

**ANALYSIS OF NARRATIVE FORM IN THREE KENYAN  
FICTION VIDEO FILMS**

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## DECLARATION

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

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**DEDICATION**

To Jackie, Koi, Maina Jnr and Glory for their forbearance in my absent presence while I worked on this thesis. You were always in my heart.

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**LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS**

BECE	British Education Cinema Experiment
CFU	Colonial Film Unit
KFC	Kenya Film cooperation
VCD	Video Compact Disk
DVD	Digital Versatile Disk / Digital Video Disk
KFC	Kenya Film Commission
POV	Point of View
PRC	Pentecostal Revival Church

## OPERATIONAL DEFINITION OF TERMS

- Riverwood:** The Kenyan film industry associated with Nairobi's River Road street where cheaply produced independent home videos are made in mass mainly by Kenyan filmmakers working with a Kenyan crew and cast.
- Zangalewa Aesthetics:** The theatrical art and image associated with street thespians and comedians of Nairobi's River Road district.
- Approximational Mimesis:** Having to do with just enough (as opposed to exact) to represent something.
- Surface Mimesis:** Representation that plays out on the exterior level of phenomena, for instance by employing a common view of things.
- Illustrationism:** Approximational and surface mimesis approach to storytelling that utilizes a narrative or/and elements thereof to make a point or pass a message rather than narrate a unified story.
- Classical Conventions:** Significant narrative practices and rules established by Hollywood cinema between 1910s and 1950s and adopted the world over as standard principles of filmic story telling.
- Narrative Form:** The relationship between various parts (elements) of narrative to form a whole. (Olagoke Alamu, 2010).
- Video Films:** Films produced, distributed and exhibited using video and digital technologies such as video cassettes, VCDs and DVDs, as opposed to celluloid films. These are mostly meant for home consumption.

## ABSTRACT

Research has identified poor quality and unprofessionalism as factors that limit the appeal of Kenyan video films (Kenya Film Commission, *Audience Consumer Trends Survey, 2010*). This study investigates the problems that Kenyan films face in trying to “break down the wall preventing Kenyan films from being shown and celebrated beyond Kenyan borders” (Justine Edwards, 2008, p. 2). It does this through an analysis of three video fiction films by three local filmmakers: Wandahuhu’s *‘Njohera’* (‘Forgive Me’), Simon Nduti’s *‘Kikulacho’* (‘What Bites You’) and Simiyu Barasa’s *‘Toto Millionaire,’* all which have been made under the banner of a Kenyan film industry that is informally known as *Riverwood*. The objectives of the study is to examine the narrative character of these homegrown video films by analyzing them against the classical film form conventions as a benchmark so as to determine how the Kenyan filmmakers’ narrative choices affect communication of meaning. The study is basically guided by the constructivist theory of film criticism which is founded on the tenet that it is the reader (viewer) of the film text that constructs the story and meanings in the story using the clues that the filmmaker puts before him on the screen. Given the broadness of field that is the Kenyan video film practice, and that not much is known concerning its fiction film’s narrative form, this study opts for explanatory case study as its research design. This design lends itself conveniently to the study’s chosen methodology of detailed interpretive textual and contextual analysis of the said films and their relationships. Although this limits (without eliminating) the study’s capacity to generalize its findings, the least that can be hoped for from these few examples of fiction film videos selected is a light, however bright, shone at the anarchic world that is the Kenyan – and by extension African – video film industry. The filmmakers and the specific works that form this research’s case studies have been selected using expert and purposive sampling, respectively, to arrive at a sample that the researcher considers as representative of the typical *Riverwood* feature film, made by Kenyans and expressing a Kenyan consciousness. What stands out in the findings of this research is the illustrational character and functionality of the Kenyan video film, which cuts across the narrative and its constitutive elements. This is to say that as opposed to the classical film model that forms this study’s benchmark, the Kenyan video film does not consider a freely-unfolding story as the core unifying factor in filmic story-telling. What matters is what point the narrative makes, whether at isolated points of its narration, or with specific narrative elements it uses, or with its overall message. These findings, the researcher hopes, will prove useful in the development of theory and practice of Kenyan film as it aspires to contribute its unique voice to the global cinema, and appeal to an audience whose filmic sensibilities have largely been shaped by previous exposure to the classical mode of filmic storytelling.

## 1.0 CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION

Turner Graeme (1999) says that “story provides us with an easy, unconscious, and involving way of constructing our world” (Graeme: 78). Story is the essence of virtually all narrative forms. Indeed, the two terms (story and narrative) can be used interchangeably. Bordwell and Thompson (2001) define narrative as “a chain of events in cause-effect relationship occurring in time and space” (Bordwell: 90). This definition emphasizes action, causality and spatio-temporal dimensions of a narrative. A second component of narrative is narration, which Bordwell and Thompson define as “the moment-by-moment process that guides us in building the story out of the plot” (Bordwell *et al*, 1985: 102). Emphasis here is on communication and reception of story information as well as the activity of the reader/viewer as they interact with what they perceive. The two (narrative and narration) may thus be considered symbiotic and indivisible, more so in film than in most other narrative art forms.

### 1.1 Background to the Study

It follows from the foregoing that ‘narrative form’ constitutes a system or structure of meaning resulting from an interplay between narrative content (story) and its communication (narration). In film, the period roughly between 1910s and 1950s established the Hollywood studio system that spawned what has come to be generally referred to as ‘the classical film narrative system’ that according to Stam (2000: 291) “has by now been internalized as an international lingua franca which inhabits at it were, virtually all cinemas, if only as constant temptation or demonized

other”. According to Pramaggiore and Wallis (2006), this system created a film style ‘in which the story is paramount,’ and all its elements ‘contribute unobtrusively to the flow of the story’ (Pramaggiore: 23). Over time, as alluded to by Stam, this style has formed the most influential formula of film narrative construction.

