonial process not only in Kenya but also in the rest of their colonies in the continent. What Mazrui (1986) calls “Euro-Christian force,” though foreign to Africa just like its counterpart “Arab-Islamic force,” was more easily absorbed due to the European colonial policy that ensured cultural erosion with less integration. The impact of Euro-Christian film cultures as they interacted with the indigenous communities at the height of colonisation is still felt in the Kenyan cinematic scene today. The didactic strand in the colonial films has continued to reinforce the message filmmaking tradition in Kenya.

From mid 1920s, the British colonial office started to explore the possible influence of the use of the new mediums of radio and film in the colonies and their impact on the colonial process. The effect of film seemed to supersede that of radio; its visual component gave it immense powers over radio and any other medium of communication at the time. These powers were summarised in the words of one J. Russell Orr who is
quoted to have said a "successful film has a greater circulation than any newspaper and than any book except the Bible." ⁹

With this mindset, the colonial office set out to exploit the usability of film not only as a medium of instruction, but also as a propaganda tool. Cinema began to be seen as the greatest agent of international communication with an incalculable moral and emotional influence on children as well as adults. Due to this realisation, film agenda featured prominently in the later colonial office deliberations, and most significantly in the colonial office conference convened in 1927. It is as a result of film-related debates at this conference that Colonial office films committee was later set up to deliberate on the questions of cinema in education. When the committee later sent a British colonial officer, Julian Huxley, to East Africa in 1929 to test the ‘natives’ reception of instructional films, he found a medical doctor, A. Paterson of Kenya Department of Medical and Sanitary Service, already successfully using a film he had produced for instructional purpose in Africa. The film, *Harley Street in the Bush*, had been a major force in the campaign against hookworm at the East African coastal strip. The British colonial office’s proposal to use cinema in the colonies was significant in two ways: how it affected the economy and political interests of the empire and how the imperial power could use it to promote what the Empire termed as the economic, social and moral welfare of the colonies (Smyth, *Ibid*).
The earliest filmmaking exposure Kenya had was in 1936 when the British Bantu Educational Cinema Experiment (BECE) started operating in East Africa. The main purpose of the British Empire's establishment of BECE was "to educate the Africans to perpetuate colonial traditions and provide entertainment" (Ngayane 1989:13). Thus, the idea of infusing message or information into entertainment was part and parcel of filmmaking not just in Kenya, but in the whole of East Africa from the onset.

Stationed in Tanganyika and sponsored by the International Missionary Council, the Carnegie foundation and the British Colonial Office, BECE produced a total of thirty-five (35) 16mm films between 1936 and 1937. The films were exhibited on mobile screens around East and Central Africa to over 100,000 viewers. Until then, the local populations did not take part in the film production process. Of greater significance to this study however, is that the films made were majorly didactic in nature. The films' themes revolved around the British civilising mission, capturing such topics as coffee marketing, the need to bank with the Post Office Savings Bank, the need to pay taxes, soil erosion, infant malaria, boy scouts among others (Banfield 1964:13, Smyth 1979:437, Diang'a 2007:54-6).

When BECE became defunct in 1937, the British colonial office had become aware of the immense power of film as a medium of mass instruction. In early 1936, a proposal for establishment of a Colonial Film Unit had been submitted by a colonial officer, S. A. Hammond. Hammond had seen cinema as a means of educating people into "citizenship" of the Empire (Smyth 1979: 447). Although the colonial office had then put his idea aside
primarily on financial grounds, Hammond’s dream was only realised later during the World War II when the old British General Post Office Film Unit was transformed into the Crown Film Unit operating under the British Ministry of Information\textsuperscript{10}. Later on, the unit’s work in and for the colonies was handed to a separate organization, the Colonial Film Unit (CFU). CFU was founded in 1939 within the British Ministry of Information to disseminate information, christened the “right propaganda,” about the war and elucidate the impact of the war on England’s general population. Film was trusted as a reliable instrument of correspondence especially between the elites and the masses. Smyth (1988:285) posits that “England’s ruling Elite (sic) had great faith in the power of the cinema as an instrument of persuasion when communicating with the masses... Film was to be in the front line of the war propaganda attack launched by the Ministry of Information.” Nonetheless, the effect of CFU’s propaganda soon streamed out of Britain into the colonies. The government sent out such units to various colonial territories and by early 1950s there were permanent working film units in East and West Africa. The film messages worked very well with the non-literate Africans and cinema’s visual power cut across the linguistic barriers that had earlier on hampered communication to the colonies. Film propaganda was commentated by the few Africans who could speak both English and local languages. In Kenya, the colonial government set up a CFU in 1950 to produce and distribute mainly propaganda films on the Mau Mau uprising.

Although film was viewed as a propeller of good morals by the proponents of didacticism, depending on one’s perspective, it was also criticised for spreading or painting undesired pictures of the empire. Brennan (2005:481) identifies
... the anxieties held by European officials and settlers towards the corrupting influence of Western cinema on "impressionable" African filmgoers. Such a corruption, Europeans feared, might undermine the racial boundaries that supported colonial hierarchies.

A particular case in point was the impact of American films on the colonies. By 1932 for example, most cinemas in Kenya, Uganda, Tanganyika, Zanzibar and the current Zimbabwe were obtaining their films from South African suppliers who provided mainly American films. The colonial office feared that American films would spread other ideas and ideals especially into the colonies. Realising that commercial films, like those of Charlie Chaplin, could probably show the colonies the negative side of the Europeans, it became necessary for the films from Europe and North America to be re-edited in order to be shown in Africa. This would prevent film from communicating what major L. A. Notcut, the pioneer of BECE referred to as "wrong ideas" about the British Empire.  

Apart from propaganda filmmaking and distribution, the CFUs performed a major task in training Kenyans to produce films, a move that played a role in establishing a culture that would later be explored to give rise to the current film industry in the country. After the war, CFU intensified its production role more than distribution. Jean Rouch sees this as CFU organiser, William Seller's long-term motive that was concealed behind making of war propaganda films. Rouch says, "if the immediate goal of the Colonial Film Unit was to make war propaganda, its organiser, W. Sellers, in fact, had in mind a long-range project – establishing a systematic way to utilise film with an African audience." This opened an avenue for Sellers to impart a filmmaking culture among the Africans. First
effort towards having an African behind the camera was witnessed when Jack Beddington, the head of the films division in the CFU insisted, against Sellers’ resistance, that it was necessary to have an African to advise the producers on African life and customs. This lead to a Nigerian musician - Fela Sowande - joining the team in 1944.

Although the plan was that Africans should be trained to take over the work of the units, more progress was made towards this objective in West Africa than in East Africa. Training the Africans to make films may have been one of Sellers’ ways of achieving his goal of “utilising film with the African audience.” However, according to Smyth (1989:390) “in East Africa, a different policy was followed; Africans were attached to the CFU units, but the European film-makers were so occupied with film production that training was neglected.” As a result, Kenyans only learnt through observation if not apprenticeship. What was gathered was applied in the production of early indigenous films such as Mlevi, Mrembo and much later on, Kolormask.

When independence euphoria hit African countries in the 1950s through the 1960s, there existed a general hegemonic assumption that once the Empire was out of the way, the newly independent states would easily graduate into economic and political ecstasy. Film was not to be left behind in this journey. Within the two decades, “nations like Ghana, Burkina Faso, Kenya, and (sic) Guinea made attempts to develop their film industries.” (The countries) “saw film as a way to enlighten and educate the people and as a way to explain policies” (Giraud 2008:97-8). In Kenya, the most significant development to filmmakers in this period was not just the establishment of the Kenya Broadcasting
Corporation, but more importantly, the setting up of the Kenya Film Corporation in 1967 to localise film importation and distribution in the country. Previously, the film distribution in Kenya and in the larger continent was run mainly by foreign film distributing companies such as AMPECA, the American Motion Picture Export Company (Kerr, 1995, Simiyu 2010). However, it was only in the 1980s that KFC's other function of film production was realized in the production of *Kolormask* in 1985 and its subsequent release in 1986.

Of significance too, in relation to this, are the activities of the Department of Film Services under the Ministry of Information. By the time indigenous fiction filmmaking began in sub-Saharan Africa in the 1960s, vestiges of the information-filled filmmaking style had found their way into the films produced. For in Africa at that time, social commitment was inevitably a crucial part in the production of cultural artefacts. As such, just like in the other parts of Africa, the pioneer creative films made in Kenya were highly socially committed.

With the onset of the post-independence era in Africa, it was only natural that didactic entertainment would start exploring the use of cultural instruments from the West. Borrowing from this new interaction, and drawing so much from the already established oral tradition in Africa, the resultant cultural artefacts were an infusion of both African and European cultural products. Thus, African film, emerging at this hybridized space and time, was not spared. In Kenya, this was solely undertaken by the ministry of Information's Department of Film services which produced development-oriented
documentaries for different government ministries. The films produced and distributed by DFS covered several historic and developmental matters in the country. This is an indication that some of the filmic traditions initially observed by the traditional filmmakers - in this case the colonial Centre - have found their way into the contemporary Kenyan message films.

2.3 African Oral Tradition and its Influence on African Film

2.3.1 The Interface between Film and the Oral Tradition in Africa

According to Hussein (2005:15), “Africa’s long tradition of oral artistry still wields a remarkable influence on the contemporary life of its society.” Film being a medium of expression within this “life” is not exempted from the exertion of the oral tradition. Film, an art form initially imported into Kenya currently draws from and rearticulates the Kenyan indigenous culture’s oral traditional codes. The entry of foreign art forms into the indigenous socio-cultural network of Africa called for ways that would find a conducive middle ground suitable for the coexistence of forms of expression which initially seemed dichotomous. For African film, finding this position was inevitable. Looking at films such as *Wend Kuuni*, *Xala*, among others, there is evidently a heavy reliance on the continent’s indigenous oral tradition. This becomes more pronounced within the postcolonial context of their production which, has been widely characterized by a hybridity of cultural products including film (Diawara, 1992). This is why any theorization of African cinema calls for a descriptive more than a prescriptive approach. African film should be understood in terms of its ability to fit within as well as to modify the established universal film codes. Even though Diawara (*Ibid*) attempts a vivid categorisation of African film, Murphy (2000:14) says “we do not yet have the theoretical
basis to talk about national or ethnic film styles. Instead ... (he proposes) an approach that attempts to negotiate the relationship between the ‘universal’ and the ‘local’ aspects of filmmaking.”

For instance, some filmmakers have adapted oral tales into the silver screen. This calls for an alternative approach to our understanding of certain concepts within film studies. Albert Wandago’s *Simbi Nyaima* (2004), is an example of such a film. It relates the mythical story of the origin of a small lake in Western Kenya called Simbi. The story is told by a narrator, who takes up the role of a *griot*. Although *griot’s* role and position in the society vary from one ethnic group or region to another, his “functions may range from that of scholar, mediator or advisor to that of musician or storyteller” (Thackway 2002: 233).

In the film’s credits, the director shares responsibility on the story. Initially, the narrator creates a performance/narration of a tale, yet on the other hand, a film director is equally responsible for a film’s artistic content including performance. In the oral arts, a narrator modifies the performance in such a way that he becomes the “author” of the performance. Going by the *auteurist* film thought, a film’s director is viewed as its “author.” Thus, narrating for film brings in a new dimension of shared responsibility over the performance. African filmmakers who chose to have an oral narrator tell the story, slightly adjust the conventional understanding of such concepts as authorship both in the Oral tradition and in the contemporary film medium. Such adjustments are considered crucially necessary in a postcolonial arena where negotiation between different cultures...
as explained by Homi Bhabha (2004) is inevitable. Post-independent African society resides in such a ground. Such a multicultural set-up is "saturated with politics of transformation: be it expressed as conflict, through calm consensus or in self-conscious gestures of reconciliation" (Jacobs 1996:11) "Conflict," "calm consensus" or "reconciliation" can be identified not only at political level but also at the cultural level exemplified by cultural artefacts such as film and the oral narrative.

**2.3.2 Didacticism in Oral Art Forms and Film in Africa**

From early stages of life, all humans express an intense desire to understand or to make sense of their surrounding in their bid to understand it. Inventing stories is one of the ways by which this desire is satisfied. These stories not only provide an ‘understanding of the surrounding,’ but they also provide pleasure or entertainment. Both are crucial for one’s well being since pleasure is good for the Freudian *id*, while information is necessary for the ego and *superego* as it enables the society to cultivate various virtues.

It is rather selfish to admit that all human desire entertainment or pleasure more than information where there is a choice between the two. Generally, once one gets information, the social expectations change. The world expects to see the impact of that information in the individual’s daily life. On the other hand, once one gets entertained, what he does with that entertainment depends on him. It is the obligation to marry these two that makes message filmmaking tricky. Njogu (2005: 55) posits that
the solution is to make the message or information a part of the show. Our forefathers in Africa were aware of this hence our oral traditional art of story. In order to keep the audience captivated, songs, dance and the whole gamut of theatre have long been used for the dissemination of cultural and social information, values and norms.

That is to say that the most important factor in making it possible for a narrative to entertain as well as to instruct or to inspire us is for the creative artist to project himself into his characters, whether imaginary or real. For in the traditional African context, the arts ‘traditionally’ play a socio-educational role in the society (Thackway 2002: 219, Otieno 2008: 31). With industrialization and the emergence of electronic media, the oral and the printed word is no longer the primary mode of storytelling. Film and television screens have found space within this arena as mediums of relaying stories. In Africa, the screen story found an already established oral tradition whose entrenchment as a medium of education has been shaken neither by literacy nor by the screen culture itself.

In Africa, orature or artistic productions were both entertaining and educative. In this duality, and as a result of this background, one wonders whether there is a time in Africa when entertainment was never useful because since the pre-colonial time, Africa has never afforded “art for art’s sake” (Diawara, 1992). Some of the earliest conceptions of what an African film industry would be like were proposed by Paulin Viyera, leading a small group called Le Groupe Africain du Cinema in 1958. Francophone Africa wanted to set up an international film centre in Dakar to be used to produce educational films. For African filmmakers, the didactic stance that their oral backgrounds bring into their films only complements what can be seen to be originally the purpose of the invention of the short film genre. After the advent of feature film, early short films banded around the
documentary work of John Grierson and his colleagues Basil Wright and Edgar Ansty at the Empire marketing Board in England and around the work of Parre Lorentz and William van Dyke in the United States of America. The works of these filmmakers were issue driven, encouraging the governments to intervene in the economy of the USA or promoting the benefits of government policies in the United Kingdom. The films did not revolve around a particular event. They had neither protagonist nor antagonist. They mostly had "essay-like" structures rather than narratives. The films were mostly viewed as propaganda as they were motivated by drama of real life issues with a political consciousness (Cooper and Dancyger, 2005:2).

Diawara (1992), in his attempt to theorise African cinema, comes up with three main categories under which most African films up to the early 1990s fall. Social realist films, colonial confrontation and return to the source are his main genres of African films. The first two categories tend to tackle contemporary issues and historical colonial encounters in Africa respectively. The third group comprises films which tend to re-live the uncolonised Africa. The oral tradition, a main feature of this "return-to-the-source" lifestyle is quite crucial in this genre. This necessarily incorporates the didactic angle initially held by the oral art forms into the produced films.

Preference of the return-to-the-source genre enables a filmmaker "to be less overt with the political message in order to avoid censorship" (Diawara 1992:160). The thrust of traditional oral stories was to encourage members of the society to cultivate positive social morals. Message films have this moral obligation. They tend to cultivate a positive
world view that shuns vices and/or permits fertile ground for cultural as well as socio-economic development in the target society. Looking at film as a medium that combines the instructional role of several social institutions, Jowet Garth and James Linton (1980) say,

The movies are able to by-pass the traditional socializing agencies in our society such as the school, the church and parents and establish direct contact with the individual. Of course, we know that whatever response is made to the 'message' of the movies will be in accordance with the previous experiences of the individual, which takes into account the influence of these traditional social and cultural influences.

(Garth and Linton, 1980:73)

The filmmaker has an obligation to shun the evils in the society. In hiding behind the oral tradition, he enjoys a safe zone, which the government of the day does not suspect any ill can come from; only wisdom, if not mere entertainment19. African cineastes successfully explored this genre to present socially important messages. A good example is Gaston Kabore’s Wend Kuuni, which ably informs its viewers of the need for women to fight for their rights, infusing the message into a popular oral narrative. Kabore, speaking about his motivation to use return-to-the-source mode, says,

I wrote Wend Kuuni in the form of a traditional tale. I wanted the most popular indigenous narrative mode and cinematographic narrative to mutually fertilise each other, to create something that draws strength from one or the other. I believed that it was (...) a new cinematographic narrative. I stayed with this idea since then. My other films like Rabi (...) Buud Yam, my last film made in 1997, continue to draw their foundation from this cinematographic approach.

(Kabore 2000: 34)

In recent times, modern creative art forms including literature, radio and cinema have continued to encapsulate messages/information with entertainment. The most outstanding characteristics of this coating are language choice and spectacle. Simple, audience-
friendly language or dialects are chosen for particular target audiences. Filmmakers have, time and again, invoked the sentiments of Wa Thiong’o’s (1986) relation of the use of a language and the culture it transmits in the process of its use. Njogu (2005:56) finds in radio soaps what this study believes drives African cinematic productions: “the ability to captivate the audience, retention of the audience and transfer of information or cognitive experience to the audience.” These three re-affirm what other researchers believe is the cost of art production in Africa. African filmmakers, in “returning-to-the source,” as described by Diawara (1992), or drawing from the traditional oral art forms, according to Kabore (2000), frequently, implore the significance of language in culture, a feature that strongly typifies African oral tradition. Films such as Wanjiru Kinyanjui’s The Battle of the Sacred Tree (1995), Anne Mungai’s Saikati (1992), Sao Gamba’s Kolormask (1986) are among Kenyan films that resort to code mixing between English and local Kenyan languages in their bid to appeal more strongly to the Kenyan audiences. This quest for relevance in postcolonial films is necessitated by “a profound feeling that a radical break with the past was (sic) occurring” (Anderson 2003:193). Thus, the filmmakers make a conscious move towards the exhumation of a culture facing the threat of oblivion; a culture which once regularised life in their communities.
2.3.3 African Film Drawing from Orature's Rich Cultural Repertoire to Instruct

Thomas Sankara, a former head of State for Burkina Faso, once described the Pan-African Film and Television Festival of Ouagadougou (FESPACO), a major film festival in the continent, as "the reflection of the most complete dialogue between African cultures" (Diawara 1992: 137). The festival showcases films from all over the continent. Each region brings to the festival newer cultural developments bi-annually. This brings cinema's role in the continent even closer to that of the oral performance. Film festivals that have sprung up in the post-independent Africa like FESPACO, Zanzibar International Film Festival (ZIFF), Kenya International Film Festival (KIFF), Cape Town World Cinema Festival (SITHENGI) and many others can now be favourably compared to what Wa Thiong'o (1986:37) refers to as "the empty space" where different cultural exhibitions and conversations take place. In cultural exhibition, carefully thought out social and political problems are turned into cultural events through film for the viewers to see and ponder over.

Murphy (2000:4) reminisces that "a critic, Serge Daney (1979) has claimed, a certain Western critic had been vaguely expecting African cinema to be some "non-intellectual, all-singing all-dancing extravaganza." For such a critic, film is meant to reflect the culture of the society that produces it. Indeed, as Timothy Corrigan (2001:7-8) posits, one of the main aims of film criticism is to "make connections between a movie and other areas of culture in order to illuminate both the culture and the movies it produces." Daney may have missed the point in his exaggerated expectation of African cinema, yet he has a point in expecting a cinema that reflects - what to him is - all that goes on in Africa. 22
In the performance of African oral art forms, a combination of devices such as proverbs, chants, dance, music, enactment, among others mutually coexist in a single space and time. This multiplicity of performances was employed in order for the different performances to complement each other in instructing the society. In any form of education, use of different approaches not only breaks monotony — hence retaining the learners’ attention — but also ensures that the information is transferred through one method if not the other. African films have incorporated this approach in instructing the contemporary society. As a way of emphasizing African oral culture, the films use different forms of narration, idiolectic dialogue and subtitles (Kabore 2000). Subtitles are mainly used to translate the language. This approach renders culture the means of communication as well as the content of communication in a film such as *Kolormask*.

Unlike in Western films, which use a single meta-narrator to tell the story, African films tend to advance storylines using a variety of different characters.²³

*Kolormask* exemplifies African films which are highly influenced by the traditional African performances, which were communal and usually invoked the active participation of all in the community. Both performers and the audience shared a stage in a manner that when now reviewed in film, may seem stylized and exotic to the Western communities from which film was invented. To an African viewer, however, it is a nostalgic reflection of the indigenous African lifestyle. While Daney expects African film to be “non-intellectual, all-singing, all-dancing extravaganza,” it is important to realise that this tradition was not a mere entertainment or extravaganza. In essence, it was embedded on among other things, the pedagogical aspect that has continued to linger in
African films well into independence. Postcolonialists find in the cultural products being created after the colonial contact, vestiges of the pre-colonial art forms of the colonized which exist as hybridized or hegemonic responses to the relations and situations that followed the colonial contact. To Murphy (2000), “the Western critic must be sensitive to differing cultural values when dealing with African culture.” To me, African cinema occupies a big portion of what Murphy calls “African culture.” By extension, then, African cinema is included in his position.

Exploiting the technological advantages of film, spectacle is an important aspect in African theatre whose understanding has been modified in African audio-visual products. The idea of the long shots commonly used in African films like *Saikati* and *Kolormask* could mean a technical fault as much as it could mean that the director is telling a story from the omniscient narrator’s point of view whereby he sees everything hence no need for specific focuses (Diawara, 1992:202). On another level, the shots accentuate the communal spatial organisation in the pre-colonial life in Africa. Thackway (2002:232) posits that in African films, this kind of shot “recreates the kind of communal performance space characteristic of traditional outdoor theatre in (...) Africa.” This spectacularly conveys the communism represented by the communal nature of indigenous performances in African communities. Such camera set-ups are stylistically opposed to the Western framing which predominantly invokes extreme close-up, close-up, over-the-shoulder and medium shots with rare long shots.
2.3.4 Structural Continuities in Traditional Tale and Didactic film in Africa

The allegorical use of the tale structure in message films in Africa emanates, to a large extent, from the metaphorical instructional function of the two modes of expression; film and the tale. Centrality of the narrator and film director are evident as the plots unfold. Among other African films, this aspect is clear in Dani Kouyate’s *Keita! L'heritage’ du Griot* and *Sara*, an animated didactic film adapted from a children’s comic book. *Sara* employs a traditional story telling style to educate children on various concerns.

Nigerian and Ghanaian films are quite popular in most of Anglophone Africa. The films have been criticised to be structurally weak as they drag unnecessarily into several sequels. However, they continue to attract larger audiences in Africa. The loose structure is facilitated by extended explanations coupled with elaborate flashbacks, which make the ultimate running time unbearably long. This stems from the traditional African storytelling method of building the conflict slowly and getting into lengthy details, leaving little room for inference. In Kenya, *Saikati* heavily borrows from this tradition. Film being an expensive medium may not give room for such explanations since the length of a film has a direct implication on its production cost. When the idea of a sequel is not considered in the initial production budget, many times - as is the case with *Saikati* - lead actors change. Sometimes, locations and some props change as well, affecting the film negatively. Nevertheless, the didactic nature of a film like *Saikati* calls for a level of deep explanations. The target audience, producers and the director’s subconscious re-visit of the tale structure makes it difficult for the films to completely run away from the extended plots.
In African cinema, filmmakers explore different ways of captivating their audiences. A filmmaker’s psychological and social backgrounds, gender, among other factors, play significant roles in his process of attempting to create meaning. Even to the film consumer, the situation is not different. Some of the best criticisms of Souleymane Cisse’s *Yeelen* (1987) for example, would be expected to come from the Bambara elders, or, better still, members of the *Komo* - a secret society among the Bambara in Mali and Sudan around whom the story superficially revolve - for they fully understand the culture in which the film is set. Yet, if for a moment, we were to excuse the authorial intentional fallacy; it becomes disturbing to hear Cisse say that *Yeelen* was his most successfully rendered political film that criticised the contemporary Malian political status. At a deeper level, a good grasp of the political atmosphere of this film’s setting or production becomes more useful for its consumer, perhaps much more than familiarising oneself with its space-bound cultural outfit. It is not a basic requirement for one to be an insider or an outsider for one to comprehend a cultural artefact at a critical level. *Yeelen*, employs the tale structure in order to draw the society’s attention to the political ills of post-independent government in Mali.

This resonates with Sembene Ousmane’s rather unusual association of *xala* - a curse - with political regime in the post independent Senegal. *Xala* (1974) richly presents a political agenda, criticizing the corrupt Senegalese post-independence state leaders. This is coated in the society’s oral tradition; a cultural belief in a condition known as *Xala*, a curse which renders men impotent, which befalls El Hadji on the eve of his wedding to
his third wife. The embarrassment and the turmoil he goes through trying to regain his manhood compares to the socio-economic stalemate in the society occasioned by the new leaders’ (including El Hadji) misappropriation of the state’s resources. The film is not an overt and simplistic attack on the leaders but a well calculated exploration of their misuse of office. If one takes this film literally, he will easily fail to grasp the symbolic presentation. In a film and literary colloquium held during the 9th FESPACO in 1985, it emerged that the attempt to adapt Wole Soyinka’s *Kongi’s Harvest* (1973) and Cheikh Hamidou Kane’s *Ambiguous Adventure* (1984) to film relatively failed much more compared to the success of films such as Wend Kuuni (1983) and *Nelisita* (1984) which are films based on the oral tradition. Many successful African classics have borrowed immensely from the oral traditions of the African communities that produced them in order to entice the audience with the familiar.

2.4 The Impact of the Third Cinema Movement on African Film

As a part of a global cinematic movement that captured much of the third world, African cinema finds itself in sync with alternative cinema cultures such as postcolonial cinemas, which closely identify with Octavio Gatino and Fernando Solanas’ Third Cinema, Julio G. Espinosa’s Imperfect Cinema, Ruby Rich’s Queer Cinema and Glauber Rocha’s Cinema Novo. The movements mainly strove to give an alternative view of the more established mainstream cinemas.

Of all the above, third cinema had a more direct influence on the didactic mode found in African message films today. The movement encompasses a set of principles designed
initially by the theory and films produced in the 1960s. The proponents classified world cinema into three rather silent yet distinct categories of first cinema, comprising Hollywood films which were basically industrial and commercial. This feature made Hollywood go to great extents to entice their audiences with exotic stories in order to increase ticket sales. Second cinema included the European entertainment comprising the Avant Garde cinema and auteur films. Emerging later, third cinema was the cinema of resistance, addressing such conflicts as those of class, which later on took a racial dimension. Much of critical African cinema took the approach of third cinema as the rise of African filmmakers from the 1960s coincided with the height of the fight for a liberated space both politically and culturally at the time when this movement was just being unveiled.

The cinema that emanated from this need for cultural and political emancipation had to be loaded with pedagogical messages that would inform not only the oppressed of his predicament and the need to move out of it, but would also tell the ‘oppressor,’ about the misconceptions delivered to him via the several cultural artefacts from both early voyageurs and colonial artists operating within first and second cinema. The cinema worked towards contesting mediated images of Africa from the Western cinemas and television newscasts.

African filmmakers had a similar uphill task of correcting the distortions of a continent, previously blown out of proportion by their Western counterparts. This explains why most early African filmmakers created narratives around historical figures and events
strengthening Diawara's (1992) classification of African films. This formed the bulk of most early African films. Some of the films directly associated with this movement include Ousmane Sembene's *Emitai* (1971) and *Camp de Thiaroye* (1988), Lakhdar Haminah's *Chronique des années de braise* (1975) and Rachida Krim's *Sous les pieds des femmes* (1997) among others. Some of these films focus majorly on the filmmakers' contestation or questioning of the European versions of what Africa is. The films question the authenticity of the European stories about Africa, setting a strong pace for message filmmaking in Africa.

2.5 Conclusion

In summary, the chapter's main crux is that "issue based" entertainment was in existence in Africa long before the colonial encounter. Yet the colonial process gave it another dimension using the new medium of film. The information was carefully encapsulated in orature, which included individual performances as well as communal rites of passage that characterise most African traditional cultures.

Oral cultures store knowledge in the popular communal memory while literate cultures, stressing the visual, encode theirs in written as well as recording and retrieval technologies. The encounter between these two has resulted in a mix which favours the dominance of the technological. Filmmakers in Africa therefore emerge as cultural intermediaries between the two media of expression.
CHAPTER THREE

3.0 CONTEXTUALISING CONTENT IN THE SELECTED FILMS

3.1 Introduction

This chapter examines the thematic inclination of Sao Gamba’s *Kolormask*, Ann Mungai’s *Saikati*, Robby Bresson and Mburu Kimani’s *Pieces for Peace* and Njoki Mbuthia and Mona Ombogo-Sott’s *Unseen, Unsung, Unforgotten*. As indicated in chapter one, this study postulates that these four are message films carrying messages formulated for and transmitted to a pre-defined target audience. The core of message filmmaking is the thematic interests in the films. Therefore, the directors of these films simply employ the film medium as a vessel of communicating to their target audience. In any communication process, “all messages (...) are made by some source for some audience for some purpose” (Shyles, 2007:17). A message filmmaker, being the assumed “source” of the message, must have a purpose for sending out the message. In this chapter, the messages in the *Kolormask, Saikati, Unseen, Unsung Unforgotten* and *Pieces for Peace* are identified and their purpose interrogated so as to establish the films’ reception by the audience. Even though the filmmakers - at the time of production of their films – had a target audience in mind, this study recognises that the films have also been watched by the unintended viewers. As a result, this has widened the scope of the films’ reception and interpretation.
For a proper understanding of an audiovisual work, an exemplary grasp of the social and cultural context of its production is mandatory. Part of understanding a film’s context includes “knowing the source’s reasons for making it and the audience’s motivation for watching it” (ibid). Apart from these, this study adds a third dimension to Shyles’ observation. It explores the audience’s position within the process of meaning reception. These can only be fully understood within the socio-political contexts of the films’ production.

The four films analysed in this study were produced within a time frame of about thirty years, from the 1980s into late 2000s. It is in the 1980s that a viable local film culture started to establish itself in Kenya. The earlier films made in Kenya before 1980 had very little impact on the public audience as they were not publicly exhibited in the theatres, which were the main exhibition vents apart from the monopoly of the state owned Voice of Kenya television network (now Kenya Broadcasting Corporation – KBC - TV). The production and release of *Rise and Fall of Idi Amin* (Sharad Patel, 1980) opened a new era in the Kenyan film culture. At this time, the country was more ready for local films than when Ragbil Singh and Kuljit Pal produced *Mlevi* (1968) and later on *Mrembo* (Barasa 2010).25
3.2 Social Concerns in the Post-independence Film Environment in Africa

Most African states entered independence with a strong inclination towards development through self reliance. This mentality was informed by the subversive stand taken by the movements that influenced the rise of independence struggles in most of the continent’s countries. Such movements include Pan-Africanism and Negritude. Cinema, though a young offspring of the colonial encounter, in the continent, was nurtured into fostering the ideologies of these movements by African filmmakers. This is characterised by the agenda for the early discussions concerning the development of a vibrant film industry in the continent. These discussions laid the foundation for the thematic concerns of the films that followed. A lot of African films such as the works of Sembene Ousmane, Kwaw Ansah, Dgibril Diop, Amadu Saalum criticised contemporary African societies which were characterised by cultural conflicts, alienation among others (Pfaff 1992).

The main discussions on the use of film to pass across serious social development messages began only in the 1970s, creating more awareness on the viability of a local film culture. (Cham and Bakary, 1996). The establishment of the Kenya Film Corporation in 1967, the first of its kind in sub-Saharan Africa (Kerr 1995), also created some film consciousness so that by the 1980s, the Kenyan society was ready for, and expecting local productions.
A major challenge to Sub-Saharan African countries is that their political independence was not accompanied by economic and cultural independence. Another argument has emerged that Anglophone Africa did not fully embrace the film culture due to the British exploitative approach to colonisation as opposed to the French’s assimilating style, which gave room for the French support for cultural products in Africa. Unlike the French imperialists, the British colonial masters did not support their colonies’ cultural products by, say, training and support for cultural productions – such as film – even after independence. Diawara posits that

the fact that most of the filmmakers from the beginning of FESPCO to present, have been funded by the French ministry of Cooperation has led some observers to point to French neo-colonialism in African cinema...it is clear that Francophone countries lead other African countries in production (except Egypt and Maghreb) because of the production and postproduction facilities France has made available to them since independence. (Diawara 1992:9)

This trend of filmmaking in Africa is the anticlimactic betrayal of the promise of cultural - including artistic - liberation encapsulated in such earlier films as Kolormask. However, with the recent advent of digital video technology, Nigerian and Ghanaian film industries have thrived in film production, challenging the earlier lead by Francophone. Nigerian film industry, dubbed Nollywood, has risen to compete with major global film industries. Its success partially draws from the country’s earlier dependence on the West both technologically and aesthetically (Diawara 1992:9).
Kenyan filmmakers have to find paths of negotiation within the turbulent post-imperial space characterised by neo-colonial tendencies. The dawn of post-independence period almost guaranteed a panacea to domination-oriented problems. Borrowing immensely from the revolutionary Third Cinema concepts, early Kenyan filmmakers dwelt rather so much on giving voice to the marginalised communities that were beginning to stake out their places in the debate surrounding the survival of African cultures (*Kolormask*) and on the empowerment of the female through formal education as the only way to socio-economic success (*Saikati*). As mentioned earlier, the struggles of these communities as portrayed in the Kenyan films closely replicate the interests of the subaltern studies whose origin and focus is local sites of resistance in India including the historiographies of “the marginalised communities, gender, races and groups” (Nayar 2008:51).

The birth of African filmmaking coincided with political independence of most African countries. It “emerged with the independent movements to liberate African states and coincided with the black consciousness movements of the Diaspora” (Ukadike 1994:60). Given the coincidence, African cinema inevitably joined the other arts in articulating the need for cultural liberation of the African. It, therefore, came up as a means of bringing to the fore, the African and his lifestyle, which Western films marginalise. The cinema also came up as a means of re-writing history. To a large extent, the preceding Western productions as well as the atrocities of the colonial encounter moulded African cinema. It is, therefore, evident that the concerns of the African film are in many ways similar to those of the post-independence African literature. Thus, Harris (1994:179) says,
The post-colonial writers’ self appointed mission to forge their countries’ national consciousness is largely defined by the Anglo centric portrayal of their culture and people by the earlier British colonial writers. Indeed, the fiction of many Third World writers can only be fully understood through an awareness of its interconnection with earlier British fictional works. Before the emergence of post-colonial fiction, Western readers were given the British view of the empire, and thus, naturally came to see the various colonised lands and peoples as the colonisers saw them.

To Nayar, “negotiation is often an attempt to achieve an identity different from the one imposed on them by the colonizer” (2008:52). Yet, for the filmmaker to successfully go through this process, he needs to be aware of the versions of the colonial histories that circulate. These histories do change constantly. So, as the postcolonial filmmaker fumbles to re-tell his(s)tories, the coloniser finds newer stories and descriptions of the colonised. But the coloniser’s stories are related in their subjugating nature.

3.3 Thematic Concerns in the Selected Films

3.3.1 Kolormask

Diawara’s (1992) three typologies of African films reflect Africa in its quest for social and economic justice. Apart from the colonial confrontation and Return to the source modes, Diawara identifies the social realist narrative in African cinema, a typology that thematises socio-cultural concerns of the time. Mbye Cham (1996) believes that the themes that dominate African films tackle the day to day social realities and colonisation and its legacies. The experiences that emanate(d) from the encounters between Africa and Euro-Christian or Arab-Islamic cultures have provided African cinema with a lot of raw material. Kolormask is no exception. Sao Gamba, the film’s script writer and director was the then director of Kenya Film Corporation when Kolormask was produced. Having
lived in Europe for over seven years, studying film directing, he was inspired to make a film relating to the cultural encounters between Western and African lifestyles. The interests of African cinastes and those of KFC only complemented his desire to tell a cultural story. His story was not fully focused on a particular aspect of the intercultural relations between these two communities.

The production of *Kolormask* was funded by the Kenyan Government. This was in tandem with some of the resolutions of several manifestos, declarations and resolutions, which had been made concerning African cinema. From the early 1970s, African filmmakers and other prominent cineastes sought to build a common approach to African filmmaking. Between 11th - 13th December 1973, third world filmmakers met in Algiers, Algeria, to deliberate on the possible use of third world cinema as a popular tool of re-making history. They saw cinema as a means of seeking cultural liberation and progress. Co-productions among the third world countries was viewed as a means by which the countries would express “anti-imperialist solidarity.”

The Algiers Charter on African Cinema was adopted at the second Federation Panafricaine des Cineastes (FEPACI) in Algiers in January 1975. The charter observed that cinema has an important role in the development of the third world countries. It recognised the capability of cinema to educate, inform and raise consciousness among the masses. It proposed that for African cinema to accomplish these, it has a duty to question the image the Africans have of themselves and their position in the global society.
charter called upon the individual governments to "take a leading role in building a national cinema" (Mbye and Bakari, 1996: 26).

A similar meeting, the Niamey Manifesto of African Filmmakers, was held between March 1st – 4th 1982 in Niamey, Niger. Its participants, drawn from different areas of cinema, observed that African cinema needed a commitment for it to assert the cultural identity of the Africans. It also recommended that governments should support national film industries in terms of policies, financial assistance and distribution of films in particular countries. The governments were also to establish national film corporations to centralise all matters pertaining to cinema in their countries. Many more recommendations have been made from the 1980s to date.30

All these recommendations focused on the need for African, indeed third world filmmakers to use cinema to liberate and re-present themselves to the world. These were the same concerns that Kenya Film Corporation had in the years that preceded the production of Kolormask. These culminated in the report written by Nyamwaya et. al in the early 1980s concerning the film industry in Kenya.31 The report, among other things, complained of cultural undermining of Africans in Western films (Nyamwaya et. al p.3). They saw an urgent need for the Africans to play major roles in filmmaking rather than the subservient roles they played in Western films. This, they believed would present a different Kenya from the one depicted in some of the foreign films made in the country. To the African filmmaker, it had become evidently clear that in order to consolidate his cultural and traditional values, through this medium, it is necessary to play a major role in
the production and distribution of his own films (ibid). For a long time, Kenyan thespians only played supporting roles. "I was dismayed to see David Mulwa play houseboy to Richard Harris in *To Walk with Lions*, yet his superlative talents require that he gets a bigger role," says Albert Wandago, a Kenyan filmmaker.32

From the above recommendations, we see that the individual governments were called upon to collaborate with the filmmakers and the other film practitioners to achieve the objectives of African cinema. The Kenyan Government took up the challenge when it sponsored the production of *Kolormask* through its film corporation. The film in many ways, though locally, conforms to some of the resolutions and declarations put forward regarding African, if not Third World Cinema in general. The recommendations demonstrate a case of 'appropriation' of the coloniser's medium by the former colonies. Appropriation is a Postcolonial feature whereby the colonised adopts the coloniser's forms of creative works in order to articulate issues of relevance to the colonised (Gandhi, 1998). After independence, African cineastes have used cinema in trying to reclaim or come to terms with cultural displacement incurred as a result of colonial encounter.33 *Kolormask*, pioneered this tendency in Kenyan cinema.

a). Cultural Alienation Emanating from Western Influence

*Kolormask* criticises cultural alienation that has its roots in the colonial contact between Kenya and Britain from the 19th century. John Litodo, a young Kenyan marries Eliza, a British-born American lady when he goes to study in London. While in London, he adopts British lifestyle to ease his stay in the foreign land. He tells Eliza that
When we were in Europe together, I had to adjust myself to the majority of the people there. Now that we are here in Africa, I think we might just have to do the same.

The film indicates that sometimes, a victim of alienation embraces it not so much in awe of it, but for convenience. John is aware that as a minority in England, he has to comply with the Western lifestyle for ease of life. The couple later relocates to Kenya when John completes his studies. Their two children, Toby and Susan, are already grown when John realises how withdrawn from his people he has become. At this point, when John is steadily practicing as a medical doctor in Nairobi, the differences between him and Eliza magnify as John finds it necessary to trace his way back to his cultural roots. Through his uncle, he meets Dorothy, an embodiment of a loving, submissive yet aggressive African woman who not only respects John as a man, but also has worked hard enough to become a lawyer. Dorothy is juxtaposed with Eliza, who is portrayed as a rude wife (to John), employer (to her maidservant), and daughter-in-law, and one who is constantly defiant to everyone’s ideas. John vocalises Sao Gamba’s comparison of the two in an interior monologue:

What is wrong with this woman? I really have tried my best. Yet the more I try, the more we drift apart. Why is Eliza so blind? (...) And look at Dorothy, just look at her! She respects me as a man, but Eliza wants to use me as a tool.

John knows what is good for him and goes for it. He wants a woman who can show him affection, respect him and one who will not watch his every step like Eliza. This reminds him of how alienated from his communities’ values he was when he married Eliza.
Kolormask, therefore, depicts the situation of many post-independence elites in Kenya. The subject matter revolves around an experience many Kenyans have witnessed in their day to day lives. For Kenyans looking up to the West for their tertiary education, and sometimes consequently engaging in interracial marriages that are sometimes disturbed by culture-clash, John and Eliza are part of the society.

b). Valorisation of Traditional African Social Practices

Kolormask, going by Diawara’s (1992) narrative styles, exhibits both Return to the Source and social realist techniques attempting to reclaim Africa’s cultural wealth. In giving these practices a voice within the multicultural set-up of the Kenyan society, Gamba silently gives the African a different outlook. The African becomes a major stakeholder in the post-independence society, in which he lives. His position is, therefore, withdrawn from the peripheral observer and continuous follower of the decisions made elsewhere or by the “master” as witnessed in the Western historiography. Hence, Gamba heeds the call by a pioneer African film critic, Tahar Cheriaa that “your cinema shall be a militant cinema, it shall be first and foremost a cultural action with social (...) value, or it shall be nothing”34. Thus, the film tends to emphasise the superiority of the pre-colonial African way of life, painting the centre and its reminders as the backdrop through which the significance of the formerly marginalised African practices is stressed.

A good example of Gamba’s attempt to celebrate traditional African culture comes out in his treatment of different rites of passage. He delves into two ceremonies and the significance attached to them. First, Gamba creates the urge to get circumcised
traditionally in Toby, John’s second child. An offspring of interracial marriage, Toby is not expected to be so enthusiastic about the African ways of initiation into adulthood. Gamba, however makes him find out a lot about circumcision from Auntie Maria. He gets all the details from their conversation and, when his parents’ domestic wrangles drive him out of home in the middle of the night, he takes advantage of the exit to “disappear” into an oncoming circumcision ceremony in Auntie Maria’s neighbourhood. Although John nearly loses his life searching for Toby, we do not see him reprimand the son for causing much grief to the family; John is happy that his son is now a man. This explains why John puts the son in charge of the older daughter, Susan, as the children set off for holiday in Mombasa because “he is now a man”. The initiation transforms Toby into “a man,” giving him powers - for the first time - to be the one in charge of their trip to Mombasa.

Apart from the circumcision rites, Gamba explores various death and funeral rites as a way of glorifying traditional African cultural practices. John’s mother dies. The sad news is broadcast though traditional mode of communication: weeping. Women wail excitedly as people who have just learnt of the death stream into the homestead. The same practice is repeated when John and his family enter the compound. Startled by all the “singing, rejoicing, feasting,” Eliza asks when the “foolishness” will end. Agnes offers her a detailed explanation. Agnes is a European lady married in John’s community. The director creates her as a humble lady who mingle very well with the members of her husband’s community. She contrasts Eliza in her ability to conform with the needs of the majority. Agnes says,
All this ‘foolishness’ will end in about three days after the burial, which is tomorrow. And then, all the women of this homestead will have their heads shaved. And, because you are the wife of the senior son, you will lead the women by having your head shaved.

In highlighting the African lifestyle, which John now yearns for after living in alienation, Gamba subversively paints the Western lifestyle as too demanding, boring and generally stringent. He does this through Eliza, Johnson, her lover and Susan, her daughter. In postcolonial discourse, subversion, an inversion of colonial oppositions, is one of the ways through which the creative artist resists demeaning portrayal of the colonised. Susan and Johnson are the only people who hold views similar to Eliza’s throughout the film. Therefore, they share with her the inverted position in the film.

c) Need for Cultural Tolerance

Adopting a neutral outlook to the different cultures represented in the film, *Kolormask* looks at individuals’ inner traits going beyond the skin colour mask. The director criticises vices in general, no matter who commits them. The fact that Eliza (whose behaviour is most condemned) is European does not, automatically, make her the perpetrator of these acts. Sao Gamba justifies this position by presenting to us Susan and Toby, who are half-casts but hold totally opposing views about their identity. Toby believes he is African while Suzy is convinced she is too “civilised” to be an African. She asks her brother to remove his clothes and jump into the forest if he feels like being an African. Suzy’s worldview is a replica of her mother’s. Gamba, therefore, condemns such extremist worldviews regarding alien cultures.
The director further heightens the call to intercultural tolerance through Agnes, whose standpoint on Africans contrasts that of Eliza. Agnes is a European lady married in John’s village. Although we do not see Agnes’ husband, people like Auntie Maria appreciate her respect for the community’s customs. Agnes believes that “Africans are real people” and that one just needs to understand their philosophy about life. The Wilson family, although of African descent, are fully metamorphosed into Western lifestyle. Their views about Africans are similar to Eliza’s. Eliza admires the Wilsons so much that she even asks John why they cannot live like the Wilsons. With Agnes and the Wilsons shifting positions, fully dissolving into ‘other’ cultures initially foreign to them, *Kolormask* exhibits a dismantling of cultural frontiers, a common observation in postcolonial reading or viewership.

Even though Gamba only aimed at narrating experiences that emanate from inter-cultural encounters based in his observation, several particular themes have been identified in *Kolormask*. Many more themes could still be identified in this film, depending on the viewer’s critical background. Therefore, the themes identified here are just but examples to exemplify the film’s ability to communicate to the audience.

3.3.2 *Saikati*

a). Gender Relations and Power

Ann Mungai’s first feature film, and one of Kenya’s earliest indigenous films, *Saikati*, tells the story of Saikati, a young African woman who strives to succeed in life despite the many hurdles the society places on her way. Both Mungai (in *Saikati*) and Gamba (in
Kolormask) tend to address the questions surrounding cultural uncertainties experienced in postcolonial Kenya. As Gamba dwells on a story that relates to his own “reception” as he came back to Kenya after several years in Poland, Mungai’s motivation to make Saikati tilts her story to focus on gender relations in postcolonial Africa. Mungai says that her objective in making the film was to

tell the world that African women are stronger, not as had already been portrayed in other films. They are not only victims; they are able to face up to challenges. I wanted to tell the world that African women are intelligent, they are hard-working and they also have some morals.37

The challenges that unfold in Kolormask affect the society as a holistic unit. Yet for, Mungai, some of these challenges get more complicated when looked at through the eye of a minority group. In trying to achieve her objective, Mungai addresses issues similar to Gamba’s through a female’s eye, giving it a unique specificity. Mungai’s approach reflects her own and Cham’s belief that female filmmakers from Africa, like some of their male counterparts

engage in the broad range of issues and topics thrown up by the experiences and challenges of life in post-colonial Africa. However, unlike many of their male counterparts, some of these women filmmakers bring to these issues and topics a particular female and gender sensibility whose absence in previous male-directed films severely handicapped the filmic discourse on these issues and topics.

(Cham and Mungai 1994: 93)

Thus, Mungai’s rendition takes a strong feminist turn from Gamba’s. The film chronicles the plight of Saikati, not so much as a person engulfed in cultural double identity, but much more as a female who has to succeed in a patriarchal society. This, Mungai says is
her story. She revisits her motivation to take the feminist turn, saying she explores the medium of film to tell the story of strong African women like her mother:

The African films that I used to see as a child never portrayed the images of the African woman I know. (...) after my father passed away, I was about thirteen years old, my mother worked so hard to encourage me to go to school ... I remember my mother, though she was not an educated woman, she said no, my daughter is not going to get married. I started wondering in school, what can I do to portray characters like my mother? To show the world that Africa has got women who are positive, women who are strong, not women who are just weak ... I wanted to portray the positive image of an African woman the way I had seen my mum. ... The Story of Saikati is the way she struggles from avoiding early marriage to struggling with her mother to go back to school.

(Barasa, 2010)

Being the scriptwriter as well as the director of *Saikati*, Mungai had much control of direction of the story. Sometimes, directing a screenplay written by someone else becomes tricky when the writer and the director do not share the mental picture of the final product. With this advantage, Mungai moulds the female characters to her desire; she gives them the required stamina to subvert the existing male dominance not only in the urban set up, but also in the rural Maasai culture.

Women, like colonised subjects have been relegated to the position of “other”, “colonized” by various forms of patriarchal domination. They thus share with colonized races and cultures an intimate experience of the politics of oppression and repression.

(Ashcroft et al., 2006:233)
As colonised subjects, women may take it upon themselves to subvert the overbearing male power that suppresses the women. Saikati is evidently the director’s mouthpiece. As such, the director enables her to resist the hegemonic patriarchy in her community by defying her uncle’s command that she marries the chief’s son. Saikati evokes an un-heard of topic in her community. Questioning, let alone resisting the uncle’s order is a bold move Saikati takes. This could lead to the uncle sending both Saikati and her mother out of the home. Achieving her initial objective, the director succeeds in showing that extraordinary strength such as Saikati’s lies within African women. That these women can indeed overcome the tribulations they face in such a society as Saikati’s.

Mungai’s ability to identify with Saikati invokes the question of the role of a committed artist. Tekpetey (2010:1) believes that such an artist has to meet two conditions: first, he addresses “fellow exploited and oppressed people”. Secondly, his target audience should be able to perceive the artistic message. Thus, Mungai’s success in portraying the African women positively can be judged by whether the target audience perceived the information and if so, their manner of perception needs to be interrogated. Mungai’s quest to “show the world that Africa has got women who are positive, women who are strong, not women who are just weak...;” her need to “portray the positive image of African woman the way I had seen my mum” (Barasa 2010) is contested by the spectators interviewed during this study. In one of the FGDs with film critics on the film’s meaning, it strongly emerged that Saikati’s younger sister tends to document a lot of information in memory, yet she doesn’t use the information in any way to contribute to
the society, nor to add meaning to the film. Cooper and Dancyger (2005:130-131) submit that

the amount of time devoted to developing the secondary characters is (...) far less. Although this may mean disproportionate reliance on stereotypes for the secondary characters, a more productive approach is to relate the secondary characters to their functions in the plot of the film. They have a purpose in the plot.

Saikati's sister comes out as a very weak character, depicting women as even weaker beings. The knowledge she has should be put to use in order to help the society. The "strong" women of the film should show their strength by acting, not being significantly quiet. As she hoards the information, the viewer gets mixed signals about Mungai's proposition to show the world the strong African women. This weakness in her development should not be confused with Cooper and Dancyger's proposal for a screenwriter's intentional bid to pay less attention to the secondary characters as opposed to the primary or lead characters that are usually developed further.

Ironically, the story takes an unusual diegetic path whereby Saikati, the protagonist, largely resists transformation within her character arc. Within the story's span, Saikati mixes with new people, new ideals and new experiences. She has a great opportunity to make comparisons, make choices and sometimes be influenced by these new experiences and cultures. These influences may not be strong enough to wholly change her. Yet, the partial influences or contaminations may easily alter her decisions and aspirations. This constitutes transformation. The audience may not expect her to change her viewpoint, but
transformation is naturally expected in a character’s growth and interaction with her environment. As Dancyger (2006: 108) puts it,

A main character must have the capacity to transform and indeed must undergo an actual transformation during the film. Secondary characters will have significant interactions with the main character that may help or harm the main character. What is critical is that these secondary characters are passionate enough in their goals that they bring about change in the main character.

In as much as Saikati undergoes transformation when she goes to the city, she retrieves her earlier worldview, and cools back to it. She goes on a hero’s journey, a concept in which an author of a creative story such as novel, short story, film among others, makes the main character go on a journey of discovery. In the journey, the audience or reader accompanies the character into a discovery journey in order to unveil new places, ideas about herself or the world. While on this journey, the protagonist makes discoveries that are responsible for her actions and growth. As such, the journey necessitates that a character undergoes some necessary transformation that does not necessarily involve change by the time he comes to the end of the journey.\textsuperscript{38} Saikati resists tradition, running into the city with her cousin, Monica. In the city, Monica’s attempts to rapidly convert her both physically and morally do not bear any fruit. Her intermittent resistance to this change and constant questioning of the urban ways makes her appear more unexplored by the time she comes from the journey, leaving the spectator with a lot of doubts about the necessity of the journey in the first place.
The director of Saikati may have aimed at focusing on reflecting the strength of the African woman. However, a keen analysis of the film exposes other themes or messages that the director may not have envisioned. Diang’a (2011:6) equates writing in literature to film production while on the same plane sees readership to be similar to viewership in the process of meaning generation. She says “writing is a social practice with a social function. It therefore follows that meaning of such writing is a social accomplishment in which the participation of the writer and the reader function within the event of that particular discourse”. This approach to meaning gives the viewer credibility as a creator of the meaning he gets from the film he watches. Therefore, Mungai’s intended meaning is successfully passed on to the viewer. Yet, as indicated in the sections that follow, critical viewership of the film exposes more messages in the film than what the filmmaker intended.

b) Cultural Crisis

Saikati seems to dwell so much on cultural conflicts between the indigenous Maasai culture and the influence of the British colonial contact. In a hybridized society like the 1990s Kenya, identity conflicts are a common phenomenon. As an individual tries to associate with a particular cultural outfit, other cultures intrude this cultural space, creating what may look like ambivalence on the part of the individual. He is then seen as an ideological podium where the cultures interplay and many times collide. Cultural crisis calls for a revisit to ethnicity, one of the major concepts relating to identity within the postcolonial discourse. “There is ... a close connection between the notion of identity
and the awareness of belonging to a distinctive group set apart from others ... by race, religion, national background or some cultural marker” (Gleason, 2006:195).

Mungai explores this subject by creating a story around a young Maasai woman who is caught between tradition and modern cultures in post-independent Kenya. Initially, Mungai introduces Saikati coming from school, walking into her rural Maasai home in Maasai Mara, Kenya. Saikati immediately changes into her traditional regalia and joins the other youth in an evening of traditional dance expedition. I view these dances as a metonym of African traditional lifestyle, while the formal school Saikati attends, a representative of the Western influence on that community.

Another representation of this condition in Saikati can be seen through her dressing. Her dressing is a major signifier of her identity. Her first appearance on the screen positions her as a character whose goal to achieve formal education is well defined. Then she puts on traditional clothes in order to fit within the traditional dance environment, signifying her desire to uphold her community’s indigenous culture. In the city, Saikati has to change into a more befitting outfit, again, to be accepted in the urban ethnic group, which is highly infiltrated by the Western ideologies. For her to get back to the Mara, Saikati puts on her traditional clothes again. It is between these two opposing forces that Saikati and her community find themselves caught up. This leads the occupants of the community like Saikati to express conflict of identities.
Saikati’s strongest allusion to the depth of indigenous beliefs in her comes out when she describes several chains hanging round her neck to her European boyfriend. She hands him one of them saying it “is the moon that guides me in the night and it is the keeper of all my dreams”. This statement gives direction to Saikati’s indigenous religious orientation since the moon features strongly in the Maasai mythology and other literatures on the Maasai culture. It has a lot of supernatural capabilities in the community.

c) Need for Cultural Negotiation

In this film, Mungai shuns certain traditional practices like early marriages and failure to give girls a chance to attain formal education. She views them as a hindrance to the society’s economic growth in the postcolonial space. Yet, on the same breath, the director uplifts some of the indigenous beliefs. Successfully, Saikati strives to overcome all the hindrances on her way to attaining what she wants. The “moon” that guides her is probably responsible for her achievement. Mungai keeps this information from the spectator till towards the end of the film. The herbs she quickly, though unbelievably finds and applies on Hamish’s injured leg also seem to work almost instantly. Saikati says confidently that her mother taught her about the medicinal herb. This is typical of indigenous cultures, where knowledge such as this was traditionally passed on verbally from generation to another. The postcolonial space has been characterised by such self-contradicting tendencies which are described by Dubois as half-hearted double aims, which result in incomplete achievements. He says,
throughout history, the powers of single black men flash here and there like falling stars, and die sometimes before the world has rightly gauged their brightness. Here in America, in the few days since Emancipation, the black man’s turning hither and thither in hesitant and doubtful striving has often made his very strength to lose effectiveness, to seem like absence of power, like weakness. And yet it is not weakness, - it is the contradiction of double aims. The double-aimed struggle of the black artisan - on the one hand to escape white contempt for a nation of mere hewers of wood and drawers of water, and on the other hand to plough and nail and dig for a poverty-stricken horde - could only result in making him a poor craftsman, for he had but half a heart in either cause.40

Mungai creates the point of intersection within Saikati a point at which cultures intersect and negotiate their existence. The juxtaposition of traditional and Western culture within the individual introduces to the spectator, a woman trying to fit in the two distinct worlds. She may not fully integrate into either of the worlds. In the city, she is lost; in the village, the society puts too much pressure on her. Yet, she has to device ways of living within the two identities. The juxtaposition brings to the fore the need to search for a space where both identities exist, be it peacefully or un-peacefully. Thus, the double identity in Saikati makes her suggest ways of accommodating the two opposing forces within herself. She suggests both peaceful negotiation and rebellion. In peaceful negotiation, she suggests that her mother pleads with the uncle to understand Saikati’s position. She says “Mother please, tell him I don’t want to get married. Please, mother... I don’t want. Please, mother, plead with him. Persuade him, mother. Please...” On the rebellious path, Saikati disappears into the city, leaving the uncle in disbelief. Nonetheless, both ways lead her to continue harbouring the two worlds within herself.
Formal Education as a Pathway out of Poor Living Conditions

Saikati is undertaking formal education, nursing her hopes to become formally employed after school and build her mother a better house and remove her family from the "poverty" they live in. She says: "I want to go on with school... I want to complete my education, get a job and build you a nice house. I don't want to get married..." She tries to pull away from the traditional marriage conventions, from the traditional education system, from the traditional shelters that her community does not question; to modern life characterised by formal schooling system, modern housing, which view traditional Maasai manyatta as a sign of poverty.

Saikati puts a lot of emphasis on education as the only way to emancipate herself and family from economic lack. Mungai stresses the need to the girl child formal education as she too has the capacity to upgrade her family's economic status. In an interview with Mbye Cham (1994), Mungai reveals that she consciously stresses this point in the film because of the low levels of educated women in Kenya at the time of the film's production.

When I look at Kenya I see that women constitute 51%, the majority, of the population, but each time I go to the rural areas, especially, I see that most of the people who are less educated or not educated at all are women, and this places women at a disadvantage in society and poses a lot of challenges. ...I found out that one of the major reasons was early marriage. ...they marry early and then start having children early and these children, in turn, marry early, the trend of women getting no education just goes on and on and on... most often people will tend to choose to educate boys and make girls stay at home in cases of financial difficulty. ...So, I decided to focus on just one issue, that of early marriage and its consequences.

Cham and Mungai (1994:99-100)
The director fears that if the girl is left out of school, the girl will soon fall prey to the harsh patriarchal demands exemplified in the chief's son and Saikati's uncle. School offers refuge to girls by delaying their marriage age while at the same time refining their intellectual acumen. Formal education is, arguably, what differentiates Saikati from her mother and Monica (her cousin). While the two concentrate on the short-term effects of the decisions they make, Saikati views life in totality, focusing on the long-term benefits of the choices she makes. For example, the mother fears that Saikati's refusal to obey the uncle will make them be sent out of their home. She also jubilates that Saikati's marriage will yield lots of wealth in form of dowry. Although she supports her daughter's intention to go on with school, they differ on such excitements. Saikati tries to explain to her the long-term and sustainable benefits of going to school. Similarly, Monica keeps on pestering Saikati to relax and "have fun for once". She gets fed up with Saikati's insistence on stringent morals instead of enjoying the company of the male tourist Monica has paired her with. Saikati knows that having fun is short-lived and will not solve the major problems her family faces.

Mungai subtly tells the viewer that African women are strong, but education improves this strength, making them more constructive members of the society. Saikati's main goal throughout the film is to go to school and make life around her better. She strongly says this to those who put hurdles on her way to this achievement. The first recipient of this message is her mother, who relays to her the shocking decision made by the uncle. She also stresses this point to Monica as well as her supposed boyfriend, Hamish. In the end,
she certainly convinces all of them and makes her way back to school at the end of the film.

e). The Elusive Urban Promise

Space and the social relations it harbours or produces are closely interrelated. Space easily creates the forms of interactions in it while at the same time, these interactions and their subsequent relations define that space. Thus, the two re-produce each other (Granqvist, 2004). This argument applies to the city as a spatial as well as abstract construction. In the mind of a city immigrant, especially coming from a rural set up, different images of hope linger. Granqvist believes that entering and exiting Nairobi - Kenya’s capital – can be a demonstration of “empowerment,” transformation or destabilisation of an already existing cultural repertoire that defines the immigrant. Saikati’s experiences in the city reflect this postulation. Saikati runs into the city with green hopes of shedding off the rural, a place of male domination and poverty. Her interest is to get a job and improve his family’s life. The director shows us that Saikati can only achieve this when she completes her education. The second alternative, which the director shuns, is for Saikati to try and get a job in the city with the little education she already has. Her entry into the city is therefore full of anticipation for economic “empowerment”. For this, she allows the moderate physical transformation Monica attempts to take her through. Her questions are not fully answered, yet she lies low for Monica to get her the job.
Saikati is unaware of the cultural or even moral transformation that entering the city embodies. Her reserved manners have to be shed off if she wants to get a job and survive in Nairobi. On arrival at Monica’s residence, Saikati wonders how people sleep at night if there is only one bed yet the room now houses four people. She does not understand why Monica says she is never around most of the nights. Monica does commercial sex work and Saikati is unaware that she is Monica’s next recruit in the business. She meets Monica’s European friends in her first assignment in the job. She is expected to relinquish her traditional moral standing for the money she needs. Her physical transformation is a pointer to this. She is made to remove her traditional Maasai clothes in stages as the viewer takes note of the Saikati’s unwillingness to let go of them. She questions her look in the new (social) outfit Monica introduces her to. On two occasions, Saikati secretly wipes off part of the make-up Monica applies on her face.

Seen through the eyes of Saikati and her sister, the journey to Nairobi is a walk into bliss. Yet, when suddenly faced by the urban set up with its Westernised occupants, Saikati seeks refuge in her traditional culture. On learning how her cousin has been earning a living in the city, Saikati is disappointed. She sees a threat to her morals and above all, her goal. She is destabilised by the turn of events and she has to find herself again. Thus, to Granqvist’s exploration of the immigrant, I add a fourth one - re-establishment - for such characters as Saikati, who fail to adapt to the city life because they want to uphold their intrinsic social values. Saikati seeks to re-establish herself in the culture she understands, despite its shortcomings. This, she only achieves by exiting the city. She
goes back to the village, the metaphoric location of the oppressive culture she initially flees from in search of an alternative modern life.