The essence of the classical film narrative does not deviate much from the original Aristotelian conception of dramatic structure consisting of a beginning, a middle and an end. However, it falls more along the lines of Tzvetan Todorov’s interpretation of the three-act structure that starts with a state of equilibrium, develops through a period of disruption of equilibrium and ends with restoration of equilibrium (Buckland, 2008: 38). This is a kernel form that shapes the story and its plot, and which film shares with most narrative arts, notably the novel and drama. It is therefore in the details of putting together the chain of events along the narrative cause-effect logic that classical film narrative ‘conventions’ become apparent - partly due to textual specificity exacted by a photographic image accompanied by a sound track; the basic units of film language. It is here that Bordwell (2001) in his constructivist approach locates what he calls ‘duality’ of film narrative; meaning the interplay between plot as *syuzhet* and story as *fabula*. It is here too that Pramaggiore locates five elements of filmic narrative: characters, actions, time, place and causality. For the purpose of this study, characters, their action and dialogue are considered together as the three are virtually inseparable in the narrative process. To plot and story, time and space, causality and character, this study adds narration and theme / meaning as additional elements to be considered.

As already stated, the interpretation of the elements mentioned above has been done here according to the constructivist conceptualization of classical narrative form.

The **plot** (*syuzhet*) constitutes both the diegetic and non-diegetic material explicitly presented on screen regardless of causal order. The **story** (*fabula*) constitutes the chronological causally ordered diegetic material, both explicit in the plot and inferred from plot cues, (Bordwell: 62). Diegesis here simply means the ‘storyworld’. **Time** and **space** has both general and specific import: general in terms of historical / geographic location and specific in terms of editing / mise-en-scène. Both categories have broad implications on the overall flow and comprehension of a film story. **Causality** is a pervasive factor that applies to everything in the story and plot as well as to the process of narration. It refers to the cause-effect link between one event and another as dictated by spatio-temporal considerations, character intention, social reality, thematic concerns or laws of probability and necessity among other factors. It also includes the crucial factor of motivation by which any instance of a film narrative is justified by the function it plays in the overall signification of the story in relation to other elements therein. **Character** is about causal agents in the narrative, their identity, roles, goals, actions, believability, their psychology and transformation by the end of the story. **Theme** speaks to the socio-cultural and ideological context within which a narrative operates, mostly at a subtextual level. Finally, **narration** includes filmic devices (visual and audio) employed in the plot construction as well as the ‘voice and eyes’ (perspective) through which we view and navigate the story.

In manipulating these elements from a constructivist perspective, popular films governed by the classical narrative formula observe the following broad imperatives:

- Clarity. Viewers should not be confused about space, time, events, or character motivations.

- Unity. Connections between cause and effect must be direct and complete.
- Identification. Characters should invite viewer empathy, be active and seek goals.
- Closure. Third acts and epilogues should tie up loose ends and answer all questions.
- “Unobtrusive craftsmanship” (Thompson 1999: 9). Stories are told in a manner that draws viewers into the diegesis and does not call attention to the storytelling process.

(Pramaggiore: 46)

Guided by these imperatives, the classical narrative elements and conventions are key in communication of meaning in cinematic storytelling. These elements and conventions have not only informed the technological and technical developments in the growth of cinema as a narrative art, they have done so in accordance with the viewers' response. In a continual cycle of feedback, exposure to the classical style and techniques through the years has created in film audiences certain expectations regarding structural organization of filmic material (Pramaggiore: 7-11) against which every new film is gauged in terms of how well it re-affirms, modifies or contravenes them. Diawara (1992) traces Anglophone Africa (hence Kenyan) film legacy to this classical film tradition via the British colonial regime that did little to encourage development of a local film aesthetic and industry in the same way that France did in Francophone Africa.

It may therefore be safely surmised that the Kenyan spectatorship possesses film narrative sensibilities and expectations fairly comparable to any that has been acquired through exposure to classical cinema, as elaborated more fully in the first part of the second chapter of this study through an overview of the development of

cinema in Kenya over a century. It follows, then, that products emerging from the local cinema industry, under the Hollywood–inspired’ banner of *Riverwood*, ought to reflect the classical film tradition in the way it treats the said narrative elements even as it aspires to establish its own voice within its own context as a socio-cultural tool for expression and representation. That is why Edwards (2008: 7) asserts:

That Kenyan voice is what will imbue Kenyan films with a unique vantage point when presented to the rest of the world. Therein lies the challenge: incorporating conventions of filmmaking language that First and Second Cinema employ and have been infused into Kenyan culture for over 70 years, while at the same time discerning and maintaining this indigenous, Kenyan voice.

The narrative elements and the classical conventions and imperatives governing their treatment, are, therefore, a foundational armature for any filmic narrative form aspiring for a wide acceptance as any film industry should. That said, and as Boughedir in Shaka (1994: 81) cautions, “one should not confuse “accessibility” of form with “reproduction” of Hollywood model.”

## **1.2 Statement of the Problem**

Following from the foregoing, it is curious that for fifty years that Kenya has existed as an independent nation, the only locally produced films that have had a considerable international impact are those that have been done by foreign filmmakers. Where can the challenge facing the Kenyan filmmaker in the crafting of film narratives be located? Is it at the point of story conception, plot construction, character development, thematic engagement or choice of narrational devices? These and similar questions lie at the centre of the problem in this study. It seeks to investigate the nature of the Kenyan video film story and its formulation within the

mentioned classical parameters of filmic narrativity, as well as within its own context as a unique socio-cultural tool for expression and representation.

### **1.3 Objectives of the Study**

This study seeks to:

1. establish the narrative character of typical Kenyan fiction video films in terms of story and plot, time and space, causality, characterization, narration, and theme.
2. analyze the selected Kenyan videos using classical film narrative conventions governing each element above with a view to establishing how they conform to or deviate from these conventions.
3. examine how the Kenyan filmmakers' narrative choices communicate meaning and theme in the selected works.

### **1.4 Research Questions**

This research is guided by the following questions:

1. What is the nature of a typical Kenyan fiction video film narrative?
2. How does it compare to the classical film model?
3. How does it communicate meaning and theme of the story?

### **1.5 Assumptions**

This study is further guided by the following assumptions:

1. That the typical Kenyan fiction video film narrative is shaped along the general three-act structure but it is not properly crafted to meet the standards defined by the classical film narrative form.

2. That the typical Kenyan video film narrative deviates more than conforms to classical film conventions.
3. That while the core story of many a Kenyan fiction video film may be credible, the narrative and narrational choices that the filmmaker makes hampers communication of theme and meaning.

### **1.6 Rationale and Significance**

Cinema is by and large a business enterprise, the success of which is measured by the impact a film has in exhibitions at the international level; be it in film festivals or commercial theatres. The size of budget and number of people involved in film production makes continual filmmaking unsustainable, even impossible, unless it captures an international audience and makes money. As Mwakalinga (2010: 146) asserts, “film industry is a business, ... it exists to make a profit. It is both commerce and art.” And even though Bakuba-Kanyinda in Ganivu Akashoro (2010: 85) contends that “financial success at the box office or in the bank is not the only goal of production,” the very channels of distribution and exhibition are not only monolithic global conglomerates, but they are also so selective that they choose to distribute and exhibit films based solely on those films’ capacity to appeal to consumers across the globe; films which happen, fairly or unfairly, to be mostly products of the dominant Hollywood industry. Much as a viable cinema (or cinemas) may develop at a local context, it is on the global stage that a national film output makes its mark. It follows then that Kenya’s nascent indigenous film industry should strive for the international market. To do this, it needs to get everything right, beginning with the basics of filmic storytelling. This will lay a sound platform upon which it can then contribute something unique and authentic that the community of

global cinema can relate to yet still identify it with the specific culture that produces it. This study seeks to point out a way in that direction.

Apart from the need to grow and break through the Kenyan borders, Kenyan cinema in general and filmmakers in particular need intellectual guidance in film theory. Film study is an undertaking that can be said to be long overdue, especially in the academia. Cinema has long been part and parcel of the Kenyan social life. It has also been a field of study elsewhere for many decades, yet it is only now taking root in Kenya. The researcher holds the conviction that theory and practice of art ought to go hand in hand. Akashoro (2010: 106) would agree as he finds out that a majority of Lagos audience (42%) “believe African film producers need to improve themselves in terms of creativity by possibly acquiring more theoretical and technical knowledge in film making.” The time for theory to catch up with practice in the Kenyan film industry is also here. This study sets up a platform for serious scrutiny of, and academic engagement in, the theoretical, artistic and technical aspects of Kenyan films besides the historical, economic and social aspects that have formed the larger part of previous studies. Specifically, the researcher chooses to deal with narrative form because a ‘story’ lies at the centre of all the choices that a filmmaker should make in developing a film from the pre-production through production to post-production stages. Yet, like video films generally, narrative form has been given minimal attention in scholarly discourses on African cinema. As Shaka (1994: 4-8) observes, there has been a tendency in African film scholarship favouring the study of “the history of the film industry at the expense of textual analysis” and where analysis is undertaken, “the emphasis is on the narrative, but since narrative is transmedia, ... the specificity of the medium is often overlooked”

resulting in “little attention paid to the cinematic codes of narration” and hence making “such studies appear indistinguishable from literary criticism.” This study brings to light the essential elements of film art form and their treatment within the Kenyan video film context with an aim of ferreting out the strengths and weaknesses of narrative choices made by the selected filmmakers. As such, the findings set out here will serve well as elemental ideas that may need further refinement as more knowledge is gained in all areas of Kenyan film art.

Another justification as mentioned above is the fact that video films (as opposed to celluloid films) in Kenya, as in Tanzania, “received either negative or little recognition from political leaders, intellectuals, film critics, ...” (Mwakalinga: 117); this in an era where video in all its formats (magnetic tape, compact disk, DVD or online streaming) has become the medium of choice in as far as film consumption is concerned. According to a Kenya Film Commission (KFC) survey (2010: 2-3), 87% of Kenyans do watch films on video, yet out of these, 40% rarely and 18% never watch videos with local content, and “the few who visit cinema don’t go there to watch locally produced movies.” A study such as the current one would serve to illuminate what reason may lie behind such a negative attitude towards local films, especially at this time when the social influence of video films continues to grow by the day due to their accessibility and expansion of viewing space beyond the traditional commercial theatres and festival halls. Otherwise, if the situation of academic neglect persists, a country like Kenya – along with her sister Anglophone countries in Africa that have little to show in celluloid cinema – may remain an intellectual desert for a long time as far as film scholarship is concerned. Diang’a (2007: 32) also sees a future in video films that she calls “emergent street films in

Kenya”. She shows how history has proven Kenya’s potential as a source of great stories: a world of the picturesque savannah, white beaches and snow-capped mountains, and, it may be added, a home of world-beating athletes and a people with such historical, cultural and ecological diversity that foreigners have exploited even in film. Besides, the success of Kenyan literary artists like Ngugi Wa Thiong’o is enough testimony that Kenyans are capable of telling compelling stories. The reason this is not reflected in the Kenyan film sector serves as the primary justification for this study. It will provide invaluable insight into the narrative character of Kenyan video films in terms of strengths and weaknesses with a view to pointing out what elements need to be eliminated, modified or added in order to take Kenya’s filmmaking to the next level.

The films used in this study were selected on the basis of three criteria. First, they are all products of ‘Riverwood’. This levels the ground for analysis on the presumption that each of them has been produced under similar economic and technical conditions. Second, they are all by Kenyan filmmakers working with a Kenyan crew and cast – another common factor that means they all present a typical Kenyan film story. Thirdly, they each represent a segment of Kenya’s multilingual character: vernacular (*Njohera*), Kiswahili (*Kikulacho*) and English (*Toto Millionaire*). The assumption here is that each language category characterizes a section of the Kenyan society’s film orientation and receptivity.