In conclusion, the subject matter in *Saikati* has survived the test of time as early marriages and objectification of women still haunt the society, albeit to different extents, depending on the concerned society. However, Mungai’s bid to show the world the strong women in Africa has been largely achieved in Saikati and her mother. However, apart from Saikati’s younger sister, her cousin, Monica is another character whose strength as an African woman is questionable. Given her urban environment – as she resides in Nairobi, the capital city of Kenya – she has totally different challenges to overcome in her day to day life. She is not easily comparable to Saikati and her mother, who are so engulfed in the traditional Maasai lifestyle except for their occasional resistance to it. Bhabha says that the postcolonial world is culturally and historically hybrid. On this hybridity spectrum, Monica on the one hand and Saikati and her mother on the other hand belong to different positions. Monica is much more Westernised and this informs her approach to life. This gives the post-independent Kenyan filmmaker an extra task; of having to redefine the African he wants to re-present. Mungai’s responsibility is to give a clear description of what she calls “strong African women”. Africans have surely changed due to the historical processes like colonisation which have had direct and inevitable impact on the way of life of the African today. As such, creating “strong African women” can be challenging as there will always be controversies relating to an authentic identity of an African woman.
3.3.3 Pieces for Peace

Peaces, as the name suggests is a film calling upon Kenyans to embrace peace by viewing each other as members of a large family - called Kenya – living in peace. This call became more urgent in the wake of the 2007-2008 post-poll animosity that quickly slipped from political allegiance, taking a tribal turn. This resulted in uncontrolled violence which resulted in over “1500 dead, 3000 innocent women raped and 300 000 people left internally displaced” (Roberts, 2009:1). With Kenyan citizens and occupants as its target audience, the film shuns tribalism, viewing it as a main recipe to national collapse.

The film is a distant product of the Kenya Film Commission’s (KFC) Sinema Pamoja initiative. KFC is a government’s department operating under the ministry of Information and Communication. One of its mandates being to promote and provide a healthy ground for local filmmaking, the commission initiated the Sinema Pamoja concept in order to bring together filmmakers within the country to share the available resources and collaboratively produce films. The initiative’s first activities were triggered by the violence that followed the announcement of the 2007 general election results in the country. KFC facilitated the initiative by providing a meeting venue for the filmmakers and meeting production cost, even though to some of the projects, the cash offered by KFC was way below their projects’ budget. Nonetheless, the initiative was successful as four short film projects came out of it; Robby Bresson’s LR 45 and Mburu Kimani’s Tough Times being some of them. In an in depth interview with the researcher, one of the directors of Pieces for Peace, Bresson, says
Pieces for Peace is actually two movies; Mburu Kimani’s Tough Times and my movie LR 45. Initially, it was supposed to incorporate four films; ... we are missing other two pieces. ...that’s how the title came up because everyone was coming with his piece. So, currently, Pieces for Peace is two movies combined.43

This film, being one of the film industry’s contributions to the call for peace in the country, is characterised by a lot of talent volunteerism as the film sector’s service to the Kenyan community. “We were very lucky because some of our friends who work for an NGO collected some footage on the post-election violence and gave us. So we used a lot of stock footage”. Mburi Kimani, the co-director concurs, citing Blue Sky Studios and the cast as having offered voluntary services to the production. As Bresson notes above, this film is a product of two short films. I have noted in chapter two that the short film genre emerged as a didactic entertainment. KFC picked on this genre not just for this reason, but also for its relatively lower cost of production. The two films were therefore merged at the editing stage. Kimani’s Tough Times was inspired by an earlier general election-related episode of the 1997 tribal clashes in Kenya’s Rift Valley province.45 He reminisces, during one of the in-depth interviews:

I was once told a story.... it was around 1997 when the first clashes happened. A guy told me he had to separate with the wife because of the clashes and the two families could not take it. Yet, he had to find ways to survive with his wife and kid. So he had to move all the way from Rift valley to come and live here in Nairobi so that his life can continue normally. He had to leave, even though being denounced by his parents. But later they came to accept that, as a matter of fact, Kenyans can come to live together.
The filmmakers' initial aim of creating the stories that make up the film was rather urgent and straightforward: imploring Kenyans to see the importance of national unity. This is a theme well executed in the film. However, in active viewership, several other themes manifest themselves in the film as discussed below.

a) Need for National Unity

In line with KFC’s intention for the Sinema Pamoja project, *Pieces for peace* is tailored towards upholding the supremacy of coherence in a country whose image was fast changing, locally and internationally, as a result of the devastating PEV. Even though the film is made up of two distinct stories, the scriptwriters/directors try to disguise the two distinct stories as they intertwine them together. The unified end of the film makes the two stories come out as sub-plots of one main story. However, a critical view of the film shows that there is no connection between the two “sub-plots.” The well fused end of the film provides a platform where the two filmmakers’ main message is emphasised. All those affected by the inter-ethnic violence converge at an internally displaced people’s (IDP) camp. This is the only time that characters from the two stories feature in the same scene. This happens in the 56th minute of the sixty-nine minute film.

The remaining thirteen minutes the two directors strongly make their statement through, among other devises, a highly didactic theme song that praises Kenya. Partly, the song declares that:

This is a song for you my Kenya (...) Different people different cultures, living together as one eeh!
James implies that it is better to lose all the money and have the family intact. It is unfortunate that his well intended decision to risk his life - by running in the violent night to go and save Celina is mistaken by the latter. Celina thinks that James, being drunk that night, has come to make sexual advances on her, taking advantage of Mwakwere’s hospitalisation. Her cry for help leads the rowdy youth who “save” her to burn down Stanley’s warehouse. James manages to convince Stanley about the importance of unity and love at family level. After a few scenes showing Wairimu just before and after she delivers a baby called, Kenya, Stanley concedes, telling James, “you were right; family is the most important thing I will ever have”.

Rono names the baby “Kenya”, saying “it is symbol of our togetherness”. I find a strong link between the discussion on the supremacy of the family unit; Rono’s call for “togetherness” and his revisit to the violence that stopped his dowry proceedings and tried to cut his relationship with Wairimu. He summarises the directors’ take on the PEV saying: “it should not have happened. It should never happen again”.

Even though the call to national unity comes at the end of the film, the directors spend most of the earlier part of the film delineating how fast the society can deteriorate in the absence of unity and peace. Rono and Wairimu are the heaviest bearers of the brunt as their urgent marriage arrangements are cut short by rowdy youth who take it upon themselves to send members of Wairimu’s tribe packing. The tribal differences get magnified. Kama and her friends who have been following the tallying of election results over a drink suddenly become enemies and Kama is attacked, almost losing his life. He
ends up at his friend’s home for help. The welcome and first aid assistance Kama gets from his friend’s family is the directors’ gesticulation for the viewer to extend brotherly love to other tribes.

b). Impact of Ethnic Animosity

In calling on Kenyans to embrace inter-ethnic love, the directors replicate the happenings of the PEV in Kenya with a strong focus on exposing the devastating impact of hostility towards a fellow countryman. The directors strongly imply that the first step towards achieving national unity is to invest in peace. The communities in the film fail to appreciate the value of peace, leading to extensive and long-lasting loss of livelihoods. For instance, Stanley enumerates the losses he has incurred as a result of this uncalled for hatred. He says, “I have lost my business, I have lost my work. We have a house that we cannot live in! And a title deed that is totally useless”.

Wairimu’s traditional marriage ceremony is messed up by rowdy youth who go round the village evacuating people from Wairimu’s tribe. We do not see what happens to her after this disturbance. However, when we meet her later, she is writhing in unbearable labour pains yet being transported to hospital on a donkey drawn cart. She suffers so much as the violence in the communities has rendered faster and more comfortable means of transport defunct. Since Mburu Kimani relates some of the events in the film to an earlier election-related strife, the filmmakers make it public for the target audience to see what they may not have seen. The viewers are given a detailed replay of how the general strife in 2007/8 impacted on the lives of individual persons with particular needs at the time.
c). Violence

The film is largely violent. The historical events that the film narrates were in themselves violent. The filmmakers choose to include this violence in their rendition of the story as they included a lot of stock footage on violence. Use of stock footage implies a conscious decision on the part of the directors to make the story look as close to reality as possible. Formalist film critics usually place a film’s aesthetic success on the film’s ability to look closest to reality. In the case of *Pieces for Peace*, it is ironic that the audience were not extremely enthusiastic about the film as they felt that it brought back memories of the sad past that they did not want to go back to be it in reality or in fiction.46

Apart from the stock footage, the directors re-created some of the violent scenes based on the stock video that they had acquired for the film. For example, Bresson, one of the directors, says that he had to extend the violence on the streets into the toilet where Mr Mwakwere, Stanley and James had gone to help themselves. The recreation helps create continuity and maintain the tempo of events in the two adjacent scenes. The earlier scene shows a man dressed in official pink shirt and grey trousers being chased by the police amid other violent activities in the streets of Nairobi. In the next scene, the man runs into the toilet, falling on the floor next to the Mwakweres. This is the point at which the police turn to Mr Mwakwere, hitting and seriously injuring his head in the process.
It dwelling on the violence, the film reveals the lawlessness that grips the society in such a scenario. Several people are innocent victims of this violence. The police injure Mr Mwakwere, the man in pink shirt, Stanley among others, though the viewer does not see any cause for these beatings and injury. The violent youth group also point to this lawlessness. They move around fighting and destroying property owned by members of certain tribes that the group deem unfit to live among them. The youth still follow their victims who are seeking refuge at the IDP camp. Their arrival at the IDP camp sends several children falling in fear.

d). Greed

According to Robby Bresson, LR 45 is majorly a story about political greed; allegorically showing how the older generation leaders tend to hold to power, not wanting to let the next generation lead. Bresson’s approach to the PEV paints the skirmishes as a result of intergenerational mistrust when it comes to political power. Bresson equates political power to the ability to lead the family. Mwakwere, a middle aged man does not want to release the family land’s title deed to Stanley to enable the latter expand the business empire he has started. The father keeps the title deed in a safe at a bank so that none of his sons have access to it. On the fateful morning, Mwakwere avoids the sons’ attempt to ensure that the three have carried the key. He easily gets irritated by any discussion relating to the safe’s key. He even threatens to cancel the trip to town if the sons keep on talking about the key.
Celina: Ammm... don’t forget to collect the mail. Have you got your key?
Mwakwere: Oh, dear! Yah, post office, I have it.
Stanley: Ooh, and do you have the other key?
Mwakwere: Which other one?!
Stanley: Dad, you know the one I am talking about.
Mwakwere: Huh! My safe deposit box key; trust you to remember that
Stanley: Well, did you?
Mwakwere: I think I did, so, can we go?
Stanley: Look, I just don’t want us to go to the city centre and then realise that we left the key all the way.
Mwakwere: Listen, I said I have it. So, the two of you can relax
James: Why don’t you just check?
Mwakwere: I said I have it! And if you are going to go on and on about the key, it is not too late for me to change my mind about the whole thing. (...) What did you say? Listen, I am not joking with you! I can stop this loan dream of yours right now!

Apart from Celina, Mwakere holds this key very dear to his heart. In his sick bed, he remembers the key and starts looking for it desperately. He then pulls it out from a very unlikely place: beneath his necktie. He thus outwits his crafty sons.

One of the sons equally exhibits greed just like the father. Stanley is depicted as a self-centred businessman who would do anything to amass wealth at any cost. James reprimands him saying Stanley has always only thought about himself. He has always measured his life with the things that he has like his business, money, title deed. James reminds Stanley of the importance of just being alive. Stanley feels that the fact that he has lost his wealth in the clashes renders life useless. He wonders “what is there to live for?” Mwakwere subtly refers to Stanley’s selfishness when he retorts “trust you to remember that (the key).” He insinuates that Stanley will definitely remember the key because he knows he will benefit from the loan. James also complains about Stanley’s shrewd ways. At the hospital, Stanley tries to convince the nurse to put it in writing that
Mwakwere has brain damage. This would enable the sons take control of his property. Stanley, being more materialistic than James, would fully gain from this.

As stated earlier, the Mwakweres’ story is a superficial representation of power greed that led the country into PEV. The directors point out that when everyone is power greedy, such violence and losses are likely to occur. They thus caution national leaders on wanting to get political power at the expense of national peace.

3.3.4 Unseen, Unsung, Unforgotten

Unseen, Unsung, Unforgotten, Njoki Mbuthia and Mona Ombogo’s 2009 debut feature film was initially composed and performed as a song. Its didactic nature fitted well within the 2003 International Conference on AIDS and STDs in Africa (ICASA). However, its composer, Patrick Kabugi later performed it at a church setting on World Aids Day Celebrations in Nairobi. The song’s main message was the need to embrace people living with HIV/AIDS (PLWA) in the society. After its performance, there was no immediate indication that the song would later on become the inspiring plot behind a 2 hour film, Unseen, Unsung, Unforgotten, hereafter shortened to Unseen, throughout this study. Kabugi later became the producer, one of the scriptwriters, score composer and actor in the film. Given the pivotal role he plays in the film’s production, his ideas seem to run through most of the film. Even though this study takes an auteurist approach, giving a director credit for a film, Mbuthia says she tended to strongly consider the scriptwriters’ original ideas in directing the film. Kabugi says that his main reason for writing the
song, and later on film script, was to show that the society needs to accept PLWA as they too have an important role to play in the society.

a). Universality of HIV/AIDS

_Unseen_ takes the spectator through the lives of four main characters, a process in which the various aspects of HIV/AIDS such as ways of contraction, spread, stigmatization, treatment and positive living are explored. Basically, the four main characters, Baraka, Riziki, Taabu and Neema are presented to the viewer as metonyms of the common people found in different local settings in a typical post-independent African capital like Nairobi. The directors situate these four in areas that a lot of people frequent, thus, familiarising the audience with the HIV/AIDS pandemic.

The youngest of the four is Riziki, a college student living with her elder sister in the city. Baraka, a young, dedicated and hardworking employee in a stable international company is bracing himself for promotions, towards the climax of his career. He is highly valued by his employer and colleagues (Kate and her cousin). As such, Baraka is used to locate the virus in the office environment.

Neema, a widow and mother of two, struggles to fend for her family by washing utensils in a bar and restaurant kitchen, an indicator that she earns a meagre income. She is also a member of a women’s group. The directors use her presence in this story to locate the virus in places where normal day-to-day activities take place.
After her husband’s death due to AIDS related ailments, Neema finds a lot of solace in Taabu, an affluent offspring of a European missionary family. Taabu comes from a middle class missionary family. He is also from a racial group different from that of the other three. However, these differences do not stop him from contracting the virus. With this, the spectator is informed that one doesn’t have to be extra-ordinary to contract the virus.

b). Spread of HIV

The film delves into the several ways through which the HIV can be spread. Each of the four main characters, who are HIV positive, contract(ed) the virus through different ways. Taabu explains that he got infected through sharing of drug injection needles. While at the university, in New York, Taabu experimented with hard drugs and consequently got infected in the process of drug administration. The directors comment on Taabu’s story – through Baraka – saying, “that was stupid.” While this may look stupid to Baraka, Baraka’s HIV contraction story is equally “stupid” in Taabu’s view. Baraka contracted the virus by engaging in unprotected sex with a stranger after a drinking spree following heartbreak. Neema’s late husband, George, must have infected her with the virus before he passed away. Riziki’s carefree lifestyle leads her to catch HIV. The life she leads before she is confirmed to have the virus is extensively exposed to the viewer. She also gets the virus through unprotected sex. However, her case introduces a different angle to the mode of contraction. Her sexual indulgence with multiple partners is stressed upon. The directors point out to the viewers that having multiple sexual partners escalates one’s chances of contracting the virus.
The modes through which the four characters contract the virus “may seem like a good idea at the moment” as Taabu and Baraka put it in defence. Yet, the directors call on the viewer to make wise decisions at such crucial moments. The choices made by these characters could have been reversed. That is why the directors shun the choices made by Baraka, Taabu and Riziki openly. If right choices are made at the right moment, the directors seem to say, the HIV infection rates would decrease. At the same time, the film does not wholly scathe PLWA. It helps them identify room for a positive and useful life with the virus. This is why Baraka is rescued from the depression he goes through after job loss.

c) Hope

Even though the film has a rather wide range of main characters with diverse backgrounds, the directors have tried to bring the protagonists together in what seems like a common fight to live positively in the society. Ties and strong bonds among the PLWA provide them with the strength to face the discriminative society confidently. They find support in each other, thus substantiating the formidability of the various unions seen in the film. We see these unions at the office party and at the restaurant where Neema and Taabu meet. Riziki, Baraka and Taabu are also brought together at Alonzo’s bar and restaurant. The most outstanding, and perhaps most significant point of convergence for the four is the self-help group meeting and Taabu’s funeral. It is at these meeting points that the directors try to merge the otherwise four different stories. That way, it is much easier for one to locate the sub-plots in Unseen than to see what Kolker refers to as
“closure”. He says that a film’s internal tensions that take different directions with each main character and each sub-plot may threaten to break it down. Yet, he believes, despite all such tensions, a film’s narrative should reach closure, “the conventional narrative event in every kind of fiction that stitches together the loose ends, the broken lives, the ruined love affairs, the villains still at large, the people physically and emotionally lost, what has come as a narrative moves a long” (Kolker: 1999:99).

The presence of several main characters in *Unseen* may come out as a script weakness to many critics. Indeed, this was a main point of contention during one of the FGDs conducted for this study. A majority of the critics involved pointed out that several protagonists tend to mar the focus of the story. It was observed that characterizing all the four makes the film unnecessarily long with several unfocused subplots. Spreading attention this way reduces a character’s emotional impact on the viewer because the feeling is distributed to many characters at the same time. This diminishes the intensity of the spectator’s empathy if not sympathy to the protagonist.

*Unseen* is presumably a story of hope as it begins, developing its case through the four main characters. However, singling out Taabu, the strongest pillar of that hope to die disorients the spectator. The film is full of sad emotions welled up in Anyango, Jason, Baraka, Neema and Riziki. These emotions, caused by HIV infection, are successfully cooled down by Taabu who as Riziki puts it, “always has a way of making things look better.” Therefore, his death foregrounds the tragic approach to understanding HIV/AIDS as a sure way to death. To valorise hope and positivity, Taabu’s death should have been
delayed or better still, completely avoided. This would give room for the larger narrative that has come along to move on distinctly. Everyone affected or infected with the HIV have come to be prepared for long-term happiness despite the raging threats some members of the society direct at the people living with HIV/AIDS (PLWA). Taabu, the symbol of hope in living with the virus should have lived on past the end of the story. Even if the film’s directors wanted to present a populist warning to the society about HIV stigmatization, a different approach leaning towards the documentary should have been employed.

Njoki Mbuthia, a co-director of the film has a different observation on this. She says this is story of hope. Nevertheless, she is of the opinion that death has to come at some point or another despite the fact that people live in hope. In the face of Mbuthia’s position, I still suppose that Taabu’s death destabilises the viewer. Even though hope and death are not mutually exclusive, the unfathomed death of Taabu even makes the directors break the news with a degree of guilt. The death is introduced in flash-forwards which are evenly alternated with flashbacks. This death is introduced piecemeal to enable the viewer come to terms with it at a moderate pace. That way, it would be easier for the audience to take it in.

d). Fight against HIV
The film largely features a main contest in which the society presented is in a long term wrestle with the HIV. Closely examined, HIV is the film’s antagonist. The infected and the affected thus, fight against the pandemic’s threats on their lives. They struggle to live
normally and acceptably in a stigmatising community of critics who catalyse the antagonist's fight. This community is made up of Bob, Baraka's judgemental work colleague; Neema's children's teacher, who incites the other children against contacting Neema's son when he nose bleeds; members of Neema's women group, who expel her from the group for fear of being infected by Neema. These people make living with the virus extremely painful to those infected. On the other hand, the society consists of people who unconditionally loves and embrace the PLWA. These include Kate, who remains a true friend to Baraka through his depression; Riziki's sister, Jessica, who shows exemplary love to Riziki even after the latter tests positive to HIV; Anyang, Taabu's girlfriend who even demands more intimacy with Taabu after learning that he has HIV. This second set of people work together with those infected in fighting stigma and making those infected find happiness.

At the onset of the film, the fight against HIV is declared in a monologue posthumously narrated by Taabu. He laments at the number of deaths caused by the virus, wondering whether the society can win this battle. He says,

A few years ago, my mentor, my best friend, died. ...I was in shock. I think there are so many people who are in shock today. ...One thing that I do remember is the anger, the outrage, the fear of this strange killer that has slipped into our homes and families eating us slowly, one by one, finishing us off. ... How can we fight back? Could we win?

Later on – in a flashback – Taabu cracks a joke that implies a fight when he introduces new members to the self-help group. He tells them “welcome to the largest football team in the world.” A team of football players work together against their opponents hoping to
win the game. Taabu’s statement implies that the group are facing a contest against some force: HIV.

e) Risky Behaviour in Relation to HIV/AIDS

Just like many of the members of the target audience, Baraka does not know his HIV status. The directors highlight the need for people to be aware of their HIV status. This becomes a common point in the lives of the four main characters. The film dwells more on the turn that their lives take after they get to know their HIV status. Thus, the fight begins with taking the initiative to know one’s HIV status. Before the main characters undergo the HIV test, they do not get involved in the fight against the pandemic. Therefore, the film comes as a wake-up call for the target audience to take the initial step in the fight against HIV/AIDS by undertaking the virus’ test. Consequently, the directors imply that it is risky to live without knowing one’s HIV status. Riziki’s friends in college try to exert pressure on her to undertake an HIV test saying “it is good practice.”

These two friends also lament at Riziki’s habit of hanging out with Ashley, a shrewd and misleading college-mate of Riziki. The two thoughtful friends urge Riziki to change her lifestyle warning her of the dangerous possible consequences. Mbuthia, describes Riziki as a “spoilt child” who unquestioningly runs after good life. Riziki’s materialistic and fun-loving nature drives her to explore sexuality carelessly with different men despite keeping a stable boyfriend, Jason. Ignorance and lack of proper guidance from childhood is to blame for Riziki’s HIV infection. On her part, she alludes this to her sister’s death in a bomb blast and her mother’s alcoholism and absenteeism.
At college level, Riziki behaves as if she does not know about Voluntary Counselling and Testing (VCT) centres. VCT involves counselling and testing of HIV infection in asymptomatic individuals who would like to know whether their body systems have the virus or not. VCTs were introduced in Kenya in the year 2000, about eight years before the film was produced. By the time the film came into the market, VCT had become a household name in Kenya. Nearly all adults in the urban centres in the country know about the practice. So Riziki cannot be an exception. It is only that she views HIV infection as other people's worry.

Given this background, one may get disoriented by Riziki's pretentious lack of knowledge about VCT. To a superficial extent, one is tempted to question the credibility of the character as created by the screenwriter. However, since the character is largely believable throughout the film, I look at this as an intentionally exaggerated portrayal to stir a fruitful conversation, among the spectators, about the prevalence of VCTs in Kenya. Such a discussion ensued during one of the FGDs conducted for this study on the relevance of the film’s content. This led the participants to delve into issues squarely within VCT activities like availability in the rural areas, how much the society knows about them and how successful they have been. If that exaggerated scene is able to create such a positive discussion, then it is worth having it than focus on character credibility with less impact on the viewer. Here, the viewer is stimulated to think about wider issues that cannot be presented within the film’s confining two hours.
Naivety plays a major role in the direction Riziki’s life takes in college. She falls into the trap of shrewd Aisha who practices responsible sexual behaviour despite flirting with several men. Riziki does not understand that Aisha does not actually sleep with the men she flirts with. Aisha also tests for HIV regularly without telling Riziki about it. Riziki thinks that Aisha and her lead similar lives yet they do not. Riziki has very little information about HIV infection. She judges the people she goes to bed with by their physical looks. She says that Rachael, one of her friends made a mistake to go out with a man who looks sick. As for her, she says she can tell from the look of the men she dates. In the long run, Riziki is infected with the virus while her friend is safe. The film warns the youth who reason like Riziki to be weary of the friends they keep. Not all friends are well meaning. It also points to the viewer that one cannot tell from the physical outlook whether a person has the HIV virus.

3.4 Conclusion

The directors of the four films had particular social messages to pass across to their clearly defined audiences as they embarked on making these films. The messages have been put forth successfully for the audience to ponder over. It is clear that all the four films largely employ simple and direct techniques such as linear storylines which make it very easy for the audience to receive the films’ main themes. However, as seen in this chapter, there are other themes that manifest themselves as the audience engage the films. From my observation, from the FGDs and interviews with the various relevant filmmakers, there are other thematic concerns that the films tend to address irrespective of the film directors’ initially intended focus. Largely, these emergent concerns do not
work against the directors’ initial messages in the sampled films. They thus complement the intended themes. For instance, Kolormask’s assistant director, Ingolo wa Keya, points out that the film was inspired by its director’s experiences when he got back to Kenya after seven years in Poland. The director set out to make a film reflecting some of these experiences, yet, other emerging themes such as valorising traditional African cultural practices come out as major concerns in the film. These themes were not initially intended yet they come out quite clearly. As mentioned earlier in this chapter, Saikati’s director intended to show strength of African women to the world, yet, a theme such as the importance of formal education as a way out of poor living standards seems to be more visible in the film.

At the same time, it is important that both the filmmaker and the spectator work with the fact that content is never simply there waiting for the audience to see it; it is generated. As such, “individuals negotiate the meaning of a work of popular culture, take the meanings they need, reject what they find unacceptable, re-interpret the work to suit their cultural positions. But, in fact, these events happen simultaneously or even dialectically when we watch a film or a television program” Kolker, 1999: 145). In which case, the director’s proposed point of view (POV) is not a fixed position from which a viewer approaches the action. The viewer’s ability to confine himself within the proposed POV or move out of it at will indicates his contribution in the film’s communicative process. Within this mobility of perspective, the viewer can receive what the director intends for him, less or more.
There is a major hindrance in assuming that the viewer only receives what the director intentionally provides. It assumes that the mode and ability of perception is unidirectional. Kolker disagrees with this saying,

The consumers of popular media are not a dumb, cowed, undifferentiated mass, repressed and oppressed by the banal homogeneity of what they see and hear. People consume in many different ways and with varying degrees of comprehension and ability to make interpretations... we don’t merely accept what the culture industry hands down, we deal with it and use it. (Kolker 1999:73)

The turn to the audience in meaning creation invokes the debate on the audience as passive recipients of the filmmaking society’s package without themselves apportioning meaning to what they receive. Perkins (2000:89-90) identifies two categories of audience in this respect. He identifies sponge model audience as those “unproblematic” and dormant, “soaking up” the message from the films. This kind of audience sees film as sealed and consistent texts that have only one meaning and impact. This is probably what the literary New Critics called authorial intention.

The other audience category is a highly variegated group as can be found in the standpoints of reception theory. Proponents of this theory, in their exploration of the audience abilities, believe that the audience are active rather than inactive, engaging in a process of making and not just receiving meanings (Jenkins 2000). Jenkins further posits that “social factors such as ethnicity, class, gender, age or sub cultural affiliations influence spectatorship and what happens when cultural materials circulate beyond the site of theatrical exhibition” (2000:173-4). Thus, the audience cannot easily be tied down
to an industry’s ideological constructs. In groups or individually, the audience contemplate and re-work film messages as the basis for their social interactions. As such, the messages get into the transforming space which is manipulated by the audience. These contemplations, re-working and manipulations bring with them a new meaning to the film.

Message filmmaking, then, is faced with the challenge of ensuring that the information intended for the target audience does not end up in this space. The information in a message film is usually urgent and needs to be delivered or received urgently. Yet, this transforming space not only delays the delivery, but also alters the reception.
CHAPTER FOUR

4.0 AESTHETIC FILM ELEMENTS AND MEANING GENERATION IN THE SELECTED FILMS

4.1 Introduction

As established earlier in chapter two, African communities have for a long time successfully employed stories and performances in tackling social issues. For instance, in most of Africa, oral communication channels and the use of various art forms like proverbs, adages, riddles, folklore, storytelling and subtlety in presentation are key tools for communicating life changing messages. Njogu (2009), writing about the use of storytelling to improve health conditions in Africa, put forth ideas that African filmmakers can borrow in producing films that relate to health issues like Unseen, Unsung, Unforgotten, recognising the fact that film and storytelling share the diegetic aspect. Thus, basic story telling elements can be used in film with a positive outcome. (Njogu, 2009:24) affirm that “stories are non-threatening and emotionally engrossing in their presentation, they can allow for release of intense feelings through the establishment of trust and identification...”. Apart from health related topics, Njogu (Ibid) further explains that creative stories are believed to be at the centre of work with contemporary media in addressing issues of poverty, HIV and AIDS, unemployment and poor governance”. In addressing some of these issues and related ones like female empowerment and cultural decolonisation, directors of the films sampled for this study hope to contribute information that would help in the development process within the Kenyan society. So the success of these stories lies in their relevant content and their ability to be “non-threatening and emotionally engrossing”. In chapter three, I dwelt on
the relevance of the content of the selected films. But the films' ability to be “non-threatening, emotionally engrossing and allow for release of intense feelings,” as Njogu puts it, can only be established after an understanding of how the various film elements work within these four texts.

4.2 Elements of Film in a Conversation between the Director and the Viewer

Film is only a medium by which the storyteller presents his work to the consumer of that story. The storyteller is at this point aware of the existence of other media such as the novel, poetry, music, and painting among others. These media have a major point of intersection where they all tell a story. The storyteller is also aware that these stories are not pure reality or simple images of reality. These are imagined stories. Even when a storyteller, say, a filmmaker bases his story on real events as is the case with films like *The last King of Scotland, Hotel Rwanda* and *Titanic*, the story is imaginatively re-created and presented in the filmmaker’s perspective. Therefore, the communication options available to a storyteller are extensive. Film is just one of them. Film should therefore be viewed only as a vehicle by which the filmmaker attempts to deliver his message. Being a medium of communication as well as a mode of entertainment, film’s message needs to be delivered to the viewer while at the same time entertaining him.

As such, the film language is obliged to espouse two facets; meaning and entertainment. Meaning, the ultimate aim of message films, cannot just be presented by the filmmaker or generated by spectators as if it were available in some documentary text. In fiction filmmaking and consumption, meaning should only be reached after a spectator unveils it
beneath the entertainment or aesthetic coating (Njogu, 2005, Middleton and Njogu, 2009, Hoveyda, 2000). Thus, making sense out of film is not automatic since:

the work of imagination, no matter what its face – painting, music, novel, or film – (…), requires mediation, of colour and shape, of sound (carefully, even mathematically determined, in the case of music), of words, of moving images. (…) some kind of interpretive work is involved on the part of the viewer or listener. On some level, reading is involved, reading in its most general sense of engaging the form of a work, comprehending it, interpreting it, comparing it with other similar examples of its kind, contextualising it, in short, making sense of it. Sense is not given. It must be made.

(Kolker, 1999:30)

Although making sense of film is easily compared to a reader’s attempt to understand literary texts such as poems, novels, short stories among others, a film spectator has to keep in mind that film communication does not rely on a system of signs like those at the disposal of, say, a writer. There is no equivalent of words - as used by a writer - in film for a filmmaker. A writer explores words or idioms, which already exist and are arranged or presented in systematic symbols to create meaning. For instance, a word, which is the building block for a writer, already exists and has a range of meanings attached to it, depending on the context. A word such as ‘face’ has a rather fixed range of meanings, be they through denotation, connotation or association. However, a shot of a face may be used to express extremely varied meanings that depend not just on the film, its maker’s aesthetic choices, but also the scene and the emotions to be expressed at that moment. The shot can be used to introduce a character, to introduce his feelings towards the events around him or even as a way of introducing a flashback through the character’s inner thoughts shown through his face. Shot framing for the face also alters the meaning conveyed. Long shot and close-up express different intensity of emotions. Then the
syntactic conventions in writing already prescribes a general tendency whereby, a predicate comes after the subject and an article must precede a noun and not the other way round. These pre-existing codes and conventions make literary creativity more straightforward than cinematic creative production. Since there are no conventional codes in film language, a filmmaker needs to come up with a working language for film, then the art (of film) while for literary artists, he has an already existing codified language, hence he only needs to invent the aesthetics necessary for their particular text. In other words, lexicon already exist for the writer, while for a filmmaker, there are no pre-existing shots – the building blocks in cinematic language - to be combined to create meaning. The filmmaker has to create his own, and then combine them to create meaning.