Further, the films are chosen from a body of works that comes closest to articulating Edward’s idea of a Kenyan voice; that is, films portraying life in the Kenyan rural, suburban and urban communities. Together, they portray the struggles of a people in transition from rustic existence, under the lure of the comforts of urbanization and

‘modernity’. For each of the three filmmakers, the film chosen typifies both his style as well as what can be considered the average Kenyan feature film.

### **1.7 Scope, Limitations and Delimitation**

This study concentrates on the decade roughly between 2000 and 2010 owing to a number of factors. First, it is during this period that according to Diang’a (2007) independent homegrown filmmaking really took off and resulted in what is now considered a legitimate film movement in Kenya: *Riverwood*. Secondly, the proliferation during this period of affordable video-based technologies for production and post-production of motion pictures coupled with improved networks of distribution and exhibition gave confidence to the future of filmmaking in Kenya, with *Riverwood* increasingly emerging as the vehicle on which this growth will ride. Indeed, this could be the threshold of the next mass production film industry in Africa after the example set by Nigeria and Ghana. This industry would benefit tremendously from scholarly input of ideas that have formed a solid foundation of similar development elsewhere.

As may be expected of an initial study such as this, numerous challenges come up. For this researcher, they include scarcity of textual analysis literature on Kenyan film (or indeed much of Africa) and unavailability of good quality films, as producers keep them away from the market for fear of piracy. Available ones are in cheap VCD format which is prone to scratches and poor visual and audio quality.

Much as the researcher strives for a quasi-eclectic approach in terms of theory, still a major delimitation in this study is imposed by its reliance on the constructivist school of thought, and in particular the ideas propounded by David Bordwell and

Kristin Thompson. Being work in progress, this theory exhibits a degree of malleability that is at once to the advantage of an explorative study such as this, and to its disadvantage as it opens it up to criticism from more ‘stable’ theoretical positions. Even so, the basic constructivist principle of the ‘reader’ (viewer) being the principal constructor of meaning remains unassailable. That constructivism as a methodology gives the researcher a leeway to plumb straight into the text and bypass the said ‘viewer’ by avoiding an audience-response study should not be taken as a weakness of the findings arrived at. Narrative form exists in the text independent of the viewer, the researcher believes. Besides, the study deploys the classical film narrative model against which to benchmark each observation.

## **1.8 Review of Related Literature**

There exists a substantial body of literature on African film – sub-Saharan Africa being of particular interest to this study – though much of it is in the form of scholarly papers, articles and unpublished theses. By and large, these studies have addressed specific aspects of specific national cinemas, mostly socio-cultural, historical, political, economic and (occasionally) auteuristic facets of such ‘established’ cinemas as Nigeria/Ghana and Francophone Africa. That aside, several books have been written that are useful in understanding general aesthetics of African cinema and its location on the trajectory of film growth. Fundamental among these are works by pioneer African film scholars: Bakari and Cham (eds, African Experiences in Cinema, 1996) and Diawara (African Cinema: Politics and Culture, 1992). Where essays in the first title give valuable insights into the ideological and philosophical dimensions of African cinema under the broad umbrella of ‘Third’ or ‘Other’ cinema, Diawara provides the thematic concerns of

African cinema in various geo-political, historical, and social contexts. These works afford one a view of the post-colonialist background from where African cinema is coming. But the objective of this study is textual analysis of a new generation of filmmakers with a more commercial and less political or ideological agenda. Lindiwe Dovey in Khatib (ed, 2012) puts it succinctly that while the first ‘African Cinema’ generation of films were considered the ‘Child of political independence’ in Africa by the likes of Cham (1986, 1), the rise of subaltern video films in Anglophone Africa can be said to be not only a disillusioned reaction to the postcolonial period’s failure to bring with it true social, economic and political freedom to most people, but are perpetuated by the same people’s craving for escapism and catharsis in the face of harsh life conditions – and hence in many ways a response against the elitist ‘Diawaran’ francophile celluloid cinema.

Better aligned to this study’s purpose is Femi Shaka, whose thesis on African cinema, titled ‘Colonial and Post-Colonial African Cinema: A Theoretical and Critical Analysis of Discursive Practices’ (University of Warwick, 1994), is a panoramic overview of cinema in Africa in all its aspects since the days of what he chooses to categorize as *colonial African instructional cinema* and *colonialist African Cinema*, to the post-colonial African cinema that seeks to counter the negative narrative of Africa put forward by the said colonialist cinema. He speaks well of the colonial instructional films, which he argues to have represented Africans as “knowing and knowledgeable people, able and willing to acquire modern methods of social planning and development for the benefit of their communities” (Shaka: 5). But what is of direct interest to this study are the sections of his treatise that deal with the question of the essence of cinema and its definition

within the African practice, and the methodologies of textual analysis, albeit from a psychoanalytic point of view. For instance, what the current researcher refers to here as conventions, Shaka calls them “the correlational rules that couple or relate the elements of a syntactic type of a system to a semantic type” some of which are acquired through training, and the understanding of whose nature and operations “in the production of a story is therefore important in comprehending film narration and rendering critical analysis that is responsive to the specificity of the medium” (Shaka: 99). Shaka’s thesis provides this research with an in-depth understanding of such film-specific codes, especially as they apply to the African context, which informs the analysis of the selected films.

But what this study is most indebted to Shaka for is his prescription of what model to use in critiquing African cinema. He is democratic enough to allow for any critical model or theory that one finds applicable (regardless of origin), as long as the analyst has “a certain amount of sensitivity to the socio-historical world and cultural specificities of the film,” and adds:

Where the problem lies is when critics begin to use European (or other non-African) cultural norms and values as *standards* – not *comparable* cultural values but *the* standard against which its African counterparts are judged as pathological deviations or corruption of the *ideal*. When this happens, criticism has moved beyond the application of a critical model for discerning the *narrational structures of narratives*, a general textual reading hypothesis, to utilization of a different set of cultural values as *judgemental* models for appraising those of Africa. When this happens, African scholars have a right to denounce such criticism for they are a product of *colonialist mentality*.

(Shaka: 34)

Shaka’s caveat here guides this study’s use of the classical model as its benchmark and constructivism as its theoretical grounding. To the current researcher, along with

a number of African scholars that Shaka lumps under the ‘Ousmane Sembene school’, and among whom he counts Boughedir and Ekwuazi, a total rejection of Hollywood and its systems would amount to throwing away the baby with the bath (or is it birth?) water.

... African cinema should be conceived in terms of its destination: the post-colonial African public. Since the taste of this public has been conditioned by what it refers to as a “cinema of distraction,” the African filmmaker should take account of this conditioning in the production of their films if it (sic) wants to cultivate and retain public patronage of their works. In the current historical phase of development of African cinema, it is necessary to retain a form of classic – that is to say, comprehensible – narrative without, however, taking up all the clichés of Hollywood cinema.

(Shaka: 81)

It is that ‘classic’ that is the object of this study’s investigation in the selected Kenyan video films. That said, Shaka’s precautionary statement above does not guarantee absolute proof against views in this study that may be read as judgemental or academic flaws. In this regard, this researcher takes comfort in the fact that flaws have earned their place in the history of scholarship as points of contention that precipitate debate, hence deeper and better understanding. Some flaws are to be celebrated rather than avoided, as they have the potential to ferret theory out of its comfort zones.

Tomaselli *et al* (2008), in a seminal thesis titled ‘Towards a Theory of Orality in African Cinema’, explores the oral essence of African cinematic expression and perception as reflective of the fundamental forms of communication in the continent and their functional nature. Tomaselli warns against indiscriminate interpretation of African films using ‘literary’ parameters established by a Western cinema. This tends to go counter to Shaka and renders credence to Branigan’s (1992) observation

that “to represent action sequences visually in no way renders them more explicit, detailed, consistent, objective, certain, present, or precise than representing them in words” (Branigan: 176). This may sound like an indictment on the entire endeavour of the present study. However, the researcher is of the view that the magnetic effect that the visually and literarily inclined Hollywood has had on many African filmmakers and viewers is too great an influence to be ignored (borrowing of the ‘-wood’ suffix to designate African film industries being a good indicator). In any case, western-type education, globalization and technological adoption has increasingly exposed Africa to external homogenizing forces such that it is no longer accurate to ascribe pure orality to our communication any more than it is to ascribe barter trade to our commerce.

Further, Shaka points out that “in the light of the march towards modernization on the continent, traditional artists are adapting and adopting media to popularize their art, and these are in turn transforming their personalities and their art ...” and “the structure, practice, and status of traditional African performances and artists” (Shaka: 36-37). Mwakalinga (2010: 12) also cites Tomlinson whose views agree with this ‘heterogenization’ of culture; that “what actually takes place is not cultural imperialism but rather a process of cultural loss,” from which “a hybrid culture emerges, one that takes foreign cultural flows and localizes them.” In the case of film, therefore, it would be impossible to adapt it as a narrative medium without having some, if not most, of the narrative conventions that have informed its technological, technical and artistic development for over a century rub off on African cinema. As Potts in Shaka says “technology is not value-free: to some extent different technologies dictate the way in which we see the world, ... and they

influence the types of codes we use to communicate a message” (Shaka: 72). At any rate, the sensationalist, capitalistic and commercial turn that African video cinema has now taken is in many ways (if not in every way) comparable to that which motivated the establishment and success of the Hollywood system and its narrative conventions in the first place. The only question should be how to indigenize such conventions to suit Africa’s socio-cultural situation. That is part of the big picture that this study keeps in sight.

The scholars mentioned so far have dealt with African cinema of the celluloid generation; what is considered ‘African cinema’ proper, much of which was produced in the 70s and 80s in West Africa, thanks to foreign patronage and sponsorship by foreign governments, especially the French Ministry of Cooperation (Diawara, 1992). But the current study concerns itself with video films. Understandably, most studies in this area have targeted Nollywood (Nigeria’s – and by extension Ghana’s – video film culture). They are incisive works that a fledgling industry like Kenya’s can learn a lot from. One such is Ganivu O. Akashoro in a study titled ‘The African Filmmaker and Content of African Films: a study of the perspectives of the Nigerian film audience,’ published in the *Global Media Journal (African Edition)*, vol. 4: 84-115, 2010. It is a mini survey of film audiences in Lagos, principally on their film viewership habits, their opinion on celluloid versus video films and their thematic preferences. Akashoro finds out that a majority of the audience (42%) watch films for education and information about African culture, traditions and history more than for relaxation (dealing with tension and boredom) and entertainment (15%) or moral instruction (11%). This gives the current study a significant insight into the sensibilities of video film audience in Africa.

Another study is one undertaken by Abubakar under the title “Storyline Structure in the Hausa Home Videos: An Analysis of *Mai Kudi*, *Sanafahna* and *Albashi*’, in which he analyzes the storylines of the three films against the Hollywood model of story writing. Abubakar follows an archetypal line of thought as he specifically uses the ‘Hero’s Journey’ structure of story construction as propounded by Christopher Vogler. Although he finds discrepancy with Vogler’s model, he treats the Hausa instances more as variations than alternatives. The present study, however, approaches the subject of storyline construction from a different perspective out of conviction that the journey construction is but an option subsumed within a wider framework of narrative choices.

Ogaga Okuyade’s ‘Women and Evangelical Merchandising in the Nigerian Filmic Enterprise,’ (*Kemanusiaan*, vol. 18, No. 1: 1-14, 2011) is a feminist take on the objectification of women from a Nollywood video perspective. It uses textual analysis of two films (*End of the Wicked* and *Highway to the Grave*, both written and produced by Helen Okpabio, 2000) to specifically examine “the role of women in evangelical films in Nollywood” (Okuyade: 1). Okuyade finds the two films to treat women in the same way. On *End of the Wicked*, particularly, she notes:

The film does not give women enough space to define themselves. Nor do they receive any special place to manoeuvre or to make necessary negotiations in a society that pushes women to the margins. It adequately captures the domestic terrain and its attendant malice.