Meaning is integral in any communication process. In his attempt to communicate as effectively as possible, the sender employs varied practices to enhance and clarify the message so that it is as decipherable to the receiver as possible. Film, being a rather complex medium of communication, relies on several components such as picture, sound, writings – both the shooting script and onscreen postproduction writings - colour, directing, cutting and editing, among others, in order to discourse effectively with the audience. As indicated earlier in chapter one, these activities are discussed in this study under four major units, namely: cinematography, *mise-en-scene*, sound and editing.\(^5\) Bobker (1979) refers to them as “elements of film.” These elements are products of different production departments headed by different professionals with varied aesthetic
orientations. Any form of film language and its aesthetics will therefore be largely defined by the operations of these components.

Lack of a clear pre-existing vocabulary may be viewed as a hindrance in the process of film communication as there are no standard codes that can be referred to in any cinematic communication. However, an Italian artist, Paolo Pasolini expressed that film, though possessing a “non-conventional and non-symbolic language,” should develop some codifiable structure akin to words in literature. Hoveyda (2000:75) refers to this code as “something that does the job of words in literature.” To Pasolini, film may not have the “words,” yet it represents reality through reality itself. This study borrows a leaf from this observation and the argument advanced by Sparshott (1985) and Hoveyda (2000) who relate film to dream. Hoveyda draws support from the linguist and theorist, Noam Chomsky’s concepts on language acquisition of “linguistic universals.” Just like dreams, cinema is a natural component of our brains so much so that “we do not have to learn any special language or grammar to understand films” (Hoveyda 2000:76).

In chapter three, I have indicated that it is not ultimately possible for the filmmaker to just deliver meanings to the spectator. It is not a smooth process. The spectator has a role to play in his understanding of the audio-visual images in the film. Understanding images varies depending on social conventions, which differ according to the spectator’s background. Thus, an audiovisual text may strive to speak a universal language, as can be said of silent film but it cannot fully achieve it because there are as many ways of expressing oneself using film medium as there are filmmakers and cultures or nations.
This is because "images certainly do not have the same meaning everywhere" nor to everyone, be they filmmaker or spectator (Hoveyda 2000:26). As such, the ideological sentiments come into play here. The production as well as consumption contexts play a major role in the meaning of a film. Therefore, the onus is on the director to inject meaning into the images he presents to the viewer. The creation of these images and their rendition is done through *mise-en-scene*, enriched with sound. At this point, it is worth noting that the language of cinema is not simply images. It is their *organisation*, their combination by the author that creates meaning. This organising process is, in the case of cinema, what comprises editing. Images have no meanings of their own. In fact, we infuse meaning or sense into the images by visually orchestrating and combining them. Yet, in all these, a good director should eliminate images that do not work towards creating meaning, at whichever level, in the film.

By the 1950s, critics' attention was drawn to *auteurism*, a movement which believed that the director's input into a film heavily impacts on the message received by the viewer. A director's position has continued to be of great significance as he is the overall controlling power during the production stage of filmmaking. For Rabiger (2008:1), learning to direct films involves learning the work of all the crew because the director has to conduct them as if they were an ensemble of top-notch musicians. Although the *auteurist* debate still fizzes in film theory and criticism fora, some of the principles put forth by *pro-auteurist* critics (Francois Truffaut, 1954 and Andrew Sarris, 1968) are by and large still very relevant in film studies today. The critical antagonisms that the approach has received from such theorists as Paulin Kael, Aljean Harmetz and David
Kippen have not deterred the director from being charged with the overall responsibility of the aesthetic choices made in a film. Thus, from the above sentiments, directors of the four films under this study are conveniently viewed as the sole creators of the aesthetic path taken by the films.

This study is, however, aware of the immense individual contributions of the heads of the different production departments. For instance, *Pieces for Peace* is largely a creation of the editor and not the directors, given that the final film, as we know it, only emerged after the editor’s synchronisation of the shorter films, “LR 45” and “Tough Times” into *Pieces for Peace*. The study is also informed by the fact that aesthetic choices or style in these films were influenced not only by the directors’ tastes but also the socio-economic environments of the films’ production. These environments change with time, so the aesthetic analysis that follows takes a historical angling.

### 4.3 The Use of Aesthetic Film Elements in the Selected Texts

Unlike their technical counterparts, aesthetic film elements are captured within *mise-en-scene*. Although not everything placed in the *mise-en-scene* ends up on the screen, the director may assume an ‘ideal’ perspective to a scene. Yet, the creative viewer can easily ‘stray’ from this perspective and focus on what the director did not envision. Hoveyda gives an example in which a WHO sponsored 1960s film was made to persuade some rural populations to take to Western medication in lieu of traditional African treatment. In the story,
the patient's parents summoned the local medicine man (shaman) to their hut. The patient was growing worse by the hour. Then came the WHO doctor, who saved the patient with a shot. The film was shown in a village and the supervising official asked the audience to describe what they had seen. For a while, no one spoke. Finally one man said, 'I saw a hen going into the hut.' In fact, while the film was being shot, a hen had entered the hut at the most dramatic moment, but the director, who was satisfied with his scene, did not want to shoot it over lest the characters (sic) be unable to act as well in a second take.

(Hoveyda 2000:25)

Consequently, when a director creates a *mise-en-scene*, he should be aware that apart from the narrative content of the film, everything that the spectator will see within a shot is a major contributor to meaning. The actors, set, lighting, props and their placement within the scene all speak to the viewer in varied ways, director's proposed POV notwithstanding.

A formalist viewer has to read narrative images in film and comprehend them in order to find meaning. In this case, some form of interpretive work is expected from the viewer for him to access the content of the story. Indeed, Kolker (1999: 30) says “content – story, characters, emotions – is never simply there, waiting for us to see it. Content is generated by the form and structure of the imagination’s work and is specific to the kind of work being done”. Thus, a formalist analysis entails identifying and understanding the language that film as a form uses to pass the message across. As such, the cinematic language being audio-visual, the viewer has to make sense of the sounds and image sequences in a film in order to get meaning (not necessarily) as packaged by the director.
This study strongly borrows Lee Bobker’s (1979) definition of elements of film as the ready “idioms” by which film communicates. Bobker distinguishes the “technical” from “aesthetic” film elements, saying that it is through the combination and manipulation of the two sets of elements that a director packages and a spectator finds meaning.

Of all the four main groups of film elements, *mise-en-scene* stands out as the most fundamental in a film’s communication process. It is the element that gives the viewer the first impression of a film’s content. Specifically, before the spectator starts delving into other aspects of the film in search of specific inferences to meaning, *mise-en-scene* provides him with the basic images that together, tell the story. Thus, the components of this element must be taken into account at the first viewing as they are capable of telling a story even without the inclusion of technical film elements such as editing, sound and camera manipulations. Consequently, *mise-en-scene* emerges as the strongest pillar in meaning generation. Even the most uncreative director inevitably relies on this element to narrate his story. In reference to Jean-Marie Teno’s film, *Clando*, Bryce (2011:21-2) states that when the director withholds some information in order to release it at a later moment in the film, *mise-en-scene* directs the viewer. “For the first session of the film, we therefore rely on the *mise-en-scene* for clues as to the narrative direction”.

The foregoing is a clear indication that *mise-en-scene* components must be considered strongly during the production stage of filmmaking. Apart from enhancing meaning generation, *mise-en-scene* as an element has the advantage of harbouring all the aesthetic film aspects (Robker 1979). The aesthetic film elements, as the name suggests, are mostly
responsible for the artistic beauty of a film. Most of the laughter, sobs or tensions, or simply put, emotional build up in the viewer are derived from the director’s inventiveness in *mise-en-scene*. The director is mainly in control, although some directors handle the heads of different production departments with a laissez-faire attitude.

Auteurist film theory views film as a sole product of the director. All the directors of the four films sampled chose to take control of the production process fully. All the crew and cast acted under their respective directors’ directives. In as much as all the other crew and cast members have unique contributions towards the completion of a film production, it is the director’s re-organisation of their contributions to what he desires that generates a film’s ultimate meaning. Although this study draws from formalism, and formalists view meaning to be resident in the text, my rendition here is that meaning may go beyond the text. A viewer’s response to a film is also part of the process of meaning generation. Thus, the meanings derived either from a film’s textual form, or from the viewer’s background or thought processes are only based on the director’s conscious move to give the film the outlook it possesses. Therefore, the director’s aesthetic choices may not necessarily carry the meaning. They may, however, provide a basis for the viewer to generate meanings in a film.

Derived from stage production into film and denoting what is put on stage, *mise-en-scene* covers all those items that are placed before the camera in readiness for shooting. Components of a scene in the four films tend to reflect the historical environment of the
films’ production, thus, the aesthetic evolution in the country’s film-scape can be viewed in the four sampled films.

In the following section, this study explores some of the major components of *mise-en-scene*, relating them to meaning in the respective films under study. The historical environment of the films’ production is therefore regularly invoked as a relevant player in the analysis of the films. Therefore, my discussion here focuses on the socio-economic and/or historical tendencies that may have influenced the use of the aesthetic components of the four films.

### 4.4 Content-Form Balancing

#### 4.4.1 Preamble

*Kolormask*, the oldest of the four films expresses a lot of anxiety in its treatment of the cultural ambiguities that characterise fictional works of post-independent artists in Africa. The film overtly dwells on themes surrounding this subject area. In more than half of the scenes in this film, a reference is made to the postcolonial cultural relations between the Centre and its colonies. The film is, thus, out rightly over-conscious of the message it hopes to communicate to the viewer. Indeed, this has been the fear of critics with regard to didactic films.

One of the major criticisms directed to films on social issues is that they tend to over-value the message at the expense of the aesthetics that form part of the film medium’s iconography. This is largely true with regard to *Kolormask*. Although *Saikati, Unseen* and *Pieces* do not lose focus of their main themes, they manage to get the viewer’s...
attention off the subject matter for a moment, engaging him with the various aesthetic components in the films. For instance, *Unseen* invests strongly in the visual appeal in a way that entices the viewer, maintaining his interest in watching. This film contravenes the expressionist desire to make the world - of film – a reflection of the interior anguish the physical world has caused. The film’s *mise-en-scene* gives a peaceful aura - except when Baraka is depressed and the set depicts disorderliness in his living room. The spectator easily associates this atmosphere with the effect of Taabu on the characters infected with HIV. The directors clearly paid much attention to the visual appeal of the film. Njoki Mbuthia, a co-director, says that her main concern during production was to make the film’s picture appealing despite the weighty themes the film explores. To Kolker (1999:120), “a basic premise of expressionism was that *mise-en-scene* – the visual space of the film (...) – should express the stressed psychological state of either its main character, or more universally, the culture at large”. For this film, the beautiful sets can closely be compared to the beauty and care that Taabu extends to many.

*Saikati’s* approach is different. The aesthetic appeal comes from a fairly complex plot, compared to *Kolormask’s*, which enables the viewer to follow other minor or parallel sub-plots alongside the film’s metanarrative: Saikati in her ambitious struggles towards her goal. In this, Saikati may recruit others to assist her achieve the goal. She may also drop off the characters that become stumbling blocks on her way. These supporting characters come in with individual histories and ambitions on the one hand, and depart with their future aspirations on the other. Those she has to recruit in her pursuit include Monica and Alex. She relinquishes her alliance with the chief’s son since the friendship
stands on her way to the future she desires. The chief’s son intends to marry her hence terminate her schooling ambitions. Although Alex, Saikati’s supposed European boyfriend, is one of her promises of a lucrative future, he later becomes obsolete when she discovers his mean intentions to exploit her sexually. Once detached from Saikati, these two have to move on in search of individual satisfaction. The chief’s son is compelled to forget about marrying Saikati after she “disappears”. He then marries a different girl. As a director, Mungai is not obliged to show the viewer the scene of the chief’s son’s marriage. She however shows us the scene and thus develops this short, yet important sub-plot.

Monica’s story is another sub-plot which runs almost parallel to Saikati’s. Again, in order to contrast the two, the director juxtaposes Monica’s carefree lifestyle to Saikati’s. These smaller anecdotes complement the main story and provide answers to the viewer by clarifying why the characters make particular choices. Saikati’s return to the Mara is safe for her and even cathartic to the viewer because the Chief’s son is already married. Though Saikati is not aware of this, and is probably prepared for a bigger battle as she makes her way back, the viewer is at peace with this return. Saikati’s uncertainty is evident in the hesitant steps she makes into her family’s compound as members of the extended family come out to welcome her back.

Similarly, Pieces narrates clearly parallel stories joined by the directors’ shared thoughts on the subject matter tackled. With believable casting and acting, the viewer’s attention is strongly drawn to the film’s aesthetic and editing success. Unseen also delves into several
sub-plots that help keep the viewer off the subject matter, though not entirely. *Unseen*’s aesthetics draw from a variety of elements such as casting, set design and directing, which subtly highlight the film’s main concerns. All these work well to neutralise the possible predominance of the HIV/AIDS subject matter.

4.4.2 *Kolormask*

*Kolormask* largely narrates a simple linear plot disjointed only by a flashback of John and Eliza back in London in their happier days together. The rest of the film is simply saturated with scenes led by John or Eliza or both. In these scenes, the two repeatedly evoke the main subject of their different and conflicting racial or cultural backgrounds. This unnecessarily redundant revisit to the topic and the director’s choice to have the story revolve, literally, around the Litodo family, renders the subject over-exploited. On another level, the subject area being explored was quite popular in the earlier African films. It may have lost some relevance to the 21st century audience whose social challenges have changed. The 1960s – 1980s audience may have found this subject immediately relevant as the period was marked with cultural re-affirmation occasioned by the pan-Africanist movement. Most African films and fiction produced in that era tended to out rightly resist cultural dominance by the (former) colonial forces over the colonies.

a). Directing/Casting

A discussion on *mise-en-scene* is largely focused on directing. A director’s success is first and foremost evident in the performance of the cast. The actors’ ability to bring out the
roles of the characters they represent is paramount in film studies. Formalist approach to film studies inquires the extent to which film imitates reality. As mentioned earlier, *mise-en-scene* is a product of the director. As such, directing, which is closely related to casting and acting becomes a strong pillar in the creation of what is filmed.

Of the four films studied, *Kolormask's* cast is the most varied in terms of culture, race and world view. This explains the numerous conflicts in the film. However, Sao Gamb finds a cast that to a large extent convinces the viewer by bringing out the highly disparate characters and their traits, shaped by their different backgrounds. However, from the researcher's keen observation of the film, an adverse side of Gamba's directing, casting and cast performance emerges.

One of the most believable aspects of *Kolormask* is its largely well done casting. The inter-racial relations and families such as John's are represented with thespians credibly fitting in their roles. Here, casting manifests as a powerful tool which aids the director in transplanting the story from the script to the screen. Even though the film's credits do not accredit a casting director or agent, casting was subsumed in director and assistant director's duties. In Gamba's bid to have a plausible cast, he assigns the role of Mrs Wilson to an African American who executes her role fairly well. This is the case with Eliza's friend whom Eliza meets at the shopping mall. She also successfully takes up an African American lady's role, which she brings out well both in terms of poise and accent. Still on the casts' accent, John's housemaid has a fairly English accent yet the narrative does not give us a hint of her having lived outside Kenya before. The nature of
her employment does not expose her to the linguistic prowess she exhibits. Her language is clearly marked off from that of John, John’s father, Auntie Maria and her sisters. Although the director may have been impressed by her acting skills, her eloquence in English reveals an oversight in casting as well as directing. Casting; because someone else could have taken up the role, and directing; because with the assistance of the director, the lady should have been trained to speak like the character she represents. Actors cannot fit in the roles they play with unauthentic accents. Thus, Colleen Ross, a CBC News journalist, in reference to Clint Eastwood’s 2009 film, *Invictus*, says that “Morgan Freeman is …supposed to be Nelson Mandela. In every other way he appears to be. But without the accent, it’s just not complete”.

Several sequences in the film take the viewer back to the question of authenticity, a significant point in formalist film criticism. As said earlier in this chapter, every element in a film should add value or illuminate meaning as much as possible. In the film, Gamba includes a scene in which a supposedly mad man jumps, chants and later on gives what I view as a summation of his life. This scene further exemplifies the underlying theme of racial xenophobia. Though the scene brings out a different angle to the subject; the ability of mono-racial parents to bear a child belonging to a totally different racial group, this point is however detached from the film’s already established thematic trajectory. Assuming that there is a justification for this scene, its execution leaves a lot of gaps in a spectator’s mind. The scene opens with the ‘mad man’ jumping quite carefully and in moderated steps as he chants. A largely unmoved crowd has formed around him, watching his antiques. His chant and dance betray the director’s intention to paint him as
Mad. Madness – though the preferred modern medical term is psychopathology - is a psychological disorder characterised by mental or behavioural violations of societal norms. In deciphering units of analysis of abnormal behaviour, Berrios (1996:20) posits that by the 20th century, “symptoms such as obsessions, delusions and hallucinations became the units of madness”. The madman in Kolormask exhibits none of these, nor does he show a tendency to mania which is another sign of mental disorder characterised by elevated mood, psychomotor over-activity and overproduction of ideas. The madman should, therefore, exhibit uncoordinated thoughts exemplified in speech. The madman confesses to the crowd that he is mad and goes ahead to memorise and explain how his madness came about. This is oblivious of the fact that a mad person usually does not know that he is mad. A beggar may not really confess that he begs and lives off the streets as the mad man does in this scene. In his rendition, the man recollects how his father beat him up as a child. The beating seriously injured his brain, tampering with his memory. Berrios (Ibid) admits that violent blows to the head can cause brain damage. Hale and Frank (Ibid) associate dementia - a mental disorder – with brain injury. In patients suffering from dementia, memory or vividness of understanding may be excessive, distorted or abolished (Berrios, Ibid). As such, we do not expect that he remembers all that he says to the crowd.

The director’s choice of POV for this “story within a story” does not suit the content being communicated. The story is told from a first person narrator’s POV. This makes the viewer believe the story more since the narrator is the subject in the story. However, the viewer feels cheated on the man’s state of mind. The man’s primary audience also
exhibit lack of involvement in his activities. The audience does not show suspicion, fear, nor excitement that could explain their motivation for watching the man. This audience is too calm and unanimously decide to listen and observe him carefully then walk away in silence after giving donations to the man. The only exception to this is the expectant couple, to whom focus shifts after the husband tries to discourage his wife from giving money to the mad man/beggar. The crowd’s monolithic outlook points to the director’s oversight on certain details as opposed to what we see in latter films such as Unseen.

Introduced to the viewer at the point of the death of his wife, John’s father is weak, both in terms of his organisational ability as well as physical stature. No wonder his consolers tell him that “she (his dead wife) really tried to put you where you are”. Throughout the film, we see his frail body weakly supported by a walking stick, with which he even travels to the city to pay his son a visit. Yet, when he and Eliza - his daughter-in-law - wrestle, he exhibits extra physical energy and finally overpowers Eliza. The inequality debate, often provoked in gender studies circles would take note of the biased gender representation in the wrestle. Even an old weak man supported by a walking stick is still much stronger than a woman, who may be younger and steadier. Even right after the fight, the old man walks away with the support of the walking stick. The old man’s general impression of overall frailty is weakened by this sudden gain of physical sturdiness. Again, acting and by extension, directing is easily questioned here.
b) Lighting, Props and Set Design

Characters’ actions and opinions are easily highlighted by proper use of intentional lighting, props and set. In reviewing Jimi Odumusu’s film - *The Mourning After* (2004) - Barrot cites the impact of set design on an actor’s emotional input. He quotes Charles Ukpong, one of the actors saying he “had been put in the mood by the set design and confined atmosphere of the studio, which went perfectly well with the sense of being suddenly and totally cut off from the world” (Barrot 2008:6). Lighting can be used to bring out different hues for different communicative effects.

Generally, lighting illuminates for better view. Yet, a deeper engagement with film aesthetics reveals several functions of light as a strong factor in meaning creation and generation. Specific lighting creates mood for a particular character, theme or activity. This way, different colours with well known denotations can be used to enhance the effect of a scene. Sometimes, light can be filtered to reduce its intensity, again for particular aesthetic outcome. Light creates time in film. Different light filters can be used to create a feel of morning, midday, evening or any other time a director desires.

Some of Kolormask’s lighting shortcomings are as basic as reflection that adds no value. This directly attacks one of film’s guises or secrets. In trying to convince the viewer that all the lighting in the film does naturally exist in the particular scenes, the viewer should not be let to feel that lights are sometimes a creation of the crew. He needs to ‘get lost’ in the world of the film and possibly believe that the film’s world is real. Whether natural or artificial light source is used in a film, the final outcome should first and foremost look
realistic or purposeful in the setting. This is because any difference in light in a scene can interfere with the viewer’s process of generating meaning. As such, differences in lighting of shots of the same scene can disorient the spectator and draw his attention to lack of continuity in the shots. Such is evident in certain scenes in *Kolormask*. The first bedtime confrontation between Eliza and John (32") greatly differs from the next scenes on the same set (33", 38"). The first scene has too much light which changes the bedroom’s wall colour from blue to green. The walls are discovered to be blue in a much later scene in the bedroom set (1:46"). The changes between green and blue can mislead the viewer to suspect that the scenes were shot on different sets; or that the set design was modified, a situation that consequently raises questions about the intentions of such modifications as any such modifications have a semantic impact on the film.

In *Kolormask*, image reflection is common, just like in *Saikati*. Shadows are seen on the walls, betraying the director’s choice to use artificial lights, especially for interior scenes. Eliza receives a phone call at her home and as she moves back after the call, the shadow is seen on the adjacent wall. A similar scene is witnessed in John’s office when he kisses Dorothy. Their shadows on the wall are a distraction to the viewer as they interrupt the flow of the primary narrative by seeking secondary attention from the viewer. It is evident that three point lighting was not used in these scenes to minimise these reflections.
A different type of reflection present in Kolormask is mirror reflection. The mirror which forms part of the set in Eliza’s office becomes a disgusting distraction (41”). As Eliza converses with Wilson in this scene, the movement of her upper body is reflected on a mirror on the next wall. First, it beats logic to have a mirror in the office. This contradicts the scenic mood created by the other set components and props in the scene. The image of Eliza’s head in the mirror, moving back and forth as she speaks to Wilson, makes the viewer believe that a member of the production crew is peeping into the set. During one of my FGDs on the importance of mise-en-scene in this film, the discussants were convinced that the head seen in the frame is a crew member who appears within the frame by mistake. This confusion is further escalated by the fact that the mirror is positioned right next to a door leading into an inner room. The impact of this reflection on the scene is detrimental, leaving the viewer wondering whether the director watched through the filming because this could have been corrected on the set. It takes longer for the viewer to relate the movement of the image to Eliza’s head. The mirror becomes a source of visual conflict and not a complementary to the essence of that scene.

A scene’s set should enhance believability and not contradiction of meaning. Apart from the actors’ performance, the director is tasked with the responsibility of creating believability within a film’s scenes. Each scene should strive to be as representative as possible of a plausible world outside the world of the film. One such way is by the careful arrangement of objects and/or people within the shot. Every item within a shot is consciously placed so that it creates a certain impression on the audience. Each camera set-up produces a different point of focus. Altering camera set-ups however does not
change the initial set arrangement. The items within a shot are usually carefully selected and strategically placed, with the director’s approval, so as to enhance the message that the film conveys.

Eliza’s living room also creates a sense of unbelievability. Throughout the film, Eliza is presented as a champion against African lifestyle; she antagonises African ways of life. She confesses to hating African women when she is with Johnson, and repeatedly refers to them as bitches. The presence of African art work on Eliza’s wall spells a contradiction of her ideologies. Given Eliza’s trait as a control freak, there is no likelihood that John or Tobby, the only pro-Africa thinkers in the family- could have hung the painting on the wall.

A similar contradictory message from the director is seen on the set of John’s clinic. John is a gynaecologist. He declares that he is used to meeting married women in the clinic. This, he says as he cheekily succeeds in finding out whether Dorothy, whom he is visibly attracted to, is single or married. While in bed at night and the phone rings, he moans that it is so difficult to be a gynaecologist. Thus, the viewer is well informed of John’s medical specialization. However, on his clinic wall, hangs an ophthalmologist’s eye-testing chart. To a hasty viewer, this is just another chart in a doctor’s clinic. The chart does not quite work in line with a gynaecologist’s work. The situation is further aggravated by the fact that there is no chart or any set component indicating that John is a gynaecologist, as should be the case. If there has to be a chart on the clinic wall, it has to
be related to the doctor’s practice. This would have further enriched John’s character profile.

c). Make up and Costume

An actor’s physical appearance plays a major role in his believability. Costume can point towards a character’s opinions about certain issues, among other personal attributes. Costume comprises every item of attire worn in a theatrical production to further define a character. The more specific it is, the more effective it will be in defining the character. So, anything worn by an actor during performance is subject to critical appraisal since it is not worn by chance, but by choice, for which the director must be accountable. Thus, costume is not just a piece of cloth to cover and protect the body; it is a metaphoric symbol that enhances performance and discovery of characters (Brockett, 1991).

Costume and Make up are quite closely related in the spectacular presentation of the character, so it becomes imperative that they be analysed together, thus the decision to consider them side by side in this study. A character’s appearance can therefore be understood in relation to and as a pointer towards their social class, sex, age, period, personal taste, attitude, religion, among other factors strongly considered in character development. Consciousness to a performer’s appearance is an age old component of performance, dating back to the ancient Egyptian civilisation whereby people struggled for survival with decorated skin that would scare, beautify or wade off evil. (Payne1965). To a large extent, costume is quite functional as it complements the cast’s varied roles. For example, Eliza’s defiance is contrasted with Agnes’ through costume. Eliza is more
liberal with her dressing and even puts on trousers both in the city and in the village. Trousers are considered indecent for a married woman by traditional Africans such as John’s rural family members. Women who conform to “decent” dressing wear skirts and dresses throughout the film. Eliza and her daughter, Susan, are the only exception. Eliza is sharply contrasted with Agnes who apart from putting on dresses, also sometimes, wears a headscarf, a symbol of further “decency”.

It is mainly through costume that the viewer gets to identify some of the ethnic communities in the film. The film parades several Kenyan ethnic groups as metonyms of the traditional culture. It is clear that Gamba Justifiably does this to avoid typifying a single national group as a representative of the traditional Kenyan culture (Diang’a 2011). It thus showcases the varied cultural wealth the country boasts. For instance, the pastoralists that Tobby meets in the savannah are costumed in the typical red Maasai shawls. This points to them being Maasai men; a situation confirmed by their song, chant and the archetypal Moran jumps with which they entertain Tobby. The long gourd with milk used as a prop also complements the spectator’s initial mental picture of Maasai men in red shawls. Likewise, at Tobby’s circumcision ceremony, the young men are clad in traditional clothes typically associated with Kikuyu and Meru communities. By the time the circumcision counsellor talks to the initiates in Kikuyu, the viewer is already prepared for this as the costumes work very well to convince him about the ethnic nations represented here.
On the same stance, the mad man’s costume shows the director’s unsuccessful attempt at insinuating the man’s mental state. With torn dirty shoes and clothes, bushy beard and unkempt hair, the man mildly comes across as a mad man. The man has had this disorder for a long while and since he says he lives on the streets, he probably dressed himself. However, these clothes do not seem to have been worn by a person with a psychological condition caused by brain damage. They are too orderly to have been put together by a person with cognitive insufficiency as mentioned herein. If the man just became mad a few weeks or months ago, then his costume and make-up, as they are, complement his character. Since his brain was damaged as a child, it is easy to assume that he has been insane since childhood. This calls for a more disorderly dressing than what he has.

As mentioned before, abnormal behaviour and extremity of cognitive judgement in insanity should have been exemplified in the man’s physical outlook. Typically, though not always, for a mad person, the shoes could be different, the shirt would not necessarily match the trousers, the glasses he wears would not be in good shape; may be broken lenses would have sufficed to show that he probably picked the used frames in a dumping site. A mad man is not obliged to wear a man’s clothes. There are possibilities of him wearing even a woman’s clothes, sometimes oversized or undersized, or even stay half naked. In a nutshell, much as little thought was apportioned to the mad man’s characterisation, the costume designer did not pay a lot of attention to this character’s outlook either. What the director says seems to have been more important to the crew than how the message comes across because costume is one of the manners in which this happens.
The mad man’s make up is an area in which this film’s flaws again. The man indeed convinces the viewer that he has not been grooming. The already shaggy hair is sprayed with dirt and dry grass to show that the man actually lives on the streets. The man’s dirty face and general outlook – to some extent - helps develop him as a mad character. Yet, the question of the duration of his insanity becomes a hindrance in the character’s development. Just as with costume, make up should be used to highlight the fact that the man has been insane for over a decade. The basic make-up used on him, may work well for a new case of mental disorder.

John’s father’s accident scene convinces the viewer that given the extent of the injury, as shown by the amount of credible looking blood across his torso, the old man cannot be alive. The intensity of this well effected make up work had to be in tandem with the amount of injury it represents as registered in the viewer’s mind.

4.4.3 Saikati

a) Directing/Acting

Saikati, produced six years after Kolormask, exhibits a commendable improvement on communicative use of the various film elements. At the time of its production, cinematic culture in Kenya was starting to gain shape. Mungai had the ground already broken for her both in terms of production and consumption. Her challenges were however different. She was pioneering what would later in the decade, and much later to date be a strong pillar of the country’s film industry; women’s involvement in filmmaking.
A trained film producer in East Africa’s oldest film school, Kenya Institute of Mass Communication (KIMC) Mungai’s casting and directing comes out largely successful. The weight and urgency of her film’s central theme has passed the test of time to date. Most of the thespians forming the cast for her film fit very well within their respective roles. The story is set in different settings including the city, the Maasai Mara game reserve, hereafter referred to as the Mara and in a Maasai community village near the Mara. Mungai uses a variety of actors who again authentically fit very well within these environments. The actors fully embody their characters and, watching this film, one sees actors who were made to fully understand their respective characters’ roles.

As a director, few instances in the film betray her work. In the film’s ninth minute, Saikati’s mother gets back to Saikati’s uncle with the sad news of the girl’s refusal to get married as the uncle wants. She says:

*Mzee, jana, kama mtoto nakula mimi naongea nayeye...* (Old man, yesterday as the child, Saikati, was eating, I talked to her...)

However, the viewer who witnesses the talk between Saikati and the mother already knows that the two talked and disagreed, but it was not during mealtime. This points to the director’s improper use of cause-effect in the film’s narrative. The director should have corrected this in the shooting script. In the case of Saikati, I attribute this gap to one person taking up multiple production roles in a film. Playing several roles in a production can let small yet dangerous mistakes like this reach the audience. As a scriptwriter,
director, producer, editor and actress in the same film, Mungai, I would say, became too familiar with the project to the extent of not noticing such a mistake. Sometimes, filmmakers in Africa are forced to slip into a number of roles so as to minimise the cost of film production. Mungai’s case is no exception. A similar consequence of assuming numerous duties in a production is lack of appropriate script editing resulting in the kind of ‘preaching’ witnessed in Kolormask as well as in Saikati (43”).

Even though most of the actors in Saikati execute their roles quite well, Ntindai, Saikati’s younger sister needed to be trained further on acting. Being a child does not mandate her to perform dismally. Comparably, the child actors in Pieces exhibit excellent performance as young Stanley and James. Again, the question of the historical period of a film’s production may be invoked to explain this. Ntindai’s character is one of the earliest child roles in the history of filmmaking in Kenya. The actress of this role was, thus walking an untrodden path unlike the children in Pieces, acting sixteen years later on a totally different landscape. By 2008 when Pieces was produced, Kenya had been hosting an exclusively children’s film festival, Lola International Children’s Film Festival, for close to three years. The idea of children not only acting, but also being trained in scripting, directing, criticising and fully involved in all aspects of film production and consumption opened up the role of children in the growth of a film culture in the country. Further to this, the actor playing the role of James in Pieces already had a rich acting profile, having won awards for his star role in a feature film, Toto Millionaire. As such, the child taking up Ntindai’s role in Saikati was acting nearly out of context and the director needed to familiarise her with the acting process to make her more convincing
and useful in the film. Her melodramatic acting, as she listens to a conversation between her mother and uncles, is disappointing. If she is listening she does not have to do it theatrically by cupping her ears and moving her head and eyeballs towards the person talking. This could have been worked on by the director.