(Okuyade: 8)

Okuyade’s findings informs the current study’s analysis of theme, that is, the socio-cultural dynamics at play in African video films and the ideology they propound at the level of family.

Closer to Kenya, Mwakalinga examines in detail the film industry in Tanzania from the 1960s to 2010 with reference to the impact that the four regimes that have governed that country since independence have had in the development of film, or lack thereof. In his doctorate dissertation titled ‘The Political Economy of the Film Industry in Tanzania: From Socialism to Open Market Economy, 1961-2010’ (University of Kansas, 2010), Mwakalinga decries “... the scarcity of scholarship on individual national film industries, ... African scholars, like their counterparts in the west, have investigated African cinema as a pure, homogenous entity ...” (Mwakalinga: 17). Although his work does not concern itself much with specific texts, Mwakalinga’s thesis presents views of interest to the current study with which it shares what he calls a ‘regional’ and ‘cultural’ base (Mwakalinga: 86). In addition, Mwakalinga exposes numerous socio-economic, political and technical issues that are of direct relevance to this study as video film development in Kenya has tended to follow the same path as in Tanzania, including facing similar challenges. In other words, the current study seeks to do for Kenyan cinema, as a distinct national industry, what Mwakalinga has done for Tanzanian cinema, albeit from a narrative rather than a political and economic perspective.

As in Tanzania, research and literature in the field of film study is just now beginning to appear in Kenya. However, significant work has been done in literary cycles. One such is Kesero’s thesis: ‘Technique of Narration and its role in the Communication of Meaning in Three Novels of Nurudin Farah’ (Kenyatta University, 1997). Kesero takes a literary stylistics approach in studying narrative techniques in three novels by Farah: *Sardines*, *Gifts* and *Maps*. The confluence of his work and this research is in the narratological aspect especially in as far as the

interaction between the narrative voice and the reader is concerned. His analysis of Somali oral art forms and the presence of audience within the text as important elements of Farah's narrative technique (Kesero: 81) presents special interest in understanding of orality in African narrative tradition; literary, filmic or otherwise. Also interesting is his social analogy of composite narrative patterns in *Gifts*, which points to the central didactic purpose of most African narrative choices (Kesero: 39). However, this study parts way with Kesero's largely in terms of medium. His is the novel; here it is film. Although the story is at the heart of both narrative art forms, different media come with different narratological demands and implications. Also, where he takes a stylistics approach to analysis of the story, this study takes a constructivist approach. Moreover, his work deals with the interplay of narrative techniques to create meaning in Farah's literary works that have few or no questions of standards. This research on the other hand has a problematic side to it as well captured by the KFC report of 2010 (3):

Several factors that affect consumption were mentioned. The most outstanding of all was the quality of the final product. The quality and content of movies to a large extent drives choice of viewership, what is perceived to be of poor quality attracts limited viewership. The quality in this context is a combination of factors such as professionalism, quality of actors, language, the plot, scripting and type of equipment...

Therefore, even though creation and communication of meaning is core in the analysis of the films selected here, the focus is skewed towards how well this is achieved.

Many critics have blamed Kenyan film standards (particularly of the 'Riverwood' category) on economic and technical factors. In her thesis, 'A History of Kenyan

Film: *The Evolving Image of the African* (Kenyatta University, 2007), Rachel Diang'a points out western monopolized "unfair market conditions" in distribution and exhibition of films, piracy, politics and a whole production process that:

... does not rely on professional crew... The actors are usually amateurs... not guided by any script or director... lack continuity and can take any direction depending on the actors / actresses' creativity. Therefore, the quality of the film is wanting. They rely on a lot of humour so that the audience concentrates on the entertainment at the expense of the obvious artistic and technical flaws... amateur acting, poor shots and editing.

(Diang'a: 25-35)

Be that as it may, this study holds that a well conceived story is discernible even in the midst of inferior technical and technological rendition. As Stam (2000: 94) points out, "technical poverty ought not translate to narrative poverty." A story formulated within the mentioned parameters of filmic narrativity will always subdue technical inadequacy in communication of meaning because, in the final analysis, it is the "connections among perceptual elements rather than those elements themselves" that bears signification in a filmic storytelling where "perception is an experience of totality" (Dudley, 1984: 32-34).

As Shaka rightly observes, scholarship in African cinema is "somewhat lopsided in favour of the history of the film industry at the expense of textual analysis" (Shaka: 8). One such scholarly endeavour in Kenya is a research documentary by one of this study's selected filmmakers, Simiyu Barasa. Titled *A History of Film in Kenya 1909-2009* (Simiyu Barasa, 2010), the documentary recounts in sufficient detail the journey that cinema in Kenya has traveled over a century. The current study owes a lot of background information on Kenyan cinema to this work. But as already stated,

the aim here is to fill the gap that Shaka identifies as lack of context-specific textual analysis, with particular regard to Kenya.

Finally the work to which the researcher owes the germ of this study is Edward's research under the title: 'Building a Self-sustaining, Indigenous Film Industry in Kenya' (2008), a study on behalf of World Story Organization. In it, Edwards envisages a future where Riverwood becomes "the centre of indigenous filmmaking in Kenya" (Edwards: 7) that churns out well crafted stories which articulate what he calls the 'Kenyan voice' in the same vein as precedents set by other third world film movements generally referred to as 'Third Cinema'. In line with the position taken by the current study, he adds that "the palimpsest of film production and storytelling theory will have to be taken into account to make room for a new voice..." Tichi Sitati of the KFC is one of Edward's interviewees. She states that:

"We have excellent stories being told (in River Road), but sitting and formulating a story and creatively bringing out the true aspect of what it is you want to bring out, that is what is lacking. We have excellent cameramen, but it is important to have a creative story".

(Edwards: 7)

The World Story Organization's insistence that 'the core story of a film must be primary' (Edwards: 9) is essentially what this study seeks to prove one way or another. In a sense, this work simply takes over the baton from where Edwards left. His study only points out what is amiss with Kenyan films and offers sweeping prescriptions without the benefit of a detailed diagnosis of form and content in any of the films he calls 'indigenous'. This omission of diagnostic analysis is the gap this study seeks to fill.

## **1.9 Theoretical Framework**

Being a multidisciplinary phenomenon, film study calls for a multiple theoretical approach. Although of necessity narratology becomes this study's main theoretical grounding, a few other theoretical positions that are contingent to, or that inform aspects of the analytical work are mentioned. These include aesthetics and cognitive psychology. It is crucial to point out from the outset that these theories are wide philosophical fields that have branched out into numerous orientations over time. Therefore, this study zeroes in on the schools of thoughts that best suit its purpose. In aesthetics, this study aligns itself with the ideas propounded by John Dewey as captured in Ferner (2003). In narratology, it goes with the constructivist school of thought that has been influenced heavily by perceptual and cognitive psychology.

### **1.9.1 Aesthetics**

Aesthetics is a broad philosophical field that concerns itself with questions of beauty, under which all forms of art fall. It raises several epistemic and ontological questions that have formed the nucleus of debate among aestheticians and art theorists, and which serve as a guiding light to this study. These include questions of aesthetic experience, aesthetic distance and what really amounts to beauty. It is a debate that has always been and always will be. So it is not for this study to supply an answer one way or another, but rather to add another voice in a discourse that Ferner (2003: 125) describes as unsettled and, therefore, “none of the difficulty ought to prompt us to dismiss a theory too early.”

For the purposes of this study, John Dewey's position on the said questions is most favourable. He argues that an aesthetic experience is “an experience that is maximally unified (set apart, whole, complete, and bounded)... that is very

interactive between object and viewer” (Ferner: 11). This observation echoes Aristotle’s definition of tragedy as an action that is serious, complete and of a certain magnitude. To Dewey, however, all experiences are to some degree aesthetic, especially the degree to which they are unified. Herein lies the conundrum in which a study such as this must find itself especially in making judgmental assessment of any cultural artifact’s aesthetic value.

For instance, why apply Hollywood narrative aesthetics to an ‘indigenous’ Kenyan cinema that occupies a completely different spectrum in geo-historical and cultural purview? Dewey offers the solution as much as he does the challenge. On the one hand, his implied assertion that no work of art should be dismissed as not measuring up to the standards of an aesthetic object qualifies any Kenyan film as a legitimate aesthetic artifact on its own right – and this research treats each one of the selected films as such. On the other, he allows a continuum within which to locate their aesthetic merit. In the researcher’s opinion, the classical film narrative model is a well tested scale on which to measure how ‘unified’, ‘complete’ and ‘set apart’ a Kenyan filmic experience is or can be. Stam (2000: 291) says; “Hollywood has by now been internalized as an international lingua franca which inhabits as it were, virtually all cinemas, if only as constant temptation or demonized other”. The said qualities – unified (implying ‘oneness’ or ‘consistent’), complete (‘self-contained’, ‘precise’) or set apart (‘outstanding’, ‘unique’) form a core part of classical film narrative conventions. But they are not absolute. Rather, they are a range of relative indices to be achieved at different degrees of perfection. While some aesthetic objects may be said to approach ‘perfect art’, others hover close to ‘zero art’, but none is ‘no art’.

Of more interest though, is Dewey's recognition of the place of the viewer in what he calls an 'interactive' environment. In film, Bordwell (1985) would call this interaction an 'invitation' by the film's narrating 'voice' for the viewer to construct the story. This also alludes to the concept of 'immersion' in film, comparable to 'contemplation' in fine art. However, this research agrees with Stam's psychoanalytic concept of the 'viewer', "not so much as a flesh and blood individual, but as an artificial construct produced and activated by the cinematic apparatus..." a "productive" yet "empty" space that anyone can occupy (Shaka: 103). How well narrative elements in a typical Kenyan film story create this space of an interactive, inviting and immersive environment is of great concern to this study. To this end, another concept in aesthetics becomes important: psychic distance.

Psychic distance refers to the psychological proximity between viewer and aesthetic object in the virtual space of the make-believe. The common concept of 'willing suspension of disbelief' in theatre and film facilitates the viewer's entry into the storyworld, wherein he assumes an aesthetic distance relative to characters, events and all other narrative elements in it. On this matter, this study takes the same view as Dewey; that such distance should be as little as possible, due to the implications of empathetic spectatorship inherent in film. This researcher feels confident in making the assertion that certain narrative excesses or omissions invade this psychic space and disturb the perceptual and conceptual signals transmitting between object and viewer so that the latter is compelled to step back or aside or right out of the storyworld. It is his conviction that classical narrative conventions help to clear up such excesses, fill in omissions, and make smooth all narrative bumps and dents. In so doing, these conventions somehow supply an answer to the ultimate of all

aesthetics' eternal questions: what is beauty? According to Edmund Burke (in Ferner, 2003), beauty is what 'relaxes the solids of the whole system'. However, this is not to mean that beauty elicits only pleasant sensations or what Ferner calls 'positive or favourable reactions'. As he puts it, "aesthetic experiences, like aesthetic objects, can be either good or bad or even indifferent."

### 1.9.2 Narratology

The art of storytelling is universal. Its prevalence in all cultures makes it a phenomenon that has engaged the minds of philosophers, theorists and scholars throughout history. Narratology in general is concerned with the art and craft of storytelling, including its interpretation. Constructivist (sometimes called 'cognitivist') narratology is an evolving formalist branch of narratology that interprets narratives from a reader's perspective. In film, the major proponents of this theory include Edward Branigan, David Bordwell, Kristin Thompson, Janet Steiger and Noel Carroll among others. The central tenets of this approach can for now be reduced to two:

1. that appreciation and comprehension of story is primarily a rational perceptual and cognitive process that utilizes the same apparatus and mechanisms as our experience of natural reality.
2. that viewers rely on schemata (including norms, principles, and conventions) to guide them in organizing incomplete narrative data (*syuzhet*) into coherent mental constructs (*fabula*) by forming and testing hypotheses and inferences from cues presented by the narration.