The director’s construction of Saikati’s continuity is largely appealing except for a few sequences which again disorient the viewer. In the middle of the Mara, Alex and Saikati’s car run out of fuel. She proposes that they trek because she knows the way home from that spot. They agree and both walk out of the car, Saikati carrying nothing. But after they have been assisted, by the park warders, Saikati walks into a small bush with a small bag, changes clothes and emerges in her initial traditional attire ready to go home. The small bag that she carries is a new entrant into the sequence and we do not understand when Saikati picks it from the car.

Similarly, when Alex gets badly injured, as he slips off a tree branch, we are convinced that the injury is so severe that he cannot walk steadily. He actually limps in pain. Yet, as he and Saikati walk back into the lodge where they had left Monica and Hemish, Alex looks quite well and walks steadily only to start limping again later. He informs Hemish of the injury and the latter tells him that he will be assisted at the lodge. The reason why Saikati and Alex drive back to the lodge is because, according to Alex, “there was a problem”; he injured his leg. Yet the actor gets himself out of character and forgets that he is supposed to be limping. The director cum editor misses that difference in acting.
b). Set and Lighting

For a 1992 film in Kenya, *Saikati*’s aesthetic performance is commendable. However, it is easy to link this to the director’s choice of locations and subsequent minimal use of artificial light. The exterior scenes tend to have better shots compared to interior scenes. Mungai over relies on this. Exterior scenes require natural lights, which cut down costs of production. For example, it concerns any viewer that there is no single interior scene in Saikati’s village even though that is where Saikati’s story begins and ends. Mungai admits that “most of our exterior scenes were shot using natural light…. The film had major budgetary constraints (so we) used the lighting that we could afford at that time”.

The city scenes begin with exterior shots as the two ladies enter Nairobi but the city’s capitalist social structures necessitate interior scenes which then come with lighting challenges for the film’s crew.

It is clear that Mungai shies away from exploring lighting options. In this film, light seems to only serve the illumination purpose. At the dinner scene, where Saikati is to be introduced to Alex and Hemish, the light is so bright that the cutlery sets on the table become too shiny. The silver cutlery placed on white tablecloths become too bright for the scene. A duller tablecloth would have helped reduce the brightness. Filtering the light would have been another remedy for this scene. Similarly, at the stop over, as the two couples take a drink on their attempt to go to the Mara, the lights are unfiltered and Saikati looks all yellow. Her (black) hair and face, just like the vegetation behind her bear the same colour. Throughout the dinner scene, shadows of the actors distract the viewer’s concentration on the cast. The shadows do not add value to the story. The director should
have used three point lighting - key light, fill light and back light - to clear this. The exterior scenes in *Saikati* largely rely on natural vegetation and wildlife for set. This has made some critics claim that the film is too touristic, Showcasing Kenya’s wildlife, which is one of the country’s highest foreign exchange earner. Indeed, of Kenya’s so-called ‘big five’ wildlife tourist attractions, this film shows elephant, lion, buffalo, rhino and hippo. To an extent, this could be a point to worry about given that Mungai’s thematic inclination has nothing to do with wildlife tourism. On the other hand, with the Mara as the setting, especially for Alex and Saikati’s journey back to her rural home, it is inevitable that they meet the animals in the jungle.

c) Costume and Make-up

The director’s choice of costume largely blends well with the diverse locations and cultures represented in the film. For village scenes, the traditional Maasai outfits are used appropriately to enhance the viewer’s belief in the context of the village sequences. A good example is the youth’s evening dance at which we see the chief’s son get attracted to Saikati. This dance becomes more authentic due to the dancers’ convincing costumes. This becomes the more reason why Saikati has to go home and change from the school uniform into the traditional attire. Monica’s urbanite lifestyle is stressed and sharply contrasted with the villagers’ way of life through her costume. The director does this successfully as she consistently presents Monica’s traits and worldview to reflect the urban culture embedded in her costume throughout the film.
However, the film also exhibits a few instances of costume oversights which interrupt the viewer’s generation of meaning. As Saikati walks into a small bush to change into her traditional regalia, her hair is long. Yet, when she walks out, she does not have the hair. The head is made up to show that she has a clean shaven head. The question of a Maasai woman’s hair is dwelt on at large in this film. The initial impression a viewer gets when the film begins is that the village women shave their heads. Therefore, the director tries to achieve this hairstyle in Saikati, Ntindai and their mother by letting them wear dark coloured stockings on their heads. The purpose of a costume is to liken the actor to the character as much as possible. It should make the actor look more real within the setting. Nonetheless, the three ladies’ hair covers are conspicuously different from the heads of other Maasai women, whose heads are actually shaved. Instead of the dark stockings making the three blend well with the setting of the story, the stockings become a marker of their alienation from the rest. It clearly shows that the actresses are new to the film’s setting yet they were not prepared to shave their heads for the film’s sake. Mungai blames this on the budgetary hindrances the production faced.

Costume department was also young and had teething problems, Saikati, her mum and sister had to have hairstyles that are similar to Maasai women, who normally wear short hear. We couldn’t cut their hair at this time of shooting without having to compensate the actresses. We didn’t have this budget; and hair wasn’t going to stop us from telling us our story, so we did something about it.

Hair make-up seems to have posed a great challenge to the director of *Saikati*. The sure way for Mungai to achieve the convincing traditional Maasai woman’s shaved hairstyle would have been for her to have the actresses actually shave their hairs off. This could
have ideally brought out the difference that Saikati feels when she gets to the city and has to dress her hair differently. The director unsuccessfully attempts to trick the viewer into believing that Saikati’s hair, with a clearly visible hairline, is a wig. Monica tries to change Saikati’s look by giving her a wig and a beret to cover the supposedly bald head. Yet, from the time Saikati puts on the wig (24”) all the way to the time she gets into the bush to change clothes the viewer is convinced that the “wig” is her hair. Up to that point, the viewer is likely to have come to terms with the director’s oversight. But, the director worsens things by making Saikati remove the “wig” in the bush to expose the “bald” head. The viewer feels taken for granted. Here, the director assumes that the viewer passively listens to the message as packaged by the director, not questioning the aesthetic input in the story. For the viewer, visual consistency plays a role in having him believe the story as told.

4.4.4 Pieces for Peace
As noted in the earlier chapters, Pieces was produced on a shoestring budget with volunteer cast and crew. This is despite the fact that the concept development and film production took place in the rather apprehensive PEV environment when Kenya was just trying to come to terms with the aftermath of the skirmishes that were fast tearing the country apart. The terse atmosphere that characterised the period is ordinarily not a creative ground for any cultural artefact whose creation require deep thoughts. However, the directors of Pieces responded well to KFC’s cue by ensuring that the film made it to the silver screen despite many obvious challenges. The film has a disturbing amount of stock footage, which, well, helps revisit the scenario as it was, but becomes a challenge to
the spectator who subjects the film to critical appraisal. The film begins as a
documentary, without narration, replays stock shots of presidential campaigns, election
procedures and the sudden burst of unruly chaos disapproving the election results. This is
smoothly merged with a prologue of the film where James consoles the furious Stanley
after the latter’s hardware shop has been set on fire by the rowdy youth. This is when the
credits start rolling, introducing the film. For a first time viewer, it is difficult to
differentiate the stock shots from the prologue that introduces the film. The documentary-
like last sequences in the film take the viewer back to the last days of the PEV, when the
peace accord was signed. In spite of this, the artistic elements in the film present an
above par performance given the economic and socio-historical environment of its
production. Some of the major elements are discussed below:

a). Directing/Acting

Unlike Gamba and Mungai, the directors of Pieces were already well established film
directors in the industry by the time they embarked on the film’s project. Thus, their
familiarity with the different stakeholders in the industry played a very major role in the
film’s production. Apart from the two screenplays, LR 45 and Tough Times, Robby
Bresson and Mburu Kimani had made films such as Help, The Witchdoctor and The Race
respectively. With this kind of background, the two filmmakers found it feasible to
request other cineastes to join them and voluntarily play a role in the film’s production.
These networks had been established prior to the film’s production. This points to an
already thriving filmmaking environment. Bresson says that all the thespians in the film
were volunteers and the stock footage was given to the production team for free by
friends. This indicates that with a more vibrant industry, dependence on willing colleagues can make production less strenuous, even on very low budget. *Pieces* can be viewed more as a product of the growing film industry and much less as belonging to the two directors. The involvement of the KFC in itself spells a lot of promise for filmmakers in Kenya. Even though the funding from KFC was far from the film’s budget, the initial ‘Sinema Pamoja’ initiative and KFC’s commissioning of the film’s production indicate availability of support, even if it is only in terms of ideas, to filmmakers from the government.

Bresson and Kimani separately scripted, cast, produced and directed the two films that make up *Pieces: LR 45* and *Tough Times* respectively. They also acted in each other’s films. The question of film directors taking up multiple roles surfaces here again. The directors unhesitatingly blame this on the high cost of production with minimal budget. The irony is that with voluntary acting, the directors still came up with a very convincing cast. The thespians were already experienced and well known film and TV stars. A great milestone that the directors achieve is seen when two look-alike brothers (in real life) play the roles of young Stanley and James. This makes the scenes in which they appear quite believable. However, when the two boys grow up, they do not look alike anymore. Although young Stanley and James are well cast, the older actors of these roles needed to have a lot of physical similarities for continuity. The director could have gone for non-look-alike boys to play the roles of the young brothers.
Despite the above hitch, the cast execute their roles quite well. The kind of acting/casting oversights seen in *Kolormask* and *Saikati* are minimal in *Pieces* as the late 2000s present a very different picture in film acting compared to the 1980s and 1990s. Other than the factors already mentioned above, the film industry in the 2000s was already replete with experienced or willing screen thespians. This explains the rise in the quality of acting and directing.

Bresson’s creativity as a director is highlighted when he creates a scene out of stock footage, creating continuity in a unique way between the stock and the scene that follows. This shows that the director’s creativity can sometimes be shaped by the inputs he acquires for the film. So, aesthetic choices, sometimes, do not have to come from the director’s initial idea. Based on a stock footage showing the policemen chasing a civilian, a man in a pink shirt and grey trousers in the streets of Nairobi, Bresson extends this chase into the public toilet where the Mwakwere’s have gone to help themselves. The man on the street is re-created by proper casting and costumes so that he gets beaten up in the toilet together with the Mwakweres. The actor in pink shirt looks exactly like the man on the street.

Although the acting is well done, a few instances in the film bring down the actors and directors’ performance. Mwakwere gets seriously injured following the police hurl-up in the toilet scene. Yet, he acts a bit too strong for the kind of injury he is feared to have incurred; brain damage. He talks energetically with strong gesticulations to a point of even rising from the bed to an upright position. He should be in too much pain to move as
he does throughout the scene in which he gets to the hospital wards. Sadly, still, Mwakere’s serious injury gets better too soon as we see him walk smiling and unaided just a day after this incident. For the head injury to get better, he should have stayed longer in the hospital, receiving treatment.

Similarly, Kama exhibits unrealistic stance, walking a long distance with a pierced chest. His friends turn into foes after the announcement of the presidential poll results and beat him up, piercing his left breast with an arrow. Visibly, Kama holds the arrow in place so that it does not drop. This sequence does not really convince the viewer. It reminds the viewer of the unprofessional acting in Sunday school concerts. The arrow has pierced into the area around Kama’s heart, yet he runs with it stuck in his flesh all the way to his other friend’s home. If the arrow pierced deep enough for it not to fall off, then Kama would not be alive by the time he gets to the friend’s home. The director would have used another marker of the extreme pain Kama suffers rather than an arrow stuck in the left breast.

When Celina offers James water and toothbrush to clear the bad breath he is said to have, James takes the opportunity to tease her. He asks whether she minds him keeping the toothbrush. Of course she does not. James slips the brush into his coat’s chest pocket then joins his father and brother who are already setting off to town. In the next sequence, a scene of the three walking along a murram road to the bus stop, the toothbrush is missing from James’ pocket. There is no time lapse between the two scenes, yet, there is no
explanation about what may have happened to the toothbrush. This is a continuity problem and could have been curbed either during production or post-production stage.

As the trio move to the bus stop, James asks Stanley for “a G”, a pseudonym for Kshs. 1000/= . Amid little grumbling, Stanley opens his wallet and gives his brother a note. By all indications, the viewer is convinced that James has been given a Ksh. 1000/= note. Yet, later in the hospital, as the two sons wait for their father’s X-ray report, Stanley blames his brother for having conned him of his money. James retorts that “it was two hundred bob” (Kshs. 200/=), which he gets from his wallet and gives to Stanley. Here, the viewer is left with too many questions and possibilities which he cannot answer clearly without the assistance of the directors.

At the IDP camp, Andrew Muthure (Stanley) confuses his lines, repeating himself unnaturally. In one scene, he utters the following sentences without motivation for the repetition. He says: “we have a house that we cannot live in and a title deed that is totally useless”. This should have been noted earlier during production or post-production. A different take could have been used instead of the one in the film.

b). Costume and Make-up

The story captured in Pieces spans over a relatively short period of time. The story covers two days though the inclusion of the flashback to over twenty years before enriches the narrative. The flashback gives reason for certain current behaviour seen in the characters within the two days.
For instance, Stanley’s excessive love for money is closely associated with the inspiration he gets from the old Ksh. 100 he stole from his father’s pocket when he was young; the oldest note he ever had. One of the benefits of limited time span is that it reduces costs. One of the areas in which costs are minimised due to the short span is the costume and make up department. Given the intensity of activities in the two days, most of the characters are too engrossed to change their costume. There is so much to handle in a very short time. The filmmakers have dressed the cast in a way that they are comfortable for their roles yet believable in the two days. For example, Mwakwere’s costume is layered in a way that it remains not only a denoter of who he is, as discussed earlier, but it is also a functional dress up. As they leave for the bank, his official dressing complements his statement: “I am sure I taught you better (grooming)”, he reprimands James who has stinking breath and is not as preenly dressed as Mwakwere and Stanley. Mwakwere’s costume peels off according to need, as the story progresses. After he is hit by the police, his coat and shirt are removed but he remains with a T-shirt, which is just what he needs in the hospital ward. Wearing a T-shirt in the ward is convincing because even the other patients in the ward are dressed in civilian clothes and not the hospital’s in-patient gowns as is the norm in the country.

Mwakwere, having been asleep in the hospital ward, wakes up apprehensive of the whereabouts of his neck tie. He finds it, though now loosely tied round his neck. He is relieved as he reaches for the safe deposit key he had hidden within the seams of the neck tie. The tie is strategically left on his neck so as to clear the suspense that has been
building up in both the sons and the viewer. The viewer has been shielded from the truth about the key from the start of the film. However, it beats logic that the nurse thought it wise to remove Mwakwere’s shirt and coat leaving the tie round his neck. The tie is more dangerous as it can easily strangle a patient in Mwakwere’s position.

Stanley and James are main characters, yet they remain in the same costumes throughout the film. This is justifiable given the turn of events around them. Within a day, they have been caught up in police attack, their father is suddenly injured and admitted in hospital, Stanley’s business has been burnt and worse of all, they are homeless and have to learn to ask for food and shelter from the Red Cross workers. With these, the least they can think about is to shower or change clothes. However, the characters that change their outfits do so within justifiable limits. For instance, Wairimu’s family are ousted from their home mercilessly. They do not carry much with them; this explains why they have the same clothes on for two days. Rono’s family has not moved as the village youth favour the family’s ethnic group. This, again, explains why Rono and his father have changed into different clothes by the second day. The film’s costumes are well thought out and largely integrated in the story with the exception of Mwakwere’s hospital ward scenes where the necktie contravenes the directors’ message.

The film has used minimal make up art. The script had to be tailored to work with the budget. With a better budget, Bresson says that he would have changed quite a lot in the film. There is no clear line between the historical setting of the film and the time of its production. This, I see as a strategy to minimise the use of elaborate make up, costume
and other techniques to create the historical mood in the film. This made it easier for the actors who were probably not necessarily just acting — but may be replaying what they or their loved ones had gone through just a few weeks before. Costume and make up become much easier to construct if the story is set in the same time as the time of the film’s production. The only scene where make up detail is observed is when Mwakwere is in hospital bed and the camera zooms into his wounded head injury, revealing the different hues of red used to highlight the centre of the wound on his head and the wound’s peripheral area. The centre is marked by a darker red while the outskirts are lightly coloured. With this, the make-up artist shows the intensity of the injury incurred, exemplifying the directors’ attention to detail. The effect of this make-up explains why I still believe that Mwakwere should not be out of hospital just a day later. In a hasty production, a smudge of red on the white bandage would have been used to pass the message, though this would be hazy. This film shows that the directors are aware of the deeper meanings that can emerge from costume and make-up. These do not contradict the main narrative which carries the director’s message in the film.

c). Set Design and Lighting

As seen earlier in Saikati, exterior sets provide a more affordable fall back for filmmakers whose minimal budgets pose a threat to a production’s completion. It helps reduce the cost of lighting and minimises the number of takes per scene since long shots can still be used with minimal camera set-ups. With extremely low budget and largely exterior scenes, the film, just like Kolormask and Saikati avoids elaborate exploration of lighting options. Apart from shooting costs, editing is also minimised with this approach. Exterior
scenes have been resorted to for this purpose in several African films (Thackway, 2003). In *Pieces*, most of the scenes are set in the exterior. This, compounded by the heavy presence of stock footage, makes set design not so pivotal in finding meaning in this film.

However, in whatever way, the appropriateness of the filming locations still cannot be overlooked totally in the film’s analysis. The relevance of the film’s sets largely complement the main narrative. For example, Mwakwere’s house as seen today is largely differentiated from its view over twenty years ago using colour. The current scenes show the house in full colour while the flashback is faded to spell out the time lapse. Yet a major input on this set is the difference on the door and window grills. The door and window grills both look alike in terms of colour intensity in the flashback. In the current scenes, the door grills have been painted using a brighter blue compared to the window grill painting. These are differences that come with time lapse and the directors’ interest in bringing out these minor changes help them convince the viewer further in their delivery of the story.

In a few instances, however, this relevance is compromised. A case in point is the location chosen to represent a house destroyed by the rowdy youth. Although the directors do not directly relate the vandalized house to Wairimu’s family, the viewer easily makes this connection. Rono’s father surveys the destruction in disappointment, but the arrival of Rono on the scene, and the duo’s argument about Wairimu and her family, brings out the link. It only bothers the viewer that the house being assessed does not look like it just got brought down the day before. If the house were destroyed the day
before, household goods - however few - should have been found on the scene. Even if
the goods were looted, there should have been just a bit of some items left over by the
hurrying looters. The directors should have used a less deserted house to show that the
destruction only happened the day before the scene’s action.

Another set that raises questions of authenticity is that of the post office scene where
Stanley goes to check if the father had kept the title deed in the post office box. Given the
kind of riots that have erupted both in the city and the adjacent villages, it is unlikely that
Stanley can make it safely to the post office. The apparent calm that characterises the post
office environment is disjointed from the mood at the time in the rest of the
neighbourhood.

In conclusion, the film’s set design largely works well for the scenes. However, the
directors do not exhibit extra effort to consciously focus on set design as a major
contributor to meaning as is the case.

4.4.5 Unseen, Unsung, Unforgotten

a). Directing/Acting

The production crew of Unseen approaches directing differently. They see directing as a
weighty task that calls for specialised talent. Aware of what is expected of a director, the
codirectors’ division of labour reflects their individual backgrounds or strengths. “Mona
has a background in theatre ... making her more comfortable working with actors,”
asserts Mbuthia during an in-depth interview session. Mbuthia goes ahead to admit that
working with actors is not her main strength. Her visual art background/interest puts this film above par compared to a lot of Kenyan films.\textsuperscript{70} It is in this regard that the film has received several nominations and awards in the East African region. Since directing can be quite demanding, calling for extensive control over the production phase, division of labour between the two directors was a successful option.

For its cast, the film fairly balanced seasoned thespians with new faces, giving it a fresh look and a break from the largely common actors/actresses. Kenyan directors have been criticised for over-relying on a few thespians, making the experience of watching a Kenyan film rather monotonous. The overall casting of the film is quite convincing. For both the main and supporting characters, their character profiles – age, occupation, past and present life - work towards shaping and developing their traits and choices, which directly contribute to the film’s themes. Kabugi, who is one of the film’s screenwriters, co-producer and score composer, contends that Taabu was initially not developed as he turns out to be in the film. He says that after casting, and Troy getting allocated the role of Taabu, the script had to change in order to accommodate Taabu as a Kenyan of European descent. His presence in the cast therefore calls for adjustment of the supporting cast as well as the extras. This can be seen in the many European extras and minor characters seen at Taabu’s funeral scenes. The flexibility exemplified here gives a spectator a feel of the changing face of message filmmaking, which was initially characterised by restricted time, budget and the general mode of operation as witnessed in \textit{Saikati}. 
The openness in the production team’s approach that saw Troy take up Taabu’s role worked well for the overall meaning of the film. According to Kabugi, Taabu was initially meant to be a mechanic, so changing him to a middle class European young man was a boost to the movie since the filmmakers were trying to present HIV/AIDS pandemic as a universal phenomenon.

Most thespians in Kenya are young people below forty years old. The film developed around young persons, got a believable cast that easily help pass across the director’s thematic concerns without much strain on the part of the viewer. Going by formalist film theory, the lesser the gap between a film and reality, the more believable a film is. Such a film is more appealing to the audience and its meaning delivered to the viewer more effectively. This approach views film as a reflection of life. Thus, the world created by the filmmaker should try to emulate the real life, extremely narrowing the dividing line between the two. Therefore, going by the formalist yardstick, Unseen comes out as a highly successful film.

The film’s cast successfully brought out the characters. This successful representation starts with a convincing casting. The film tends to explore known social stereotypes to develop some of its characters into familiar persons in the community. The most stereotyped characters are the members of the catering committee, Taabu’s personal assistant and Anyango. The actresses exhibit a conscious effort to execute their stereotyped roles effectively. The feminine gossip spread within the catering committee is humorously executed, adding flavour to the film, while at the same time, pushing the
plot forward. The directors’ input in the way the actresses represent their roles is visible. Although to some extent, Naomi, Anyango and the two catering committee members tend to exhibit forceful rendition that usually characterizes stage acting rather than acting for camera. If the director gets way too immersed into the humour elicited by Naomi’s girlish gossip, or the two “strange women” as Taabu refers to the two committee members, she may easily fail to recognise the need for the less melodramatic screen acting in these scenes.

Anyango’s nagging and unfounded assumptions propelled by jealousy get her into frequent conflicts with her boyfriend, Taabu. On the other hand, Taabu is presented as a rational thinker who carefully weighs the impact of every word and action associated with him. Scenes with Anyango and Taabu easily evoke a postcolonial understanding of the film’s choice to juxtapose the two. Anyango’s irrational emotional eruptions, especially towards Taabu can be viewed as hegemonic re-articulation of the colonial centre’s intelligence, sharply contrasted with the periphery’s wildness as seen through Anyango. Taabu cannot understand her turbulence. He tries to do her a favour, and gets “accused of manipulation…”.

Baraka’s acting brings to the fore the issue of inter-textual relations. He tends to carry over his comic character in a series of popular paint commercials, in which he is known to be a cunning yet humorous painter called Mr Marangi. The comic tone slips into his performance as Baraka. I view this as an actor’s inability to fully detach himself from his role in a previous production. Such an inter-textual relation in the same film is exhibited
by Anyango. The rebellious strides she takes, walking out on Taabu at a dinner date replicates her exit from Pick, her boyfriend in Albert Wandago’s *Naliaka is Going* (2003). Mbuthia, a co-director of *Unseen*, finds it easier to work with inexperienced actors than with seasoned ones. Her position insinuates that detaching a seasoned thespian from his established approach to acting is one of the challenges an avant-garde director faces in Africa.

In trying to create a realistic feel in *Unseen*, the directors tend to pay attention to detail by developing the minor characters and even the extras so that their presence and actions add to our understanding of the lead characters. For instance, Anyango is portrayed as a young career lady whose undying love for Taabu drives her to push for a more fulfilling relationship with Taabu. Her desire for Taabu’s love blinds her from seeing the risk of engaging in a sexual relationship with Taabu, who has the HIV. Most of her actions in the film are driven by this desire. She is said to have uttered in Taabu’s presence that “I wish I had a boyfriend”. Consequently, when Taabu invites her for dinner, she demands for a closer relationship as she cannot understand why Taabu is always distant from her yet he claims to love her. When this ends in a disagreement and Anyango bursts out of the dinner scene, a happy, loving couple walks romantically past her. She envies the couple. The two, who are extras, help re-ignite Anyango’s desire for Taabu’s love. The extras, thus, influence the lead character (Anyango) to pursue her desires. This heightens tension in the film.
On the other hand, a lead character may also directly influence the extras and supporting characters. In one of the scenes at Allonzos, Baraka’s continued reckless drinking becomes a point of concern for many. Taabu and the bar attendant try to express their concern with Baraka’s risky behaviour. Baraka first, tells off the bar attendant, saying that he has a mother. He thus warns the lady not to bother him with motherly lecture about his drinking. To Taabu, he roars: “well, fellow Kenyan in a bar, mind your own business!” The effect of this admonition is seen on the extras’ reaction. A young couple that has been drinking at the counter is perplexed. The lady is frightened while the gentleman, worried for the lady, attempts to protect her from any harm that may come from Baraka’s confrontation with Taabu and the bar attendant.

The directors of this film realise that lead characters do not operate in a vacuum. The directors show that even with the extras around the main characters, there are interactions between the two groups of characters. Extras are not used just to decorate the scene. They respond to the main characters’ actions. They are only silenced because the story being narrated is being told largely from the main characters’ point of view.

Compared to the other films already discussed here, in *Unseen*, the directing is much more refined. As an example of this refinement, one of the scenes stands out. When Kate walks Baraka out of the office (1:24”), she remembers something; walks back to her desk; presses a few keys on her laptop keyboard; folds the computer then resumes her walk after Baraka. With hasty directing, Kate could have just walked out. Yet in real sense, Baraka found her working on the computer. Her going back to the machine creates
the impression that she is saving the work she had been doing on the lap top computer then turning the machine off. This becomes more convincing as she says that she was actually done for the day and was ready to leave before Baraka walked in at the start of the scene. Since Kate’s walking out is thus justified, the viewer sees her as a principled character who does not just walk out with Baraka out of sheer excitement. As such, this small act helps solidify Kate’s traits while at the same time, adding a realistic touch to the film. These two aspects are definitely important in a formalist reading of the film.

b). Set, Costume and Make-up

In *Unseen*, the directors exhibit an improvement on the earlier message filmmaking trends in Kenya. The set design exemplifies the director’s attempt to attract the viewer’s attention through pleasant moving images. The film’s mood, is generally sombre, given the deaths and threats occasioned by the HIV pandemic; however, the pleasant sets of interior scenes uplift the spectator, giving him a positive feel despite the fact that most of the main characters are in an indefinite battle with the HIV virus. Specifically, the interior scenes tally very well with the directors’ choice to have the story revolve around a middle class community. A good example is Riziki’s room, which is fully exposed to the viewer only after she tests positive to HIV. The camera reveals a pleasantly arranged room with a purple-pink theme. The girlish room does not prepare the viewer for what Jessica, Riziki’s sister finds out once she opens the beautiful violet and pink coloured furry casket. Jessica’s realization that her sister could be HIV positive is a reality that even the spectator finds difficult to accept. The beautiful set for this scene immediately provides
both Jessica and the viewer with an appealing site that lightens the sad shock of Riziki’s HIV status.

Another therapeutic set in the film is Baraka’s house. The viewer does not get introduced to any other room in Baraka’s apartment except the living room. The film’s directors use this room as a metonym of not only the larger house but also as a reflection of Baraka’s emotional or inner state or being. As a representation of the larger house, the living room is made to harbour all that is just enough for Baraka to live through the period of his depression. He sleeps in this room, eats there and all the left-over food is left lying on the living room table. Baraka’s whole apartment is thus compressed into and represented by this room.

The living room is first introduced to the viewer when Baraka is at his lowest, emotionally. He feels really hopeless and angry. He sees nothing positive in life. He feels unappreciated by Pent International, a company he has been serving with dedication for fifteen years. His fiancée left him for another man because of his workaholic tendencies; he spent most of his time behind the computer working. In despair, and in reaction to the fiancée’s move, Baraka overindulged in alcohol, ending up in unprotected sex with a stranger. He believes that that is the moment when he contracted HIV. He is more saddened by the fact that the same job that cost him his fiancée and good health is the one that now throws him out mercilessly. He painfully mimics his former boss’ explanation that Baraka is “a risk to the other employees” and “it is the company policy”.
What Baraka feels cannot be graphically shown to the viewer, except through the mess the living room has become. Baraka now seems to spend both day and night in this room. Several half-eaten meals in different states of decay litter the table. The beer bottles littering the room are a clear indication that Baraka has been taking too much alcohol as an escapist measure. His shaggy hair is now forming untidy locks out of neglect. He has not changed clothes and now bears a long untidy beard. He managed to get a duvet from his bedroom and now uses it to cover himself when he needs some warmth. His unkempt look and the pathetic status of his living room further highlight Baraka’s depressing moments. The set, or *mise-en-scene* in general, thus, add meaning to the themes being tackled in the film. It helps bring out the extent of hopelessness in Baraka. His hopelessness and anger only illuminates the need for Baraka to be more positive and have hope, which is a major theme in the film.

With the kind of mess in Baraka’s living room, the viewer is distracted from the beautiful wall painting and hangings. These are only visible when Baraka finally manages to pull himself together. The change brings with it a fresh look at Baraka’s life which is now positive. The two interior scenes described above show that set can be successfully designed and used to enhance meaning in film. Even though earlier Kenyan films did not pay a lot of attention to this element, it is an important formal component that should be explored further in relation to meaning generation. *Dr Caligari*, (1917) is one of the films that have been acclaimed for their expressive use of set to back up meaning (Corrigan, 2001).
In Unseen, costume and make-up are effectively used to bring out characters’ traits, which in turn, work towards developing the film’s main concerns. Jessica draws the viewer’s attention to the similarities between Riziki’s dressing and her traits. Riziki thinks that doors are too restricting. That is why she does not close her bedroom door behind her. The sister retorts that “clearly, you feel the same way about clothes”. She says this with a disapproving look at Riziki’s revealing outfit. So, from the outset, the viewer has the opinion that Riziki thinks of clothes as restricting. Her carefree attitude to life validates Jessica’s insinuation. Thus, Riziki’s dressing plays a very important role in advancing the theme of the impact of risky sexual behaviour in relation to HIV.

Costume also largely defines a character’s social standing. The film, using costumes, and to some extent props, like Taabu’s coffin, places the funeral within a middleclass socio-economic context. The mourners are largely dressed in black, a middle-class African sub-culture originating from the West. Apart from Neema’s self attestation to her economic disempowerment after her husband’s death, her dressing helps the directors bring her out as a struggling low income widow. For instance, she does not dress as flamboyantly as Riziki, Ashley or the leader of the catering committee who suspends Neema from the group. Neema’s dressing is moderate and she says that she cannot afford to collect handbags and shoes like many well-to-do ladies do. She only collects bible verses, which give her hope and strength to face each day in her condition. She mentions that she over-depended on her late husband and, were it not for Taabu’s assistance, she would not have made it through after George’s death. Baraka’s emotional states are also amplified using his costume and make up as seen earlier in this chapter.
4.5 Conclusion

This chapter has centred on the identification and assessment of artistic forms of the selected films and the factors that may have led the filmmakers to adopt the particular styles in the films. Formalist and *Auteurist* film theories guided most of the thoughts put forth in the chapter. The Formalist film critics admit an understanding of the fact that film is not reality. It however has immense ability to represent any imaginable part of the real life, be it abstract or concrete (Lindgren, 1972). This position evokes Plato’s observation on the Arts as mere reflection of reality. Hence, formalism explores the extent to which a filmmaker attempts to minimise the dividing line that separates reality from its representation on film; the real world from the reel world. A filmmaker has a wide range of possibilities to explore in his bid to minimise this gap. The gap can only be reduced but cannot be fully eliminated because in its very nature, the screen, as a picture frame comprising the various shots, is a barrier creating a distance between the audience and the film’s action both in time and space. With a film director or *auteur* rests the power to manipulate the artistic film elements in order to achieve a particular desired effect for communicative purpose. A director’s success is thus partly increased by his attempt at eliminating this barrier, permeating the audience’s entry into the reality of the scene. In this chapter, it emerges that the earlier films registered a lesser closeness to reality compared to the more recent films. *Kolormask* and *Saikati* exhibit less aesthetic variation as they present their thematic interests more blatantly compared to *Pieces* and *Unseen*. *Unseen* emerges as a film with a very urgent social message, yet, its directors, exploring various aesthetic elements, soften the gruesomeness of the message making the film very appealing.
It is important to note that an understanding of a film’s message is not only found in the _mise-en-scene_, but it is also closely related to the manner in which this _mise-en-scene_ is shot, enhanced and presented. This can only be found in an engagement of a film’s technical film elements (Bobker 1979). Therefore, this becomes my main undertaking in the next chapter.
CHAPTER FIVE

5.0 APPLICATION OF TECHNICAL FILM ELEMENTS IN THE SELECTED FILMS

5.1 Introduction

This chapter recognises the significance of technical elements of film in the medium’s dissemination of meaning. Of the four main categories of film elements, which Bettetinini (1973:11) refers to as “sources of stimuli for the hypothetical preceptor”, mise-en-scene harbours mainly the aesthetic film components. The other three – sound, editing and cinematography are technical. Chapter three has established that in trying to create meaning out of mis-en-scene, a spectator pays close attention to such elements as setting, props, costume, performance and lighting. Yet, mise-en-scene cannot operate solely as the ultimate carrier of meaning as it does not explore all the possibilities of the film medium to influence meaning. Indeed what Warren (2003:96) refers to as “mise-en-shot” and the processes involved in attaining it transforms the art of putting on stage, or scene into the picture eventually captured by the camera. Not all that is in the mise-en-scene finds space in the mise-en-shot because the latter is rather subjectively created by the filmmaker to create a certain meaning or impact in the film. Therefore, it is clear that to a large extent, what is placed before the camera, mise-en-scene provides the story. It does not change. However, the technical film elements enhance meaning in film by creating mood, intensifying or eliciting further emotions and highlighting points already made by mise-en-scene.
A discussion on *mise-en-scène* and *mise-en-shot* can be simplified as a discussion on narrative and image respectively. Thus, a film narrates a story through images. Much as the narrative is found within a scene, images can only be captured in a shot. In essence, according to Robker (1979) the technical film elements embody the techniques that help manipulate the aesthetic elements to give the film its originality or specific stance. Hence, Robker’s aesthetic elements produce the narrative of a film, which is coerced by the technical elements to give a director the desired images that enhance meaning. The *mise-en-shot* of a film is therefore composed of such elements as camera setup, including angle and movement, editing, sound and colour.

In communicating through film, the construction of the image – a part from the other elements that constitute the narrative – makes up for a larger part of meaning creation. The impact of visual perception tends to last longer in the recipient’s mind. Thus, the director invests a lot in the manner in which a film’s images are constructed and disseminated. Image construction rests heavily on two major factors: the director’s aesthetic prowess and a film’s budget. With reference to *Kolormask, Saikati, Unseen and Pieces*, the following section will dwell on the use of the three main technical elements – cinematography, editing and sound - in the Kenyan message films from 1980 to 2010.

### 5.2 Cinematography

A critical appraisal of camera techniques in the selected films takes centre stage in this section. Cinematography is one of the oldest elements of cinematic expression. When cinema was first invented,
Cameras were placed without thought to compositional or emotional considerations. Lighting was notional (no dramatic intention meant), even for interior scenes... camera movement were not variables in the filmic equation. In the earliest Auguste and Louis Lumière and Thomas Edison films, the camera recorded an event, an act, or an incident. Many of these early films were a single shot.

(Dancyger 2007:3)

Today, camera use has become one of the most critical elements at play in the manner in which cinema communicates. This section analyses, cinematography, the use of camera in shot construction, with respect to the four films under study. Cinematography is “a creative and interpretive process that culminates in the authorship of an original work of art rather than the simple recording of physical events” (Burum, 2007:1). In this definition, Burum establishes several features that give cinematography a distinct and important function within what has been largely attributed to the director authorship.

Burum foregrounds authorship as a function of those involved in cinematography. The process goes beyond mere recording and extends into the manner in which the recording is done. The way an image is constructed should reflect how its creator interprets the world around him. As such, shots become a language that can be manipulated by those using it to create figurative discourses directed to the perceiver to unravel. In a nutshell, a film’s cinematography generates varied meanings that are not obviously intrinsic in the object of focus in this case, the mise-en-scene. Cinematography has three main components that directly influence the viewer’s perception of the objects, altering the supposedly known meaning present before the camera. These are framing, shot composition and camera dynamics. Some scholars also recognise even the post-
production processes used to create the look that the director desires in this category (Robker 1979 and Newman 2009). This is because, no matter his audience, every good director approaches a production with a clear idea of how the film should look. So, the filmmaker may choose to “control” the eye of the film audience to see the objects from a desired perspective. In discussing this, the researcher will time and again, evoke the position of the auteurist movement on the concept of “camera stylo.” According to the popular 1950s-1960s movement, the camera, which controls a lot of cinematic thoughts to date, can be used as a pen by the director to put across the desired images (Sarris 1968). Therefore, this chapter underscores the use of this concept within the four Kenyan films under study.

5.2.1 Shot Composition and Framing

The composition of a shot has a strong semantic effect on the visual message communicated to the viewer. A shot composition comprises the “entire group of parameters - size, framing, point of view, as well as movement, rhythm, duration and the images’ relations with other images...” (Aumont et al. 2004:27). Just like composition, framing enhances meaning created by the various elements making up the shot. Allan (2001:182) views framing as “the way in which an image has been composed with regard to what has been chosen to be shown”. From these descriptions, the two concepts’ interrelatedness is evident. This poses a challenge of analysing the two as separate entities without risking unnecessary repetition. Appropriate use of the two creates continuity in the sequence. The right camera placement and shot flow are the two most important ingredients in a shot as they help orient the viewer (Ablan, 2002). The camera
placement encompasses all the camera set-ups that the director opts for in order to capture the object from different perspectives resulting into varied shot types and framing for semantic and aesthetic impact. Proper shot flow not only maintains the viewer’s interest but it also ensures the film makes sense throughout without uncalled for shifts within the shot.

When Kolormask was produced, the focus of the majority of films made by Africans was more on the message than the manner of conveying it. Although the film joined the pool of pan-Africanist films late, after the works of filmmakers from Senegal, Nigeria, Burkina Faso, Ghana, Mali, among others, it was breaking new grounds in Kenya as the first film by a black Kenyan. Being the first of its kind in the country, its use of technical elements tends to point to the challenges related to the filming and postproduction equipment used the grappling of a new film industry, and the general technical know-how at the time. These directly relate to the historical period of the film’s production, which inevitably had a say in the film’s camera, sound, and editing techniques.

Kolormask’s cinematographic choices are largely influenced by the fact that the film was shot using a 35 mm camera. First, this has an impact on the cost of production, even though the film was produced using state funds. At the time, independent filmmaking was nearly impossible given the cost implications. The equipment used to film Kolormask was too expensive for independent filmmakers to afford. The film had to be taken to Vienna, Austria for post-production processing since Kenya only had one 16mm processing plant at the then state run KIMC. This is the plant that would be used later to
process *Saikati*. Nonetheless, *Kolormask* explores various camera movements which result in shot types that essentially enhance meaning, even if minimally. This becomes more visible given the film’s over-valorised content, subtly implying less attention to other film elements. Some of the scenes lack exhaustive shot exploration which can enhance viewer engagement with the film. A scene where Susan receives a phone call from her mother is captured in a single medium shot. The scene leaves no impact on the viewer other than plainly stating the obvious.

Film realists like Andre’ Bazin and Siegfried Kracauer and more recently, Stanley Cavell talk in favour of long take and reject montage as they focus on film’s ability to record real events, arguing that that is what defines film as an art. They identify “the long take and deep focus shots as the elements of film style that realise film’s specific property. Deep focus allows for a number of actions to be composed in the same shot” (Warren 2003:24). Long take is a shot of long duration. The definition of ‘long’ here is dependent either on the length of the other shots within the film, the general length of shots in other contemporary films or the particular film’s average short length (ASL). ASL is a statistical measurement devised by a film scholar, Barry Salt in the 1970s as a method of determining and appreciating shot editing patterns in a film. Calculated by dividing a film’s length by the number of shots in it, ASL can help identify a shot that significantly deviates from the norm. Being qualitative, this study does not extensively pursue statistical data. Thus, the ASLs referred to are derived from dividing scene length in seconds by the number of shots. Only purposively sampled scenes that have outstanding features are focused on for exemplary reasons.
Even though creative use of the long take can make a scene more appealing, detailing and varying shots through cutting and editing still elicit deeper interest from the audience. At no point in the *Kolormask* do we see an extreme close up or POV shot. These are usually effective in qualifying the message being communicated. The ASL of most scenes is quite high compared to those of the scenes in the other three films. This is because the film largely relies on long shots and long takes, which are very well exemplified in the scene where the Wilsons’ family eat in the village. The scene is very long, running up to three minutes with only 22 shots. The ASL here is about eight seconds per shot. Another scene with very high ASL is when Maria asks Eliza to leave John and join other women in singing. This is a 58 second scene captured in only three shots, giving an ASL of nineteen seconds per shot. One of the scenes, where Susan converses with Eliza on phone, is fully presented in one emotionless medium shot. Lower ASLs hasten the pace of the film, making the viewer more interested. Higher ASLs can easily slow down an otherwise great story. Over time, in the history of cinema, there has been a downward trend in films whereby older films tend to have higher ASLs while more recent films have lower ASLs.

Given the stringent economic environments in most countries in Africa, low budget straight to video films are a common phenomenon in the region. For message filmmakers, the situation is trickier. The film’s directors have to manipulate the available resources in order to come up with a product that can pass the message across using the minimal resources available. The narrative approach, to use Warren’s (2008) concept,
comes in handy for low budget African films mainly because it contracts shots. Instead of expanded and detailed shots, a few shots can advance a very important beat within the narrative. However, while a typical Hollywood film, for example, would have quite a number of shots, with more observational or dead times which minimally move the plot, a narrative approach to making a film, especially one with a low budget, can have much fewer shots narrating a longer part of the plot. It is common to find that such films would further minimise the number of shots in the entire film by investing in long shots. In these long shots, a lot of information or beats are covered. This enables the director unleash his intent message without having to delve into fineries of different camera set-ups meant to draw particular emotional response from the viewer. For example, in Kolormask, The shaving scene employs this technique. In Saikati, the Mara accident and initial village scenes also make use of the narrative approach with minimal shots. This is in contrast with the city scenes which rely on several shots to express Saikati’s physical change as she undresses, dresses up, applies and removes make up.

At the same time, adopting deep focus photography gives room for a detailed narration. The adoption of deep focus photography in the long shots in Saikati and Kolormask invites the viewer to get to grasp the rural setting in its totality. The indigenous cohesion in African communities can only be expressed in the long shots showing action in the foreground, mid-ground and background in a frame. Warren (2008) and (Dancyger 2006) find this a feature of deep focus photography and wide angle shots respectively. For Kolormask, a film that continuously appeals to the audience to appreciate the cultural aesthetics in African communities, this shot type is inevitable. Although long shot makes
less emotional impact, it highly highlights the communal lifestyle by bringing people together in celebrations such as circumcision, mourning as well as other death related rituals that we see in *Kolormask*. When John’s mother passes on, the camera is stably positioned where characters move in and out of frame as different members of the community respond to the death. The shot exposes the people’s varied reactions which help enrich the existent cultural beliefs such as gender roles during death and mourning.

In John’s community, it emerges that women nurse the sick till death. It then becomes their consequent duty to break the news of death by wailing to draw people’s attention. The men do not wail as seen in the widower in this scene. Some of the male mourners simply utter words of condolence to the bereaved. Even John maintains his calm while women weep moving in all directions. The scenes of women wailing as they welcome John’s family to the village as they continue mourning, singing and dancing in the evenings and scenes of women fetching water from a spring are all captured in long shots. In these shots, cultural uniqueness is expressed in a manner that criminalises those opposed to the lifestyle. The males’ roles are also highlighted in a communal setting. The hair-shaving ceremony is conducted under the directives of an uncle. This spectacular as well as dramatic scene, shot in long shot brings out the height of Eliza’s defiance to what she calls “silly” African customs in the full glare of the large extended family. She commits “an abomination” - according to the uncle - by refusing to have her hair cut.

A long shot creates an uncomfortable distance between the viewer and the events, limiting his interaction with them. It also minimises editing, a moment when the spectator highly influences the filmmaking process. A spectator wants the different shot types to
speak to him differently. For example, the intensity of the emotions from the events in a shot is felt more as the camera lens zooms further into the action resulting into close-ups and extreme close-ups. This is how monotony is avoided even in day-to-day conversations. If a character is to express anger or even contentment without dialogue, a long shot will not express the same depth of feelings as an extreme close-up. A good example is the expression of Tobby’s fear while he is in the death Forest. Sound and visual effects have been used to show how scary the forest is. Long shots are used to show the vastness of the scary forest. Toby is really frightened and this can be seen on his face, captured in a close-up. It is only through such a shot that the spectator is easily drawn to Toby’s fears. The climax of Tobby’s fear is reached when he accidentally knocks himself on an even scarier carcass. This action is captured in a close-up. Here, Gamba succeeds in getting the viewer to fully empathise with Tobby. In a long shot, this would not have been clearly viewed, hence less emotional impact on the viewer. On the other hand, an extreme close-up would not have given the full view of the action since, even with the close-up, the carcass looks like some hanging piece of meat. It is only until the camera lens zooms out to a medium shot that the viewer is able to tell that the hanging meat is actually a carcass.

For the circumcision ceremony scene, the long shot plays a role uniquely important for the film’s plot. Thitherto, the viewer is in suspense about Tobby’s whereabouts. The long shot of the young initiates does not allow the viewer to recognise Tobby amongst the other initiates. Only a very keen viewer or a second time viewer can identify Tobby in this shot. Even up to the point of the actual operation, the camera avoids closing up on
Tobby although it closes up on the other initiates. This conceals the truth, heightening tension in the viewer, making him well up emotions since both the viewer and the Litodos are still worried for Tobby's security.

The scenes shot in deep focus photography in *Saikati* also tend to be those highlighting either the sprawling Maasai Mara or the communal African lifestyle in Saikati’s village. For the Mara scenes, especially when Saikati and Alex run out of fuel and the elephants threaten them, deep focus photography captures the activities in the wider plane within shot. The early sequences of the film expose an evening youth dance at which the chief’s son shows admiration for Saikati. It is the response to this admiration that propels the film’s plot to the end. The evening dance can only make a visual impact when captured in a long shot. Other camera set ups may interfere with the spectacular picture created by the traditionally clad dancers. However, a few medium shots are used aptly.

*Pieces* employs them in the scene near the newspaper vendor and at Wairimu’s home as the community prepares to receive Rono’s family. On the contrary, *Unseen* minimally uses the long take as it emphasises a closer viewer-character relationship through shorter takes or use of editing. This stylistic choice in *Unseen*, combined with the other well executed elements such as *mise-en-scene* and good directing makes the film emerge as the most compelling of the four. In early Hollywood, long take and deep focus photography combination was adopted purely on its aesthetic strength by such directors as Orson Welles (*Citizen Kane*, 1941 and *Magnificent Ambersons*, 1942). For some filmmakers use this combination in order to avoid interrupting the unfolding and
development of certain events whose rendition strongly relies on this continuity. A major feature of this kind of filming is that it minimises the difference between *mise-en-scene* and *mise-en-shot*. All that is put before the camera has a high chance of being captured by the camera in order to make the shots that make up the final film.

Compared to *Kolormask* and *Saikati*, *Unseen* and *Pieces* tend to explore cinematography more as a means of facilitating meaning conveyance. This shift can be associated with the advancement in technology as well as the film crew's more established knowledge of the language of cinema. The Kenyan society has generally become more cinema-literate and their production and consumption patterns have improved remarkably since the 1990s (Diang'a, 2011). This change is characterised, in *Pieces* and *Unseen* by lower ASL per scene and more detail shots as opposed to the 1980s' case exemplified by *Kolormask*. In detailing shots, long shots are followed by medium shots, close-ups, shot-reverse-shots, over the shoulder shots or even extreme close-ups appropriately to create different emotions and focal points. For instance, two-shots are commonly used to show intimacy while shot-reverse-shot shows that the characters are emotionally apart. These dynamics come out very clearly in the scenes depicting different emotions between Anyango and Taabu in *Unseen*. When the two go out for dinner, they are first captured in a long shot, including the waiter. The camera then steadily zooms in slightly so that the viewer is invited into their privacy. This zoom also ensures a smoother transition into two-shots of Taabu and Anyango, which is the most dominant in the scene. Taabu knows that he can never have Anyango; he is emotionally withdrawn from the scene. He is only trying to be nice to her and enjoy her company. Given this emotional distance, he is the only
character in the scene that is captured in a close-up, save for Anyango’s only close-up at the end of the scene. Anyango is fully emotionally drawn to Taabu. This explains why most of her shots are captured in two-shots with Taabu, where two-shots take the position of the pronoun “we” in verbal language.

Similarly, *Pieces* explores close-up and two-shots in much the same way. As Wairimu and Rono’s families gather to finalise marriage preparations between Wairimu and Rono, the directors are keen on showing how close the two families are. The idea is to shun the violent separation of the two families based on ethnic backgrounds. Just as in *Kolormask* and *Saikati*, *Pieces* employs wide, high angle aerial shots at the start of this scene to express the communal unity of the different ethnic groups. To detail this, the camera captures Baba Rono and Baba Wairimu twice in two-shots as the whole group of relatives from both sides bows down to pray. Baba Rono and Baba Wairimu are the topmost representatives of the two families represented. Capturing them in a two-shot is a way of further expressing how united, if not intimate the two families are, now that their children are even inter-marrying. Just as in *Unseen*, close-up shots come out as intensifiers of emotional distance. In the same scene, Rono and Wairimu, sitting apart, can only exchange loving glances that the camera captures in close up shots. They are emotionally connected but physically very far from each other given the presence of the community members. The smiles exchanged between the two convince the viewer that the two will find time to be closer after the marriage negotiations. The viewer’s expectations are intentionally aroused so that when the rowdy youth disrupt the meeting, the viewer can
also identify with the couple. This technique makes the viewer get actively involved in meaning generation.

Yet, sometimes, two-shots can also be used ironically to express the lack of intimacy. The viewer needs to be critical enough to find the meaning implied in the sub-text. *Pieces* provides a series of two-shots that do not necessarily mean intimacy but show a dependency syndrome that one character would love to get rid of but cannot. Stanley’s elder brother is a “burden” that Stanley would wish not to have as a brother. Celina does not like James’ character as well. In two-shots, the camera projects James as a burden to members of his family. When paired with Stanley, they are always arguing in close-ups. However, when the two tend to agree outside their father’s house, two-shots dominate the scene shortly before they again disagree. When they are in agreement, Stanley only condones the brother for as long as it can last. When Celina is paired with James in a two-shot as he brushes his teeth, Celina is visibly disgusted with James. She only overlooks his seductive approaches to avoid confrontation between Mwakwere and the son. At the same time, Mwakwere is a mean old man who would not wish to share his property with the sons. He calls them names, threatens to withdraw his assistance for Stanley to get a bank loan and refuses to pay his fare to town since the business taking him to town benefits his sons. Two-shots of him and his sons, especially James are expressions of the familial entanglements he would wish to free himself from. One such shot is at the exterior scene where the three want to depart to town. The two-shot only draws James and the father apart as James’ bad breath becomes the source of dissension. Another two-shot that has contrary implication is taken in the *matatu* scene where
Stanley looks at his brother and father and a two-shot of the two taken from Stanley’s
POV discloses not intimacy but a temporary shared meanness directed to Stanley.

POV shots are subjective and are geared towards enticing the viewer to identify with a
character’s position. These and other shot types like aerial shots are, again, more explored
in *Pieces* and *Unseen* than in *Kolormask* and *Saikati*. The POV shots used to disclose
Mwakwere’s view of the ceiling in the hospital corridors as he is pushed on a stretcher is
dramatic and quite ably informs Mwakwere’s later actions. The events that have led to
his hospitalisation have happened too fast for him to comprehend. The rapid movements
and his view of the ceiling mentally take him back to the beatings he went through. The
memories make him shout, “tuna-surrender! Tuna-surrender!” (*We surrender!*). This
prompts Stanley to try taking advantage of the situation to have the old man rated insane
so that Stanley can easily take charge of family wealth. *Unseen*, through a POV shot
takes the viewer through Baraka’s messed living room. The audience is already aware
that Baraka’s house is untidy. But when Mike walks in to his amazement, the camera
follows his eyes in a pan to show the viewer what Mike sees that makes him whistle in
wonder. Indeed, the POV shot shows a more pathetic situation than the earlier objective
view from which the viewer first saw the room. Thus, the POV shot lays emphasis by
giving details of the environment. Dancyger (2006:99) suggests that in order to create
dramatic emphasis, a director should “consider the shift from objective to subjective
placement (of the camera) or the reverse. Such a change will get the audience’s
attention.”
5.2.2 Camera Dynamics

The impact of a moving camera or its lens is immense on meaning generation. Mobility of plane has been found to be one of the cinematographic elements that enhance the spectator's active participation in the process of meaning generation. Clair (1985) implies this as he analyses *Broadway Melody*, a film he really praises, saying "the immobility of planes, that curse of talking films has gone. The camera is as mobile, the angles are as varied as in a good silent film" (Clair 1985; 93-4). The dynamics of a shot may be displayed by the various movements of the object to be filmed, or the movement of the camera or its lenses in accordance with the filmmaker's choice of viewpoint. The filmmaker does this by placing the primary area of his focus within the frame.

The four films experiment with these dynamics variedly depending on the cost of production, the director's choices as well as the temporal environment of the productions. *Kolormask* mildly invests in camera dynamics as a means of enhancing meaning. Its camera is largely stationary and tends to zoom in and out more than pan, track, dolly or tilt. In most of the scenes, the characters walk in and out of the frame creating some level of immobility of the narrative. With a stationary plane, the director takes back *mise-en-scene* to its original meaning in theatre, stage and its components during a performance. It also makes the story less authentic as the shots seem to be restrictive of the action. John walks into frame as he gets home to meet Eliza on the chair. After their dialogue, he walks out of shot as he says he is off to bed. This is really more of a stage movement. In several scenes after this, Sao Gamba's characters walk in and out of frame giving the viewer a near theatrical feel. His walking into shot in a scene where the Toby, Susan and
their friends are playing in the garden seems disruptive to the characters already within frame. Immobile frame has one main drawback that puts the viewer off. It creates an uncomfortable distance between the viewer and the action. A stage audience knows that what he is watching is fictional and so he suspends his disbelief in what he watches on stage until the end of the performance. But a film audience knows how much the art can stretch not just to represent reality, as the film realists would propose, but even to try something outside reality for aesthetic appeal. A dynamic plane is one of the techniques that have been used to stretch the boundaries of reality in film.

The film is however popular with rapid zoom-ins that start with steady long shots or establishing shots then focus into the scene of interest. The technique is employed when John walks home to find Eliza waiting for him unhappily in the sitting room. First an establishing exterior shot of Eliza’s house zooms into the house before the interior scene when John walks into the room and sits next to the wife. Another scene with this camera movement is at John’s clinic whereby, just before the interior scenes, an exterior establishing shot is used then zoomed in. Also, at the restaurant, when the waiter overlooks a minister’s table just because the table has African patrons, an establishing shot is used to locate the table among several others, then the camera zooms into the minister’s table. Nearly every other scene is established then zoomed in. Much as these zooms are too many in the film, they help create spatial relevance of the scenes.
Saikati’s pans are used more in the long shots than in close-ups. However, the panning shot in the washrooms where Saikati timidly plays with a hand dryer is appealing. Monica notices her touching the hand dryer and, dejected, turns to try and implore Saikati to take it easy and ignore Hemish’s rude comments. Plane mobility in *Kolormask* is rather low with minimal pans, tracking and tilts. This restricted movement makes the spectator feel cut off from the film’s action. Mobile plane is more inviting and the spectator feels compelled to move along. Although both *Saikati* and *Kolormask* show several high-rise building in Nairobi, Saikati’s tilting in the shot of the metonymic Kenyatta International Conference Centre actually creates the intimidating feeling Saikati gets as she looks at the building.

Conversely, the latter films such as *Unseen* and *Pieces* tend to explore plane mobility thereby maintaining viewer interest through dynamisms that help drive the narrative. With a dynamic plane, the frame tends to lack borders, creating a feel of real life where there are no borders. A good example of such is in *Pieces* where James clears a bottle of alcohol and throws the bottle off-screen. When the father walks into the scene and realises that James has been drinking, he reaches for the bottle off-screen to ascertain that James has actually been drinking so early in the morning. The viewer feels as if there is life and action even beyond the frame. Even in *Unseen*, a slightly different version of this dismantling of frame borders is employed for authenticity and aesthetics. Riziki finally catches up with Taabu at Allonzo’s and the two engage in a conversation, formally, for the first time. As she walks into the restaurant, Taabu is in frame and Riziki walks past him to a nearby table. The camera follows her to the table - still in the same shot- leaving
Taabu out of shot. "A pan is narratively effective for description because it favours the spectator's cognitive contact with the environment reproduced and with the people that inhabit it (Bettetinini, 1973:93-4). Having been familiarised with the environment through the pan, viewer is aware of Taabu's physical presence and position even though he is out of shot as the camera focuses more on Riziki who is not aware of Taabu's presence. As she notices him and they start talking, the viewer cannot demarcate a proper frame boundary as it seems to keep shifting given the camera pans employed.

As Taabu's casket is lowered into the grave, the camera tilts slowly but stably into a low angle position. This insinuates a possible subjective movement from Taabu's POV. The camera sinks lower as the film comes to an end. The viewer views the environment from Taabu's POV with a sad feeling as we seem to be losing the fight to HIV. "Low angle shots have been used for years to portray strength and power" (Ablan, 200:144). The viewer "sinks" with Taabu and the low angle view of all that surround the grave makes the viewer feel intimidated and powerless. The tilting is more emotional and so the cinematographer makes it really slow to express the sense of loss.

5.3 Spectator Orientation through Editing

Another area of the motion picture that has drawn remarkable interest of film critics over the years is editing. Film editing can record as well as distort reality. Using what Eisenstein refers to as montage, it can also create the unreal. For "a film can be made using a unified unedited space of long take, or with the synthetic constructed space of montage" (Warren 2003:28) Film cutting and editing first came into critics' focus during
the Soviet Montage Movement of the early 1900s. Then, editing was viewed as the most critical element in a film’s communication process. The way shots are carefully put together must therefore be controlled and regulated by a series of techniques that permit the spectator to fit them together like the pieces of a puzzle. Editing beats long take and deep focus photography through the changes in viewpoint implied by the differences in shots, the director can fully involve the spectator in the action. This is so given the fact that the whole idea in composing a particular *mise-en-shot* is to include or orient the viewer as much as possible. Editing aims at giving the story a certain direction, which the director hopes that the spectator will follow. Thus, it “gives the director almost complete control over the events and actors, since the scene only stands when the shots are edited together” (Warren 2003:19). In short, long take focuses on the actor/action more while editing involves the spectator more. To the formalist filmmaker-cum-theorist, Sergei Eisenstein, editing means joining shots together, while, montage means the expressive combination of these shots in order to give metaphoric and symbolic meaning to the filmed events (*Ibid*, 2003:25). In the four films, the joining of shots is done with respect to the various functions of editing that highlight meaning.

Editing generally dismantles the time-space continuum of a story. A single shot may be divided into several parts which may be re-located to other parts of the film for aesthetic, semantic or syntactic purposes. In *Saikati*, Monica’s entry into the village best describes how plausible it can be for a filmmaker to use editing expressively to convey meaning. The “meanwhile” concept, as discussed by Stam (2000) takes full effect in this sequence. The main beat being expressed is that Monica arrives in the village. This, therefore, takes
centre stage. However, filming her entry in a continuous shot would have made the scene quite unappealing to the viewer. For aesthetic purposes and for authenticity, other activities concurrently take place as she walks to Saikati’s mother’s house. To Stam (Ibid), several actions taking place at the same time give rise to the “meanwhile”. For example, Monica walks towards her aunt’s house; “meanwhile”, there are women and children going about their business in the other manyattas within the compound. So, through editing, these other activities taking place beside the main beat are shown to the viewer so as to break Monica’s, otherwise, monotonous walk. Shots of these other activities also help create an authentic rural spectacle. This is particularly effective given that the scene does not have an establishing shot. The spectator is compelled to pay attention to both the central and peripheral activities. In this, the filmmaker is forced to cut the shots of Monica moving and place them where they semantically fit within the plot. The scene is quite long. She has to walk a long distance as the expansive space characteristic of village setting allows it. The long distance also allows the group of children and extended family members who receive gifts from Monica to gather as she walks across briskly, attracting their attention. In such a long scene, only the choices made by the director on the script and during editing can save the film from getting boring. Mungai’s choices succeed in maintaining the viewer’s attention through proper editing.

Through shot arrangement, the directors of Pieces come up with a formidable plot out of the two initial stories. Editing is the most creatively explored technical element in Pieces. The fact that the film was made from two pre-existing story concepts makes editing the
most significant element in creating a cohesive flow in the narrative, thereafter enhancing meaning generation and drawing different emotions at the same time. But this experimentation with editing affects the film in a variety of ways. The struggle to achieve a new coherent film is partly achieved and partly lost.

In trying to set up an environment for the film, the directors place documentary stock footage of the 2007-2008 PEV as the opening sequences of the film. But this comes out as a serious editing mistake. These scenes give the film an unpleasant documentary feel. The target audience is Kenyans. Since this film was produced barely a few months after the actual historical event that inspired it, the memories were still too fresh and uncomfortable for the citizenry to watch them replayed in an otherwise creative film. This puts off the viewer who is prepared to be entertained by a feature film. Bresson, one of the directors admits that many people did not want to be reminded of what had happened and so the film’s reception was poor.74

That notwithstanding, the directors create a very smooth transition from the documentary beginning to the main narrative through editing. Footage with violent destructions of property, looting and police-civilian battles is adjoined with the violence at the end of the film which see Stanley’s hardware shop burned down. Both at the beginning and towards the end of the narrative, we see the same shots of the hardware burning and James trying to restrain Stanley from running into the shop to save his property. In the two positions, the shot sequences serve two distinct purposes. At the beginning, the sequence creates viewer orientation by forming a relevant link between the opening stock shots and the
film the film narrative as seen above. Yet, towards the end of the film, it illustrates the devastating impact of the unrest on individuals as is the case with Stanley who has worked so hard to see this business flourish.

It is during editing that shot lengths are decided. Shorter shots tend to hasten the pace of the narrative. More rapid pace implies tension (Dancyger, 2007). A fairly fast paced narrative also keeps a viewer interested since the viewer can see developments within the plot and in the characters. An active and interested viewer is what a filmmaker needs for optimal meaning transmission or generation. The impact of short shots comes out clearly in *Saikati*. Mungai successfully uses rapid cuts and Eisensteinian montage to speed up the story when Saikati enters Nairobi. The director samples the most important sequences and spends more screen time on them. Saikati’s travel to the city could have been dramatic and entertaining for the audience would see her learn to come to terms with new culture as she travels to Nairobi for the first time. However, the director chooses to leave this out of her narration, making the viewer meet the two young ladies only as they make their way through the city. In the city, Saikati is bound to show a lot of naivety as she gets familiar with several strange things she has to meet. These include: skyscrapers, heavy traffic, people sharing a very small room, Monica’s commercial sex work, among others. She is forced to change her outlook in order to fit in this new setting. At this point, the director opts for montage editing in order to compress information that would otherwise take too much screen time to explain. Rapid cutting between shots could speed up action, hastening the general pace of the film. It could also be used to emphasise slowness of an activity hence prolong the suspense – this can emphasise the conflict or
tension of a situation. A main function of rapid change in shots is to get the spectator involved in the two or more points of action.

The transformational montage shots make a clear statement of change in Saikati within a very short screen time. Mungai expresses Saikati’s physical transformation, showing Monica’s suggestions and Saikati’s resistance or compliance where relevant. After the two minutes, the viewer is convinced of Saikati’s partial tolerance to the demands of her new life. The viewer also knows that Saikati’s mind is still clear and her goal remains unchanged even as she accepts to meet Alex. The tension-filled montage shots help the viewer understand why Saikati later removes “excess” make up before walking into the hotel room she is meant to share with Alex. She does that to re-emphasise her continued resistance to prostitution and the images that she associates it with. To her, indicators of such promiscuous life include glaring make up that Monica wears, artificial hair – like the wig Monica offers her and hanging around white men – which she sees as a sign of financial dependence and cheapness. She laments that the Australian tourist lady at the lodge was looking at her as if to tell her to go away; as if to tell her that she is cheap. Saikati hates to be associated with these images and so she insists on going back to school. She is optimistic that she will earn a decent life once she is through with school.

Apart from Saikati, Unseen also exhibits constructive use of rapid cut editing as a mechanism to introduce the rather shocking death of Taabu, the film’s protagonist. The audience get to like Taabu very easily. His magnetic impact on other characters is effortlessly extended to the audience. His death is indeed sadder for the audience, who, at
first, get tranquilized by the film's flashback structure. The viewer only realizes that the film is a flashback of Taabu's life after scenes of his funeral have been introduced. The other characters in the film are aware that Taabu is dead and that all the incidents in the film are sheer memory. In order to bring the viewer to the reality of Taabu's death, the directors creatively introduce funeral scenes while Taabu and his girlfriend, Anyango are engaged in a highly emotional conversation on the balcony of his house. This is again, a very long scene and befittingly important because in it, the main conflict in Taabu and Anyango's relationship is resolved. Taabu has been suppressing the urge to disclose his HIV status to Anyango, yet she keeps on pressuring him to get more serious in the relationship by taking her to bed. The viewer is also tense and concerned about Anyango's persistence. Taabu's decline to her persuasion is one of the reasons the viewers adore Taabu. The scene is thus, one of the most emotive in the film.

Proper editing controls the viewer's feelings towards the action. For instance, sometimes the events in a scene can move too fast for the viewer to keep abreast. Thus, editing determines the pace of the narrative thereby eliciting the viewer's response to it. To break the collated emotional tension, jump-cut editing perfectly works well in Unseen for the transition from the balcony scene, which began as a happy romantic night for the two, to the funeral service scene which takes the viewer back to the film's opening funeral scenes. The romantic night becomes comfortable, at least for the viewer as Anyango discovers that she cannot have Taabu as she has always wanted. The viewer is sorry for Anyango and likes Taabu more for being truthful and selfless to Anyango. More importantly, the viewer is relieved that the conflict has been resolved. However,
immediately after this, he is introduced to a funeral home shot. Without the viewer understanding fully the relevance of such a shot given the cathartic feeling resulting from Taabu’s disclosure, the viewer is taken back to the balcony scene where Anyango is still pestering Taabu to take her to bed even once. The two scenes are interplayed in short cuts captured in a way slightly different from Saikati’s. Editing in Unseen is evidently an improvement on Saikati’s. I allude this to several factors that have improved in the Kenyan film industry from between 1992 and 2009. Of greatest magnitude is the cost of film production, which is highly dependent on the production equipment used. Kolormask and Saikati were filmed and processed using the more expensive analog technology while Unseen, just like Pieces, was filmed on the much cheaper video technology, which allows for equally affordable digital postproduction. The digital era has seen a lot of film industries burgeon in the developing world, Kenya included. The lower production costs and user friendly equipment that characterize this period enables independent filmmakers to produce low cost films with relative ease.

Availability of film crew in the country from whom to choose one’s film professionals has greatly improved the technical aesthetics with which to make even a didactic film more appealing. The director of Saikati says that one of the challenges she faced during the film’s production was the fact that she could not find competent crew to work on some of the departments of her production, necessitating that she takes up several crew duties. For Unseen, these roles are highly delegated. Delegation and sharing of roles has a great potential of enriching not just a film but also any project as several people with varied experiences can share ideas resulting in more refined widely accepted decisions.
With respect to editing, two directors working together with an editor definitely gives a more well thought out creation. This is one of the reasons *Unseen* easily appeals to a wider audience.

The contrast in the two scenes that the *Unseen*’s editor interplays is glaring. As seen above, the balcony scene is established on heightened romantic emotions while the funeral scene is filled with gloom and a deep sense of loss. The balcony scene takes place at night, yet the funeral scene is a day scene. Intercutting these scenes solicit extreme emotions from the audience as the visual appeal of the brightly lit and more colourful funeral scene outshines the rather dull, less lit balcony scene. The viewer’s emotive domain is constantly teased as the focus moves back and forth between the two scenes. This is an aesthetic strategy executed through jump-cut editing to not only slowly introduce the unpalatable truth to the viewer, but it also keeps the viewer guessing through suspense. Suspense is good for a viewer’s attentiveness. The shot-by-shot alternating of interior/night and exterior/day scenes makes the action seem more dynamic and engaging. Although the two scenes are interplayed, they do not amount to the “meanwhile” moment seen in *Saikati* because the two scenes do not take place at the same time.

The film finds a smooth transition from the two scenes back to the narrative when the funeral procession moves to a funeral service and eulogies are read as Anyango continues to pester Taabu at the balcony. The quick mixing of these two activities, the day and night parallels and their seeming independence of each other makes the viewer suspend
the thought of the funeral being Taabu’s. All along, the viewer is tempted to think that the funeral is either a flashback of Anyango’s uncle, whom she mentions just before the first shot of a funeral home plays; or a continuation of a funeral procession at the opening sequences. Up to this point, a first time viewer does not know whose funeral it is that we watch in the opening sequence. Through montage, the directors take the viewer back to the sad realisation that the initial scenes are actually Taabu’s funeral. The shot of Taabu’s photograph with the name William and that of Riziki’s eulogy to Taabu are the first indicators that reveal that it is Taabu’s funeral. In the adjacent balcony shot, Anyango, for the first time in the film, calls Taabu William. With proper and keen arrangement of shots and with a selective cinematographic focus, the directors of *Unseen* are able to withhold certain information from the viewer - such as the fact that Taabu is dead and we have only been watching a re-cap of his life - from the viewer until the directors deem it fit to release the information. Here, editing acts as a sifter through which information gets selected for semantic or aesthetic purposes. Through it, some information may be held back from the viewer until such a time that the director deems it fit to be relayed to the viewer. Thus, editing can increase or lighten the intensity of the information according to need. For example, at the circumcision ceremony scene, in *Kolormask*, Toby’s identity is intentionally held back through a long shot and later shown to the viewer through close up shots. In the script and during production, the need to hide his identity may not arise. However, the editing process provides a podium for this manipulation through shot selection and juxtaposition.
Juxtaposition enables a director to place side by side shots that are out rightly opposite to each other,\textsuperscript{76} for emotional balance; or those that create symbolic meanings through associations (Warren, 2008). Apart from \textit{Unseen}'s juxtaposition of the much disparate balcony and funeral service scenes, \textit{Kolormask} also explores juxtaposition for cathartic effect. The director places side by side, Toby's happy celebratory mood at the circumcision ritual scene to the saddest moment for his parents as they try to identify a body of a young man believed to be Toby. Eliza is convinced that the body is Toby's as she breaks down, yet, shots of Toby finally becoming a “man”, what he has always wished for, interrupts the sad emotional build up in the viewer. This juxtaposition relieves the viewer in a way opposite to the effect of juxtaposition of \textit{Unseen}'s balcony/funeral service shots. For \textit{Kolormask}, it is a feeling of relief while for \textit{Unseen}, the viewer is moved from relief, after Taabu confesses his HIV status to Anyango, to dejection after learning of Taabu’s death.

Through associations, placing shots adjacent to others can create symbolic meanings that can take the form of a shot offering detailed explanations to a previous one or giving answers to questions asked in a previous shot. This makes a film more exciting to watch, keeping the viewer entertained. It also helps minimise unnecessary dialogues since cinema essentially relies on action more than dialogue. \textit{Kolormask} and \textit{Unseen} are the only films studied that exceptionally explore this technique. In \textit{Kolormask}, Mrs Wilson remembers her experience at Wilson's village home saying, “I can laugh about it now, but then...”. The flashback shots that follow tend to explain to the viewer as well as her direct audience what happened then. Similarly, John contrasts Eliza's insensitivity to him
to Dorothy’s appealing understanding. Lying in bed and lost in thoughts, he appreciates Dorothy, in an interior monologue: “...but look at Dorothy, just look at her.” Immediately, shots of Dorothy showing him affection follow, explaining to the viewer exactly why John enjoys her company more than Eliza’s.

In answering questions previously asked in other shots, shot placement can heighten suspense or actually speak on behalf of the characters to whom the question is directed. *Kolormask* invests a lot in this technique. In several occasions, questions are answered by shots. After a fierce domestic wrangle one night, John stays away from his home for four days oblivious of the fact that his son also leaves home at the same time. In a conversation with Eliza, at his clinic, he asks her in a close-up shot, “what do you mean you want your son back?” The close-up shot rightly expresses his intense concern. Eliza does not say anything as the long shot of Toby wandering in the jungle gives details of what she is talking about. This shift from the tense office scene to the relaxed natural set up is a relief to the viewer. From a close-up to a more relaxed long shot; from suspense to realisation of the fact that Toby is alive and safe, the viewer finds the shift cathartic.

In the same way, Eliza and her friend later talk about Toby’s disappearance at a coffee shop. The friend asks Eliza, “could he be eaten (sic) by the wild animals?” Eliza’s answer, “anything can happen in this jungle – meaning Africa. This precedes a shot sequence showing Toby entering the dangerous Death Forest, where indeed anything is possible. Such shot arrangement is also used in *Unseen*. Allonzo, Neema’s employer does not like Taabu coming to his bar and restaurant to “chat” with Neema. On one occasion,
he stops Taabu’s attempt to see Neema telling the latter, “I don’t pay you to chat.” However, the next time, we see him walk into the kitchen, where Neema is working. The viewer is as perplexed as Neema. So, she asks, “How did you get past Allonzo?” Taabu murmurs a response, “I have my ways.” In the next shot, we see Allonzo at the entrance, smiling, counting a wad of Ksh. 1000 notes. This is certainly a very good deal for him. The viewer understands that Taabu bought his way into the kitchen. This is a sign of his commitment to help Neema. The viewer, then, gets to know him as a selfless friend who has kept his word to always be there for his late friend’s wife.

An exceptional achievement of Pieces’ editing technique is the directors’ ability to contract time. Their technique however differs from Anne Mungai’s montage editing. Through editing and appropriate camera angle, the directors contract about two decades into five seconds within which there is transition from the scene in 1988 to the fateful morning when the election results are released in 2007. Some filmmakers tend to mark such long time lapse with subtitles, which on the one hand distract the viewer from enjoying the flow of images to reading words on the screen, and on the other hand, make the film clumsy. In this transitional technique, young Stanley pulls out a Ksh. 100 note which he has just stolen from his father. The excitement with which he draws the money from his pocket attracts the viewer’s attention to the note. Befittingly, the editor places an extreme close-up shot – of the note – next so that the viewer’s interest in the note can be fully optimised. The old note provokes either nostalgic memories of the 1980s in the older viewers or insinuates archaism to the younger viewers. In the next shot, the
camera zooms out of the note to reveal adult Stanley’s hands holding the note in exactly the same way young Stanley did.

One thing is clear: The directors are not keen on giving exactly how many years have elapsed nor do they tell the viewer exactly how old James and Stanley are. The scene and its shot arrangement is a very effective way of the directors ensuring that the viewer plays an active role in the process of meaning generation. The viewer is compelled to remain active through the different emotions elicited in him by the old note; the sudden time lapse and by the fact that he has to do a quick yet mandatory calculation of the time difference between 1988 and 2007. After this, the viewer is again tempted to work out probable ages of James and Stanley in relation to the old note. The viewer starts to wonder why Stanley has kept the note for so long, and why, at this age, would he stare at the note then keep it. Although Stanley gazes at the note only once in the film, the viewer believes that Stanley may have done this severally in the past nineteen years, as the note inspires him to create more wealth. Stanley’s relationship with this note and by extension, money in general becomes a focal point for the viewer as the film plays on. Starting with the dialogue in the next scenes as his brother joins him, all the way to the end of the film, Stanley’s love for material wealth is evident. Knowing him this way assists the viewer to understand him more. Stanley only lets go of this note after undergoing a transformation from a self-centred, money-minded person to a person who values human relations rather than wealth. Shot arrangement has the ability to raise several questions and activities that keep the viewer active as he views a film and generates meaning from it.
The film’s directors rely on continuity editing to create coherence in time and space from the two stories. This creates viewer orientation whereby the viewer is able to relate the shots to one another in a flowing manner. This technique is applied in the interior scene in a public service van, popularly known in Kenya as *matatu*. The *matatu* conductor asks James to pay his fare and James answers in Kiswahili: “*chapaa nyuma*” (expect the fare from someone sitting at the back of the van). In the same shot, the camera pans to reveal Mwakwere sitting right behind James. Then the conductor asks Mwakwere to pay the fare in a mumble that is inaudible to the viewer and Mwakwere points to the back of the van where Stanley is sitting. It is very important that what the conductor says is not audible enough for the spectator to hear. Yet, a viewer can still put together the shot sequencing to imply the message communicated to Mwakwere. Mwakwere signals the conductor without saying a word. The camera then further pans to the back seat where Stanley is. After a few shots in the same scene, Stanley demands for more change from the conductor only to be told that he has paid for the other two. His anger is again captured in a shot just before a two-shot of James and Mwakwere looking quite indifferent. None of the three says anything in these subsequent shots. Yet the audience follows the narrative, which is very humorous. My appraisal of this scene does not undermine the significance of dialogue; it only celebrates the effectiveness of *mise-en-scene* — if well edited — in telling a story.

*Pieces*, Just like *Kolormask*, employs very commonly used editing technique to demarcate time. Space bodies such as stars, moon and sun are sometimes used in transition shots to indicate day or nightfall. The film starts in the morning and by dusk, so
much has happened that the viewer is surprised to see the sun set to mark nightfall. This shot precedes the first night scene which sparks a series of misunderstandings that drive the plot to the end. Similarly, a sunrise transition shot accompanied with an off-screen cock crow is placed after the last scene of the night, the burning of Stanley’s shop. The shot creates viewer orientation as the film directors are keen on marking the sunrise and sunset so as to indicate that the film spans over a very short period. This is also semantically admirable since in less than 24 hours, the impact of PEV has been devastating. This increases the immediacy of the message of peace embedded in the film because one more day of disharmony ensures further devastating destructions. Another transition shot of a rising sun is later used to mark dawn of a new day. Similarly *Kolormask* uses a transition shot of a moon to separate the daytime scene of goat slaughtering from a series of night scenes that follow.

Even though the four films use the above techniques differently, one aspect of editing conjoins all the four. The films have a lot of their scenes located in Nairobi. Being the country’s capital, Nairobi was an early hub for film activities. Currently, film production and other related activities like training, filmmaking firms and festivals are now spearheading film decentralisation in the country from Nairobi to mainly Kisumu and Mombasa. The 2012 introduction of film genre within the National Schools and Colleges’ Drama festival is another promising strategy to encourage filmmaking in all the regions in the country. All the four films studied use various markers to identify Nairobi city, especially, the central business district (CBD). Traffic jams (*Saikati*) and skyscrapers (*Kolormask, Saikati, Unseen and Pieces*) are the most outstanding markers of
the city. With shots depicting high buildings such as Lilian Towers (Saikati and Kolormask); Uchumi House (Kolormask) and Kenyatta International Conference Centre (Kolormask and Saikati) among others, the directors easily establish the city scenes before narrowing down to the scenes of action. The only hindrance to this approach is that these structures change with time, newer ones come up and meanings attached to such structures change over the years. A good example of such changes is Monica showing Saikati KICC, telling her that “it is the tallest building in Nairobi.” This is supposed to elicit wonderment in Saikati who has just come to Nairobi for the first time. But reading this scene today a lot of changes that have taken place in Nairobi’s CBD render KICC less important. For example, it is no longer the tallest building in Nairobi.

5.3.1 Editing Shortcomings

Apart from Pieces’ editing shortcoming already mentioned, most of the four films have several cases of editing hindrances that lead to incoherence, which greatly disrupts meaning generation. Kolormask’s minimal shot exploration directly affects how much editing manipulations could be done. Even so, the editing also sometimes overuses shots whose function is repetitive. For instance, there is over use of an establishing shot which is repeatedly used seven times in the film to introduce the viewer to Eliza’s house. The filmmaker, here tends to view the viewer as a passive being who cannot relate to Eliza’s house without the repeated establishing shots that precede nearly all the interior night scenes in Eliza’s house.
In as much as the directors of *Pieces* explore editing as a technique to successfully put across a comprehensible narrative, several oversights still mar the film’s appeal to the viewer. One of the main shortcomings in the film’s editing is lack of continuity in the shots of the same scene. During editing, the director needs to ensure that all the takes in a scene depict a particular arrangement or appearance of the *mise-en-scene*. Ablan (2002:146) says that continuity must be maintained. The smooth flow that viewers see from one shot to another, continuity, can keep or lose your audience. It can keep them by creating a logical progression shot after shot. They are compelled to watch because the shots make sense in their mind. You can lose viewers if continuity fails because shots are illogical, out of order or simply inconsistent scene after scene. Some of the shot sequences in *Pieces* depict an oversight in this area, putting the viewer off. From the start of the film, Mwakwere calls his new wife, Celina, to greet the boys. The look on her face shows that she is aware of James’ cheekiness towards her. Therefore, she maintains a safe distance from him as she stretches out her hand to greet him. Yet, in the next shot, she is standing right next to him yet no time has passed to account for any possible movement.

*Saikati* also exhibits poor continuity in distance when Saikati and Alex finally part ways. Saikati bids him farewell and starts to walk away. Alex stares at her as she leaves and walks further away into the fields. But when Alex starts to drive off back to where they came from, Saikati is right next to his car. Her proximity to the car disorients the viewer’s perception of the scene. Even in *Kolormask*, shot inconsistency is exhibited in a flashback scene where Wilson’s family are joined by his brother, Lotto for a meal in the village. There is inconsistency in Lotto’s eating. Seemingly, the scene had a lot of takes,
which have been put together without considering the disparities between them. At one point, Lotto starts asking a question holding a very small piece of *ugali* and completes the question in the next shot with a much bigger piece, yet there is no time lapse to warrant any possibilities of him having picked a bigger piece of the meal.

When James and Celina argue at night in Celina’s house, a more glaring shot inconsistency can be seen. James risks his life to get to the house to save Celina from any violence. But his encounter with her is a major twist in the plot that re-directs the narrative as a result of the cross-purpose conversation they engage in. The scene is thus, very significant in the plot. Yet, important as the scene may be, the directors failed to notice the lack of continuity in the takes. This brings down an otherwise well directed scene, which runs for one minute and twelve seconds. The scene is presented in twenty-six shots, out of which ten are close-ups on James. Just behind his head, a wall clock shows it is eight o’clock in the fifth, seventh, ninth eleventh and thirteenth shots. In the fourteenth and the sixteenth shots, the clock reads 8:30. Then, again, in the 18th, 20th and 22nd shots, the clock reads 8:00 o’clock. During editing, the directors, who both express that they were present throughout the editing process, ought to have detected and corrected the mistake early enough. With the assistance of the set designer and director of photography, the director would have removed the clock from the scene or have it defunct since it does not add any semantic or aesthetic value to the scene.
5.4 Functioning of Sound in the Selected Films

Currently, sound is one of the major features we expect any critical appraisal of a film to touch on. Aumont et al (2004: 31) believe that “synchronized sound is one of the most natural-appearing characteristics of the cinema. Yet, for the very reason that sound does appear natural, it remains one of the least examined areas of film theory and aesthetics”. Indeed, sound is less examined, especially in African Cinema. Even though recent scholarship on African cinema has started to recognise the need to study sound as a significant element of meaning generation (Petty, 2009; Dovey and Impey, 2010), there has been no critical engagement of sound in the existing literature on Kenyan film. When sound is well synchronised into the narrative and it unobtrusively complements the themes, the scenery, the emotional impact of a sequence, among others, the viewer is tempted to assume that it is a natural given of film representation. The conception and construction of sound in film has been identified as varied and continues to fluctuate extensively from film to film.

From the Lumiere brothers’ exhibition of le Cinematographe (1895), the audience had to wait until 1928 when the first notable sound film, the Warners’ The Jazz Singer, was produced. Since the advent of the “talkies”, as sound film came to be known, sound technology has continued to evolve. Over the time, there has been a drastic advancement in technology that has greatly simplified sound recording system from large and cumbersome equipment to the use of a more convenient magnetic tape. At the same time, there has been great advancement in post-synchronisation and mixing. This has opened up a lot of possibilities in sound use in film, making proper sound use a crucial part of
film communication. Sound, just like the imagetrack, provides a director with lots of options in formulating thought and generating meaning.

The advent of sound met an early challenge in the works of the 1920s formalists whom Bazin (1967) categorises into two groups; the directors who sought to remain true to the image as the specific language of the medium and those who sought to remain true to reality as the main concept in formalist theory. Those who upheld reality unanimously welcomed sound as a much needed component that would make cinema look closer to real life even though without colour. Yet, the other category of directors happened to be the majority as can be exemplified in most of the 1920s' schools of thoughts such as the French impressionists and surrealists, the Soviet montage and constructivists and the German expressionists with their view of cinema as an intrusion into the already developing “cinelanguage” characterised mainly by image and gesture. They took quite a long time to accept sound in films while others like Charlie Chaplin, never really accepted it (Bazin, 1967; Kracauer, 1985; Arnheim, 1985).

With such a rather cold reception into the film world, sound still made its way, albeit with time, to be one of the most important elements in generating meaning in film. Despite this, its importance is seldom considered subordinate to the “scenographic” representation offered by the visual elements like cinematography and mise-en-scene.
There is absolutely no reason, from a theoretical standpoint that things must remain with sound reinforcing the image. In effect, audio and visual representations have nothing at all in common. Thus, the whole issue of film sound and its relation to the image and the diagesis is another persistent question on today’s theoretical agenda.

(Aumont et al., 2004:1)

This position is misleading. This study draws from Robker’s earlier consideration of sound as a crucial element in film’s semantics. Robker’s position has been later reaffirmed by other scholars such as Clair, 1985, Wright and Braun, 1985 and Chion (2000), who defends cinematic sound saying the mutual relationship between sound and image and how the two benefit from each other to create complete meaning is an “added value”. “The expressive and informative value with which a sound enriches a given image so as to create a definite impression in the immediate or remembered experience one has of it that this information or expression ‘naturally’ comes from what is seen and is already contained in the image itself” (Chion 2000:112). Therefore, the “added value” is at play in the process of sound-image synchronism, which creates a crucial relationship between the audio and the visual film components.

5.4.1 Main Categories of Film Sound

The role of sound in film is closely pegged on the source of that sound. Sound can originate from the film world, diegesis, or from outside the film world. Sound source has been the main parameter in categorising sound used in film (Warren 2008). Warren classifies film sound as either diegetic, originating from the diegesis, or non-diegetic (ND) – originating from outside the film world. He further differentiates external diegetic (ED) sound from internal diegetic (ID) sound as per their respective sources and effect.
a) The Use of External Diagetic Sound in the Films Studied

Diegetic sound may comprise the voices of characters or dialogue and sounds of objects that exist within the story world such as a door bang, music from the instruments that form part of the story, a car hooting, or a fall among others. These are external diegetic sounds as they originate from outside a character’s being. These sounds can be heard by the other characters as well as the viewer. Chion’s added value is exemplified in nearly all diagetic sounds since they are part of the narrative and any discrepancies between such sounds and the corresponding images distort meaning. A good example is the sound of a fall, a slap, a spank or better still, an explosion which is not properly synchronised with the image it relates to. Such acts only find materiality through sound.

External diegetic sound may link shots as seen in the toilet scene in Pieces. With the gunshot sound, the director seamlessly joins the exterior scene where the anti-riot police fire guns in a stock footage and the interior toilet scene, from where the Mwakweres can hear the loud gunshots. The interior scene is enacted while the exterior scene is stock. Here, the gunshot sound helps the directors incorporate the stock footage into the narrative; this is the greatest directing challenge in this film since the sequences risk getting shattered given the numerous stock scenes which must find relevance in the narrative. The linking of shots through sound is what Clair (1985: 94) refers to as “unity of place.” Clair’s position is that sound unifies action from supposedly different shots or even scenes by implying these actions while concentrating on one scene or shot. Clair commends the use of this technique in Harry Beaumont’s Broadway Melody (1929)
saying, "... we hear the noise of a door being slammed and a car driving off while we are shown Bessie Love's anguished face watching from a window the departure which we do not see" (Ibid.). In this short scene, the effect is concentrated on the actress's face, and which, the silent cinema would have had to break up in several visual fragments, owes its existence to the unity of place, achieved through sound.

In *Unseen*, it becomes more interesting to watch the listeners at the party scene rather than the speakers' faces. In watching the listeners more closely, we are able to see Taabu and Anyango exchange fond smiles as other lovers, Roney and Rachael receive a toast for their unbreakable love. Taabu's bid to move towards Anyango is interrupted by Neema. This changes the plot as it inspires activities that propel the plot to its end. Here, the impact of the speaker's message or dialogue is much more important than watching the speaker utter it. Similarly, Saikati is not amused by her mother's proposal for the girl to drop out of school. So as the mother is excitedly explaining to her the benefits of the move, the camera focuses more on Saikati than on the mother, from whom comes the sound. Likewise, *Kolormask*'s shaving scene shows more of the listeners' responses to uncle Tobiso, who is the main speaker, leading the ceremony. In the initial stages of film sound, filmmakers were keen on convincing the spectator that the speaker's lips actually corresponded to his utterances. Today, it is more aesthetically appealing to focus on the effect of the speaker's words, which is largely seen in the recipient's (re)action as it creates Clair's "unity of place." Unity of place is applied more explicitly in *Unseen* and *Pieces* than in *Saikati* and *Kolormask*. This alternative use of the receiver to show what
the speaker is saying creates a more definite effect. It is more dramatic than focusing on the speaker.

While at dialogue, it is important to note that dialogue being the most important ED sound, requires to be as useful as any other sound component for it to “exist naturally” as mentioned at the beginning of this section. “The essence of the cinema is basically visual and every sonic intervention ought to limit itself to a justified and necessary act of expressive integration” (Bettetinini, 1973:111) [emphasis added]. This requires that only “justified” and “necessary” sound components are implicitly foregrounded so that they can contribute to meaning. The sounds emanating from a film are, therefore, assumed to be intentional and their contribution to the overall meaning open to critical discussion of the film. Dialogue should only be used as long as it enhances the meaning in the visual elements. This is why action-based scenes tend to be more popular with the audience than unnecessarily dialogue-based scenes. Kolormask relies more on lengthy dialogues which, combined with the film’s limited plane mobility, renders the film less entertaining. Unnecessary dialogue pushes the film to overstressing the theme. For example, John-Eliza tussle is repetitively addressed until it gets unappealing. Any time the viewer sees the two together, he can guess that there is going to be a conflict, and all this is expressed in dialogue. The mad man’s scene also drags the film into an unnecessarily lengthy yet unconvincing dialogue.
Saikati has a more meaningful use of dialogue as it improves on the lengthy and preachy dialogue use in its predecessor. The lines are more to the point and are minimised. Although Saikati’s drive to go on with schooling sometimes gets overstressed, leading to too much dialogue on Saikati’s part. For instance, when she talks to her mother about her need for education, she even repeats herself. This shows that the dialogue could have been edited and reduced to minimum, meaningful lines. Being the director’s mouthpiece should not imply that she has to literally say what the director wants us to get. The director’s message can still be passed visually through action.

Language choice is another challenging area in Saikati’s dialogue. The use of Kiswahili by Saikati’s mother, uncle and the villagers is a bit disturbing. One wonders why these characters are not using Maasai. Assuming that Kiswahili shows the illiteracy of the village dwellers would be fallacious. The Maasai Mara park warders also later use Kiswahili, yet they are not illiterate. Given the nature of their work, they come into contact with foreign tourists quite often. They should be able to use English which is the language of the film. If the warders’ use of Kiswahili is meant to imply their attempt to exhibit cultural connection with Saikati, then it would be more appropriate for Monica to also use Kiswahili when talking to Saikati. English, the language in which the film is presented, and Maasai, the language of the villagers would have sufficed for the film’s dialogue.
On the contrary, *Pieces* and *Unseen* tend to restrict dialogue to give room for action. Although *Unseen* invests heavily in action in the funeral scenes, with great impact on the viewer, its other scenes are not largely action-based; they have well measured dialogue that does not obstruct the flow of emotions and entertainment as the viewer watches. The two films' fairer use of the other film elements also helps reduce the viewer's attention to dialogue. For example, convincing cast, dressed convincingly in a believable set, with relevant emotional input into their roles can easily get away with an over-worded dialogue. The only thing they cannot get away with is preaching the director's message – especially over and over - as John (*Kolormask*) and Saikati (*Saikati*) do.

External diegetic sound creates the much required cause for decisions made or action taken by characters. It fills up abstract images with meaning and conceals the images' emptiness. Therefore when sound is used as a motivation for a certain action, it should be audible enough to warrant the response it ignites. The director should keep in mind that amplitude increases as the sound source moves towards the ears. The spectator's ears can be assumed to be at the camera's scene of focus. In this way, if sound originates from within a room, where the camera focuses, those in the room, including the spectator, should perceive the sound more clearly than those outside the room. Given the sound levels of Eliza and Gladys, the housemaid, the phone's ringtone originating from the same room should be loud enough for the viewer to identify at the first ringing. Yet, the phone rings for the first time and a first time viewer hardly hears it. At that point, the viewer wonders why Eliza leaves the scene in the middle of a conversation. There has to be a distraction to their discourse so that she can walk away to attend to it. Then, the
phone rings again, this time, louder. For a viewer, it looks like Eliza starts to go to pick up the call before it rings. Quite appropriately, in *Unseen*, Mike rudely rings Baraka’s doorbell and bangs the door in order to draw Baraka’s attention. A normal ringing would not have caused Baraka to get up to receive him as Baraka has been drinking and keeping to himself since he lost his job. Here, the sound is strong enough to wake up a drunkard.

In using sound to cause action from other characters, the amount of sound needs to be equivalent to the reaction desired from the other character for authenticity.

Sao Gamba experiments with the fragmentation of the relationship between sound and its origin throughout the film. He creatively overlaps sounds from different origins and with different functions in an appealing way for aesthetic effect. In the earlier sequences, what begins as a non-diegetic soundtrack turns out to be diegetic as the subsequent scene exposes Toby singing one of the songs that Susan refers to as “radical,” accompanied by a guitar. This technique is repeated severally in the film. For example, the swallowing of milk by Toby is in sync with the Maasai beat as they sing. The boy is very thirsty and hungry as he has not eaten since he left home. It has been several days now. The two Maasai herders offer him milk which he gulps loudly. This swallowing is intentionally amplified to give credence to his hunger. But as he drinks, the two herders start singing as they dance. What starts as loud swallowing of milk smoothly changes into the song.

When John is just about to take his life, what begins as sound effects – to reflect John’s confused state of mind – turns out to be background noise – setting the environment whereby some people are making noise from the background – and as a new shot is
introduced, it becomes dialogue vocalized by the thugs who heartlessly beat up a man before robbing him of money. This transition of the same sound from one function and type to another is an aesthetic success for the film. Gamba manipulates sound to find a creative way of preventing John from committing suicide.

Initially, the sound effects draw the viewer’s attention to John’s latest decision. The viewer is grieved and even nearly upset with John for being such a coward. This was going to be Gamba’s weakness in John’s characterization. Yet, before the viewer’s emotions are fully developed, the background noise distracts John, just before he can tighten the noose. This is cathartic to the viewer. Then, quickly, John identifies the source of the noise as it graduates into dialogue. Ironically, John suddenly realises his value and takes cover successfully. He gets to know that if he goes back to the suicide plan, not only will he lose his now valued life but also the battered man will as the latter really needs John’s help. Sound here aids the director in making a very useful twist on the plot of the story: John does not need to die as he is yet to celebrate his son’s coming of age. Most importantly, John needs to live on to the end of the story so that he can deal with the antagonist.

b) Application of Internal Diegetic Sound in the Films under Study

External diegetic sound is narrowly contrasted with internal diegetic sound, which originates from within the character. Therefore, they are highly subjective as other characters cannot hear these sounds (Buckland 2008). The sounds tend to express a character’s feelings, fears or reactions to or perception of a situation. The use of this
category of sound helps the viewer understand a character better and relate to the character at a closer level. Understanding characters is the beginning of getting a film's meaning.

Internal diegetic sounds may have no physical origin in the story world, but they still emanate from the happenings of the story. For example, interior monologues that Eliza and John engage in while in bed bring out their worries. Gamba even juxtaposes Eliza's and John's monologues by letting each of them give an account of their side of the story simultaneously. This they do lying on the same bed yet not talking to each other. The audience is welcome into the private and inner worlds of each. Without the off-screen enunciation of these thoughts, the viewer would lose track of the story as the image alone cannot express the valuable information carried in these interior monologues. Furthermore, getting to hear each character's take on the conflict enables the viewer decide whether Eliza or John is the villain in the story. Clearly, this scene is challenging – for aesthetic effect – the known convention that internal diegetic sound is not meant for other characters. It impresses the viewer to realise that the two, who are at loggerheads most of the time are actually quite telepathic with each other. It is quite ironic that even though only the viewer should be able to share the internal thoughts of the characters (Warren, 2008), these two characters share thoughts without knowing it. They both worry about their declining marriage.
Similarly, the film invites the spectator into the inner fears of Toby as he makes his way through the Death Forest, but his emotional reaction to the thick and scary forest can only be conceived and expressed through the disturbing sounds that indicate fear. At one point, the intensity of the scare heightens and Toby is so prepared to attack his imagined foe only to knock himself on a dangling carcass, which confirms even to the viewer that indeed the forest is very dangerous, if not scary. Saikati uses ID sound to remind Saikati of her mother’s advice. While in the hotel room, a lone with a strange man, Alex, Saikati remembers her mother’s words – in an internal diegetic sound - as the mother reluctantly bade her farewell: “Saikati, ukienda Nairobi, usiende kutangatanga huko, Ee! Kumbuka umewacha mimi hapa, na dada yako Ntindai; Baba yako amekufa” (Saikati, while in Nairobi, do not engage in immoral behaviour; Remember you have left your sister and I here, and that your father is dead).

These words propel Saikati to take off from Alex after realising that Monica is introducing her to commercial sex work. She realises that she has a responsibility to her family. ID sound in Unseen takes a different format. It immortalises Taabu’s virtues even though the man dies. The film starts when Taabu is dead and the hearse carrying his body is in the funeral procession in the film’s opening scene. Yet, he talks to the audience in a voice over, which only comes in at the opening and last scenes of the film. He tells the audience about his friend and mentor, George – Neema’s husband – who died a few years ago. As the mourners walk in silence, he goes on and on telling the viewer how powerful the HIV has been and wonders whether humans have the power to fight back and win the battle. The virus has made us bury a lot of loved ones. At the end of the film, his interior
monologue resurfaces, Just after Baraka's eulogy and says, "and today, we bury another"; him. From his concerns in this interior monologue, Taabu is dead, yet his soul lives on and continues to do good to the society. He may not physically help people and touch their lives as he did in life, but he still worries about how to fight back and save those who are alive.

The three films which employ ID sound use it for various aesthetic purposes which helps maintain the viewer's attention by fully involving him in the process of meaning generation. A good case in point is its use in the funeral scenes in Unseen. The two funeral sequences drew a lot of discussion during the FGDs on the film as the respondents could not easily agree on who is narrating, whose funeral is it and how many funerals are shown in the first place. A film that critically engages the audience inspires numerous interpretations, which is a success for the directors. This is because meaning is not necessarily inscribed in the shots presented to the audience; it is generated.

c) The Four Films' Use of Non-diegetic Sound

Although non-diegetic sound has its physical origins outside the story world, its use still remains very relevant to the story. The most common sound in this category is score or soundtrack, whose influence on meaning is immense. Soundtrack is widely used in the four films for its impact in trying to create mood or paint the atmosphere that complements the theme of a scene or a sequence or even a whole film. Saikati's soundtracks are thoughtfully selected and are in tandem with themes expressed in the various scenes.\textsuperscript{83} For instance, in the village scenes, the soundtracks used are traditional
Maasai tunes which enhance the Maasai village lifestyle. Yet, when Saikati and Monica get to the city, modern Western music forms the soundtrack to mark the change in the atmosphere and culture; the change that necessitates Saikati’s transformation. Most interesting, is the low tunes of Maasai songs that play as Saikati’s traditional regalia is peeled off and replaced by the clothes she wears to the dinner. This conflicting soundtrack is a symbolic pointer to Saikati’s attachment to her cultural roots despite her transformed outlook. This complements her unwavering approach to things. She has a goal which is made more urgent by the atmosphere created by this soundtrack. This aspect of sound use in Saikati typifies Wright and Braun’s position on film sound. They say “the use of sound imagistically, the crosscutting of sound and visuals can undoubtedly be effective (...) It can and does undoubtedly intensify the effect of the visuals (...) The wrong sound can kill the image” (Wright and Braun 1985:97). So, the director’s choice and use of soundtrack depends on the kind of message he ultimately wants to pass across. He has the mandate to re-create sound so that in conjunction with the imagetrack, the message can be sent to the viewer.

The introductory soundtrack in Kolormask sets the mood by its lyrics which just like every other scene in the film calls upon the audience to shun racial or cultural segregation. It blends very well with the film’s main concerns making it very relevant to the story. The role of music in film cannot be underrated, especially where didactic films are concerned. A lot of films made in or by Africans are didactic. For that matter, appropriate infusion of music into the film to help propagate the message is crucial. “Music has always played an important role in African film as a means of advancing
debate” (Petty 2009:96). It “speaks like those talking drums which send coded messages from old, forgotten languages (giving) an independent connotation to the spoken language of the film” (Barlet 2000:186). Even before the advent of film and literature in the continent as a means of information storage and dissemination, music played a substantial role in the pre-literate Africa where different forms of music “appear in almost unlimited number of contexts” (Finnegan 1981: 241). In concurrence, Okpewho (1992) says music and chants characterised any social gathering or theatrical gathering in Sub-Saharan African traditional lifestyle. Drawing from this tradition, African filmmakers continue to hybridize film with specific music which give their films a cultural expression strongly foregrounding an African world view. To Petty (2009:104), “music and song are often diegetically grounded in a film’s structure, or serve as a suturing device.”

Citing the examples of Senegal’s Madame Brouette (Sene Absa 2002) and Karmen Gei (Ramaka, 2001), Petty (2009) finds music a useful component in African films as it is timely employed by the filmmakers to interrogate various social and political concerns in postcolonial African culture (p. 96) At the end of Pieces the film takes a musical stance investing in the music to complete the story. The appropriately themed song delineates itself from the position previously occupied by music – as soundtrack- throughout the film, taking over the narration. The main theme of the film is heightened through this melodious end, where the song’s lyrics help advance the directors’ cause. When music forms an integral part of a film, the film can be classified as a musical. The musical turn in Pieces shows the significance of music as a reliable communicator of crucial
information. Therefore, the music in *Pieces* is meant to create a distinctive social space, a key moment of decision, within which a summary of Bresson’s story can be understood. Sung in Kiswahili, the then Kenya’s national language, the music brings a unifying feel as the most widely spoken local language in the country has a unifying role in this context, evoking the promise of post-independent cohesion that is now perverted in the aftermath of independence.

Sound tracks play a major role in drawing the viewer’s attention to the film, especially at the film’s onset. All the four films studied invest in captivating sound tracks and effects for their opening sequences. The semantic effect of *Kolormask*’s thematic opening track cannot be over-emphasised. It speaks directly to the viewer, through its lyrics as well. This direct addressing of the viewer further helps define the film’s target audience as it sets up the stage for a debate on the need for inter-cultural tolerance. *Saikati*’s opening soundtrack, composed of traditional Maasai songs helps prepare the viewer about the setting of the story. *Unseen* introduces the film before any sonic intervention on the black screen. As expected, the viewer starts wondering whether the film has an audio problem. Yet, when the opening track starts to play, the film looks complete. For *Pieces*, the opening soundtrack comes in as a relief for the viewer who is already wondering whether the film is a documentary or feature. The sound effects that accompany introductory credits mark the beginning of the feature film. These opening sound effects, though non-diegetic, are very crucial in alerting the viewer of the start of a film. Hence, diegetic actions do not start – for all the four – until the viewer is assumed to be fully attentive. Sound is often the first element of a film to catch the audience’s attention, especially in
an opening sequence (Shyles, 2007). In studio systems, certain theme sounds help the
viewer identify the production company even before the viewer watches the film. A
viewer who has been watching Hollywood productions will immediately identify a Metro
Goldwin Meyer or Universal Studios or a Paramount Pictures production without having
to look at the images as the film begins. This is important where viewers are mainly
attracted by production companies more than directors, stars, genre or film titles.

5.5 Conclusion
In this chapter, it emerges that technical film elements have a major role to play in
creating meaning in the film. *Mise-en-scene* provides the basic story to be told through
film. However, it is the director’s technical choices that create cinema out of what is put
before the camera. The director’s use of cinematographic, editing and sound techniques
in the four films has been analysed, with varied findings. It is important that the four
films studied make an attempt to use these three main technical elements in order to
influence the viewer to perceive the message being passed across in the films. Yet,
*Kolormask* and *Saikati* tend to explore these technical elements less than *Unseen* and
*Pieces*. This observation is closely pegged on the historical time of the film’s production,
which implies that the first two films were breaking new grounds in the country’s film
industry, while the last two found an already growing industry. This favours the latter
films in terms of the presence of much more knowledgeable and experienced crew and
cast.
Referring to contemporary critics' pejorative view of the early films as “silent”, “flicker”, “black and white”, etc, Barrow and White (2008:3) point out that critics should desist from describing these films as if to suggest that there is some incompleteness in the films. They argue that “early media need to be seen as part of the world that created and consumed them.” This approach applies in my appraisal of early Kenyan films like Kolormask and Saikati. As established in this chapter, these films may not have some of the latest technical competencies in the market today. Yet, they made lasting marks on the societies that produced and first consumed them. I define this society not as the individuals that made or consumed the two films from 1986 and 1992, respectively, but as including the general production know-how and the audience literacy at that time. That way, some of the viewers who watched and responded to the films then would have a totally different response to the same films today.
6.0 SUMMARY, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1 Introduction
This chapter summarises the major findings of the study; draws conclusions relating the study’s lacunae, objectives and the findings and recommends areas for further research. This study set out to find out how the directors of *Kolormask, Saikati, Pieces* and *Unseen* balance between style and content in order to entertain and communicate effectively to their viewers.

6.2 Summary and Conclusion
The study delineates some possible origins of didacticism in African film in General. This provides a suitable background from which to analyse Kenyan didactic films. Three main strands emanate as the main contributors to the didactic approach common in African films. The impact of indigenous oral tradition in Africa has continued to be seen in the films, which were mainly produced in the post-independence period. The propagandistic use of film in British colonial Africa introduced film to the colonies as a medium for passing across social information. In this regard, Kenya’s experience with CFU and BECE paved way for a didactic approach evident in latter films made by the locals.

The colonial use of film as an instructional tool found, in Africa, an already existing view of performing arts as channels through which useful information could be passed to the
public or target audience while entertaining them. Viewing the arts as modes of instruction continues to find relevance in contemporary African, indeed Kenyan films through the postcolonial nostalgia - conscious or sub-conscious digging back into the pre-colonial experiences in order to enrich or fill up the hangovers experienced in the postcolonial culture of which contemporary Kenyan film is a product.

Third Cinema’s influence on African message films is marked at two levels: The resistance to class structures, hence the view of cinema as a weapon for revolution. At the same time, colonial resistance in Africa peaked in the late1950s into the 1960s, the time around which Third Cinema movement got into the limelight. With much of its following being third world, Third Cinema’s ideas easily found ground in the budding regional cinema. Joining other arts in articulating postcolonial resistance to cultural domination by the imperial powers, African filmmakers found themselves inevitably committed to articulating social issues through the film medium. African film, though Kenya was to join in later, sprouted as a cinema depicting resistance to cultural dominance by the (former) colonial powers.

Having demarcated the possible roots of didacticism in the Kenyan films, this study narrows down to the four didactic films sampled through stratified random sampling to find out how their directors balance between the social messages and style – characterised by the use of the various elements of film. Whether intended or not, the directors of these films pass across messages that remain relevant to the society today. The directors of the four films had clearly defined target audiences whom they knew
would benefit from the messages in the films. Kolormask addresses the postcolonial community in post-independence Kenya, highlighting the cultural conflicts that typify multi-cultural spaces. The film calls on the audience to become colour-blind and look beyond the skin colour when relating to members of different races. The film uses skin colour as a metonym for other cultural differences. Saikati’s director set out to illuminate the hidden strength in African women. The film was inspired by the director’s mother’s traits. The film also showcases other themes such as cultural crisis, issues of power in gender relations, need for cultural negotiation in a postcolonial space, role of formal education in poverty alleviation and the elusive urban promise. Pieces initially sets out to call upon Kenyans to embrace peace and forge towards national unity in the wake of the 2007/2008 PEV. The film also unearths the gross impact of ethnic animosity, violence and greed for power and wealth. Unseen was conceived as an advocate for reduced stigmatization of PLWA. It also showcases the universality of HIV/AIDS, the virus’ modes of spreading, risky behaviour that can lead one to contracting the virus, how the society can fight the HIV/AIDS pandemic and the importance of living in hope for a better tomorrow albeit with HIV.

The thematic concerns outlined above are expressively communicated to the viewer through various stylistic choices. To make the messages reach the viewer in a more appealing way, the four films make conscious attempts to manipulate the various film elements they use in order to enhance meaning. This study distinguishes four main categories of film elements as outlined by Robker (1979). These are: mise-en-scene, cinematography, editing and the sonic component. Isolating mise-en-scene from the other
three elements, this study analyses the use of aesthetic components such as costume, props, make-up, set design, lighting, acting and directing. The analysis of *mise-en-scene* focuses on the use of the aesthetic film elements in enhancing meaning as well as their ability to entertain in order to sustain the viewer’s interest in the film. The other three elements are found to further modify the components of *mise-en-scene* by creating a perspective from which the viewer is invited to watch the events in the film.

The evolution in the techniques of film production largely affects the Kenyan message film directors’ tendency to manipulate meaning in their productions. The first two films, *Kolormask* and *Saikati* were shot and processed using the analog technology while the other two, *Pieces* and *Unseen* were produced using the digital technology. *Kolormask* and *Saikati* had a lot of budgetary constraints given the immense expense that were occasioned by the expensive technology. The situation was aggravated by the temporal challenges in the Kenyan film industry. At the time of their production, filmmaking had not gained ground in the country. Every crew and cast member was an amateur and had no local icon to learn from. These two aspects largely informed some of the rather wanting aesthetic and technical choices made in the two films. *Pieces* and *Unseen* also faced budgetary constraints. However, the already thriving film culture from the year 2000s becomes their recourse in terms of casting, directing and other crew work. The changing audience literacy also pushed the filmmakers to improve their standards, making the two later films explore more both technically and aesthetically. All in all, most of the four films still exhibit certain artistic and technical oversights that tend to
disorient the viewer. These can be explained more as directorial oversights rather than originating from external forces.

6.3 Recommendations for Further Research

In the course of this study, the following areas emerged as requiring scholarly attention:

- There is need for research on trends in the use of particular film elements in Kenyan and even African cinema since their inception.

- Similarly, a research on style or content patterns of individual film directors should be undertaken to show the direction such directors are taking and what motivates them to take such directions.

- This study identified the impact of colonial filmmaking on the Kenyan productions that followed. Since Kenya is one of the Africa countries that are famous as locations for foreign (mainly Western) filmmakers, It would be important to have a research conducted on the impact of the foreign filming on the country’s film industry.
NOTES

1 See http://malaysia.answers.yahoo.com

2 See http://onpaedia.com

3 Sonia Maasik and Jack Solomon, in their essay, “Popular Signs: Or Everything You’ve Always Known about American Culture (But Nobody Asked)”, concur with Sipalla’s position. In their discussion on signs of popular film, they give one of the salient features of such a film as that of providing “one world” in which we do what we do in everyday life, from the way we entertain ourselves to the way we educate ourselves. They see the old artificial wall between everyday life and the ivory tower of life in the arts coming down.

4 In the 1990’s, there was a marked rise in independent filmmaking firms in Kenya. This has been the most productive decade in terms of filmmaking in Kenya. The independent filmmakers take it upon themselves to source for funds, train their thespians and crew where necessary, and manage their own activities all the way to the final stage of marketing and exhibition. The independent film firms have also been involved in training filmmakers. Such films include Acacia Films, Alwan Communications, X-media and Et cetera Productions among others. In all this, the government’s involvement has been far from the expectations of Nyamwaya et al, who would like the government to provide for filmmakers in all the stages of filmmaking.

5 Refer to www.ed.mtu.edu

6 Ibid.

7 This is according to the Kenya Film Commission Archives. It should, however, be noted that KFC has been in office for only three years and are in the process of compiling a comprehensive list. Other films are yet to be added to the list.

8 Samuel Johnson viewed fiction as didactic, at least in part. He singled out “the young, the ignorant and the idle” as the ones who familiar stories usually instruct on conduct and introductions to life.


10 Crown Film Unit was an organisation within the British government’s Ministry of Information during the World War II. At first, it was known as the General Post Office (GPO) film unit but it became the Crown Film Unit in 1940. It made short information films, documentaries, longer docu-dramas and few feature films for the general public in Britain and abroad.

11 Quoted in Ngayane, 1988/89.

12 Such an impact is recognised in Ghana where the CFU initiated a film school in Accra. The school had encouraging results as African students were trained to become assistants to the production teams. The Ghana Film Industry Corporation (GFIC), established after the country’s independence from Britain in 1957 emerged as an offspring of the old Gold Coast Film Unit formed in 1948 by the British as an extension of the Colonial Information Service. These together with Kwame Nkuruma’s regime’s support to the film industry gave Ghana a steady background to the strong audio-visual culture it exhibits today.


14 Sellers did not want an African advising on this as he argued that such an African was likely to be an elite whose views would be out of touch with the realities that exist among the illiterate Africans for whom the instructional films were made.

15 See the analysis of Mr English at Home (1940) at www.colonialfilms.org.uk/node/1808
Western domination of African film distribution owes a lot to the colonial period when the two major distributors were Gaumont for the French colonies and Rank for the British colonies. In early 1960s, shortly after most African countries got independence, intermediary film distributing companies, Compagnie Africaine Cinématographique Industrielle et Commerciale (COMACICO) and Société d’exploitation Cinématographique Africaine (SECMA) distributed for Francophone countries while the American Motion Picture Export Company (AMPECA) distributed films in Anglophone Africa. This saw the United States of America replace Britain as the main supplier of films in Anglophone Africa.

Having researched and published in orature in Kenya, her understanding of a tale narrator’s work is above that of a common consumer of the orature in the society.

The centre was to produce feature films as well; hence its focus was not just on the instructional and educational films.

The other two reasons he gives are to search for indigenous African traditions that can assist in resolving the current social problems encountered in Africa and to create an alternative film language (p. 160).

Apart from these three forms, this has been found to be the case with African literature.

Spectacle is discussed under the next sub-topic.

This is totally another debate that stretches beyond the perimeters of this study. A further study of this topic involves a deeper postcolonial understanding of the Western critics’ gaze on African culture and its products.

Proverbs (as is the case in most West African films) and other performances can sometimes be over-emphasised such that they operate as independent entities.

Several African filmmakers attest to this as one of their roles. This is well discussed in Mukora (2003) and Diang’a (2007).

The actual date of release or the director of Mrembo, in my view, remains unclear as there are no proper records to ascertain this. The earlier allusion of the film to Sharad Patel and Anne Mungai proved misleading after my personal communication with Anne Mungai on 27th July 2011 in Nairobi.

Nigeria was declared the leading film producer in 2009 followed by America’s Hollywood and Bollywood, the Indian film industry.

See Diang’a 2011.

From an interview with Ingolo wa Keya, the film’s first assistant director in Nairobi on August 3rd, 2011.

See Cham and Bakari, (p. 23).


The report is not dated, but a personal talk with a Kenya filmmaker, Albert Wandago in 2004 reveal that it was written in the early 1980s.

My concern with cultural displacement does not overlook the other different forms of displacements that have been identified within the postcolonial debate. Physical displacement and its consequent
psychological conditions of the colonised has been an important subject in African films like Djibril Diop Mambety’s *Touki Bouki* (1973).

34 See Mwenze Ngangura 1996 p.61. Kinyanjui infers her commitment to this call in Elerson 2000. Gamba is one of the people who wrote the report on Kenyan Cinema which is referred to in this work as Nyamwaya et al. The most memorable impact of this report was the Kenya Government’s support for the production of *Kolormask*.

35 Wilson, an African whose extended family resides in rural Kenya, is married to an African-American lady. The wife refutes the historical relationship between Africans and African-Americans. The Wilsons have so much identified with the Western life that they find Wilson’s extended family unbelievably backward. According to Chief Nanga, in his *No More Lies About Africa*, “The mere fact that African people live in the Americas, the West Indies and Europe, having fast been chained and taken against their will to strange lands as captives, does not, in my opinion, remove their link with mother Africa....” (29). Similarly, Wa Thiong’o in *Decolonising the Mind*, locates African connections to the Four Corners of the earth. He says these people are historically linked through biology, culture and struggle. Ngugi believes that the Afro-Americans, for example, share with Africa the same “bio-geographical roots.” He therefore refers to the Afro-Americans as “Africans who a few hundred years ago were brutally uprooted from the African continent.” (98). He concludes that They both have shared the same past of humiliation and exploitation and they have similar aspirations “for total liberation of all black people in the world.” Harris (Insiders and Outsiders) and Fanon (The Wretched of the Earth) share the same position, referring to this link as the shared history of subjugation which leads its subjects to a common destiny of liberation.

36 Kofi Anyinefa, in “Postcolonial Post-modernity” focuses on the similarities in approach between postcolonial and post-modern criticism. One of the areas in which the two share, he says is on the fact that they both question the social as well as artistic frontiers in a work of art. (15)

37 Interview with Rachael Diang’a on 27th July, 2011 in Nairobi, Kenya.


39 The Maasai are a herding community found largely in Kenya and Tanzania in East Africa Due to the harsh climatic environment they live in, the community sometimes embodies a nomadic lifestyle in search of water and pasture both for themselves and their livestock, which comprise African zebu cattle, goats, sheep, among others. The community is among the few indigenous shifting cultures around the world (See: [http://www.helium.com/items/713314-the-maasai-community-living-in-the-past](http://www.helium.com/items/713314-the-maasai-community-living-in-the-past)). This makes them a major cultural tourist attraction in the region.


41 What Saikati calls poverty is debatably, not poverty, but just another way of life that becomes re-defined as poverty given the Western culture that Saikati has been exposed to.

42 See Bhabha’s “Commitment to Theory.”


44 In-depth interview with Rachael Diang’a on 14th Oct, 2010, Nderi.

45 1997 was a general elections year and the clashes were triggered by the political tensions that surrounded the election period with claims of election rigging.
From my in-depth interview with Robby Bresson on August 2nd 2011, Nairobi.

From my in-depth interview with (Risper) Njoki Mbuthia on August 10th 2011, Nairobi

This is from an interview the researcher conducted with Patrick Kabugi on August 2, 2011 in Nairobi.

According to one of the directors, Njoki Mbuthia, this film was produced within 2007-2008 (Personal communication on August 10th 2011). Thitherto, there were over 900 VCT sites in Kenya. Thus, nearly all adult Kenyans in urban centres had heard about if not spotted VCT centre - 2007 HIV counselling and Testing Week, LVCT Strategic Paper, March 2008.


POV and its effect on meaning in film are discussed further in chapter five.

Refer to chapter one where the four are introduced based on Abram et al’s (2001) classification.

This is expounded further in Hoveyda (2000) and www.myspace.com/pier_paolo_pasolini

According to Chomsky, our comprehension and perception of the world relies on our innate ability to comprehend such concepts (as shape form, movement) and the ability to acquire any language exists within our minds from birth due to the presence of genetically transmitted principles which exist in all human beings across the world. Going by these principles, a new born has the ability to acquire any language it is exposed to because it has the language acquisition device even before it is able to speak.


Interviews with Njoki Mbuthia (10th August 2011); Anne Mungai (15th July 2011); Robby Bresson (14th October 2010) and Ingolo wa Keya (2nd August 2011).

Early films in Africa resisted this by either revisiting African cultural or by criticizing the presence of the colonial forces and cultures on the continent even after political independence of some of the states from late 1950s.


It’s important to note that these conditions do not exhaust the entire list of the iconography of madness.


This was the feeling of the majority of discussants during an FGD on the film on 12th February, 2011.

The painting in question is typically Sao Gamba’s. After producing Kolormask, the film director diminished from the cinematic scene, reverting to painting, the main artistic work he did until his death in 2004.

This is evident in a series of email conversations with the researcher between March 10th and 15th 2012.

Ibid.
This was a major point of discussion during one of the FGDs on Saikati’s aesthetic elements on February 5th 2011. Initially emerging as an unplanned observation by one of the respondents, the concern was that the director’s focus shift to wildlife tourism was misplaced and not within the film’s initial thematic path.

This is according to an email conversation between Anne Mungai and the researcher between 10th – 11th March, 2012.

In-depth interview with the researcher on October 14th, 2010, in Nairobi.

Interview with Bresson 14th October, 2010 in Nairobi.

Interview with the researcher on 10th August 2011.

Ogova (2008) largely expresses discomfort with the aesthetic as well as technical quality of a majority of the Kenyan films.

I have described the concept of “silencing” in an article “Cinema and Development: Necessity for Film training in Public Kenyan Universities” which was presented at The Molleniun development Goals Conference in Nairobi (2005). I view the concept as film’s unique ability to draw its audience’s attention to a particular item within the scene, amplifying its presence and reducing that of the other items in the scene.

Personal communication with Charles Manyara, head of Film training department, KIMC on 12th July 2012 in Nairobi.


Interview with the researcher on 2nd August 2011.

Email interview with the researcher on 10th March 2012.

www.lostpedia.wiki.com/juxtaposition

The Ksh. 100 note that was in circulation in 1988 is no longer in print in 2007. Its use to highlight time is very appropriate in maintaining viewer orientation in the film.

Interviews with Robby Bresson (10/102010) and Kimani (14/10/10) in Nairobi and Nderi respectively.


The FGD on the film’s sound, conducted on 12th February, 2011, did not agree on a convincing reason that could have justified this language choice.

This was the reaction of the FGD participants when they watched the film on 12th February, 2011.

This was observed by the respondents during an FGD on the film’s use of technical elements on 12th February, 2011.
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--------- Emitai, 1971.

**Interviews**

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--- Interview with Rachael Diang’a in Nairobi, August 2nd 2011

Kabugi, Patrick. Interview with Rachael Diang’a in Nairobi on 14th October 2010

--- Interview with Rachael Diang’a in Nairobi on August 2nd, 2011

Mburu, Kimani. Interview with Rachael Diang’a in Nairobi, on 14th October 2010

Mbuthia R. Njoki. Interview with Rachael Diang’a in Nairobi, August 10th 2011

Mungai, Anne. Interview with Rachael diang’a in Nairobi on 15th July 2011

---- Follow-up email interview with Rachael Diang’a 10th – 15th March 2012

Wa Keya, Ingolo. Interview with Rachael Diang’a in Nairobi on August 3rd, 2011

**Internet Sites Frequently Visited**


http://malaysia.answers.yahoo.com

http://onpaedia.com

http://www.ahrf.org.uk/ahrf_news/%20v2_2/prevention.htm

http://www.bartleby.com/114/1.html

http://www.books.google.co.ke/books

http://www.ed.mtu.edu

http://www.filmingkenya.com/issue2.1/sinema_pamoja.html

http://www.filmttheories.com

http://www.jstor.org/stable


http://www.slideshare.net/gumisash/audience-and-editing

www.answers.yahoo.com

www.colonialfilms.org.uk

www.desktopvideo.about.com

www.imdb.com

www.wikipedia.org

www.myspace.com/pierp
APPENDICES

I. Focus Group Discussion Questions

1. How do you assess the use of editing in creating meaning in the film?
2. How does sound enhance the authors' message?
3. Camera movement can create impressions that affect the meaning in film. How does the film explore this?
4. Did you notice any shot content that seems to send out as meaning enhancer?
   - Costume
   - Make-up
   - Directing/acting
   - Lighting
   - Props
5. Do you think the content/themes in the film are relevant to a contemporary Kenya?
6. When watching the film, how did you feel about the balance between the message and entertainment?
7. How do you rate the content presented in the film?

II. Film Observation Guide

1. What themes are brought out in the film?
2. Which film elements are explored in the film?
3. Does the filmmaker create a particular POV to the images/shots?
4. Is the cast convincing in their roles? (Focus on casting, costume, make-up, and register)
5. On average, how many shots are there in a scene? Why?
6. Does the director vary the framing within or between scenes? What is the impact?
7. How does a scene's ASL relate to meaning?
8. Do the props and set have a meaning within the scene?
9. Are there any set discontinuities within a scene? Why?
10. What types of sound are used in the film? Do they have any semantic connotation?
11. What is the order of shots in the scenes? Does this have any significance in the meaning?
12. Is there consistency in style for a particular director, period, etc? Does he/it establish for himself/itself a distinct visual style?
13. How long are the speeches? Over five minutes is absolutely anti-cinematic and needs to be followed up in terms of frequency and implication to style.
14. Do the various film elements provide an insight into a character’s traits? How?
15. How effective is the director’s use of the various film elements?

III. In-depth Interview Guide
1. What was the main aim of making the film?
2. What motivated the story?
3. Who were your target audience for this film?
4. Why did you prefer the film medium to pass across the themes tackled?
5. What did you do (if any) to ensure that the message reached the audience? (colour, cinematography, editing, point of view)
6. Do you believe that technical/aesthetic film elements can be used to improve a film reception? How?
7. Your film is --- long, why?
8. Did you use all professional crew and cast?
9. As a director, how much did you influence the decisions made by the following Departments?
   a. Make-up and Costume
   b. Editing
   c. Cinematography
   d. Sound
   e. Cast directing
10. Do you still think that there should have been a higher budget for this film? What would that have improved?
11. What do you think keeps the technical quality of most Kenyan (African) films low?