Although audience response is outside this study's concern, it is the nature of the said cues and their cinematic manifestation that this study interrogates in the chosen

Kenyan video films. Evidently, the central concept in constructivist narratology is the relationship between plot as *syuzhet* and story as *fabula* in what Bordwell and Thompson (2001) call ‘narrative duality’. It would seem that *fabula* is the end of any narrative, and that *syuzhet* is the means by which it is reached. Balcom (1996) offers the following dichotomy to explain the distinction between the two.

**Table 1.1: Fabula / Syuzhet Dichotomy**

<b>Story (<i>fabula</i>)</b>	<b>Plot (<i>syuzhet</i>)</b>
Constructed by reader (viewer)	Constructed by writer (teller)
Chronological order	Order of recounting
What we interpret	What we perceive
As many different ones as there are readers	Generally only one, agreed upon by all
Mental	Perceptible

It would therefore be imperative that every element of a narrative serves the story. This way, the story becomes the unifying factor in the narrative whole, from which each part or element derives its role. This study, therefore, gauges the role and suitability of each narrative element based on this criterion.

Another important aspect of constructivist narratology is ‘schema theory’, a concept borrowed from cognitive psychology. Schema theory postulates that human memory (both mental and sensual) is replete with ‘schemata’ onto which new perceptions are mapped by a process of associative simplification to ease up comprehension. The implication of schema on film in general and its individual narrative patterns in particular is enormous. The mental set of viewers, barring their individual unpredictable psycho-emotional fluctuations, is defined by psycho-social schemata that filmmakers take advantage of so as to arouse maximum interest. Application of schema in film can be looked at at three levels:

1. The socio-cultural reality as a broad schematic system against which the veracity of every story, or narrative elements thereof, is measured.
2. The individual story as a schematic structure that unifies causally related narrative elements and patterns.
3. The viewer as a carrier of a priori social and cinematic schemata against which every story or narrative element thereof is referenced.

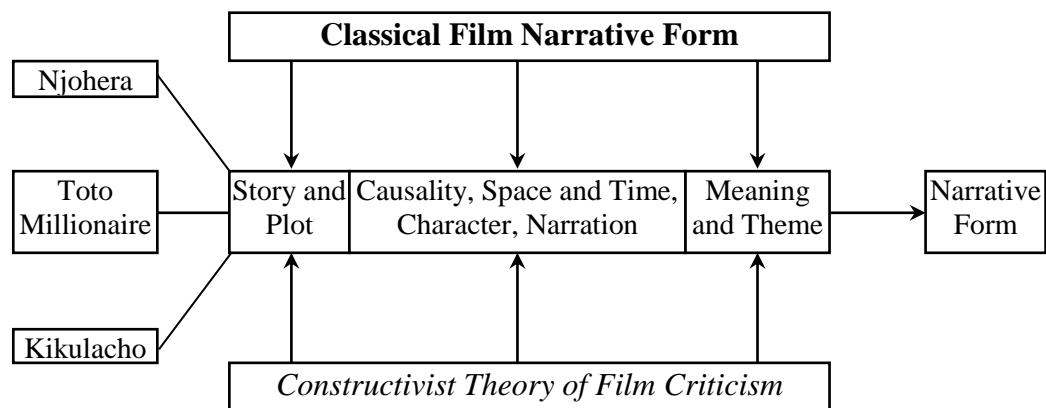
These levels echo Bordwell's summation on ways of looking at a narrative: as a representation of a world, as a structure, and as a point of view. The third case applies equally to the filmmaker as to the viewer. In this study, the researcher uses it not only to get a peek into the Kenyan viewer's narrative psychology as conditioned by social reality and past exposure to Hollywood-type cinema, but also as a ground on which to gauge the Kenyan filmmaker's worldview as put forward by his narrative choices. Specifically though, this study uses the whole idea of schema as it creates certain expectations in the film viewer based on such considerations as common sense, laws of nature, facts, social conventions, and, particularly, a background of other films wherein lies classical film conventions. It also takes each film as a schematic system and analyzes how unified it is as well as how it confirms, modifies or violates established cinematic conventions. To quote Peter Vertraten (in Van der Lecq, transl, 2009: 26):

The conclusion to be drawn here is that narrativity in cinema is created by an interaction between the narrative agent and the viewer. In classic cinema, which spells out the developments according to a clear pattern of causes and consequences, the narrative agent is so emphatically directing the story that the viewer need only follow. When this psychologically motivated pattern becomes less obvious, the viewer

can accept the invitation to put in some effort himself.  
The amount of effort can vary greatly...”

As Vertraten intimates here, sticking too strictly to conventions can in itself be counterproductive. Therefore, this researcher adopts the position fronted by de Beaugrande (in Dawning 2004: 131) that “the most famous stories – those that survive like *The Arabian Nights* and *The Decameron* – are those which offer stimulating mixtures of confirmation and violation of what people expect.” The degree of narrative integrity in the chosen films based on schematic truth is hereby measured in term of how well it encourages the viewer to participate in the story construction without getting to the point where he, as Vertraten puts it, ‘decline(s) the invitation made by less clearly constructed films’.

### 1.9.3 Conceptual Framework



**Fig 1.1: Conceptual Framework**

As the diagram here attempts to illustrate, the researcher utilizes both deductive and inductive conceptual processes in dealing with the research problem at hand. The objectives and hypotheses that guide the study are propositions deduced from an analysis of elements of the classical film narrative model undergirded by the constructivist theory of film criticism. But the real job involves drawing inferences

from observations made of the selected films themselves in order to arrive at a new proposition concerning narrative form in Kenyan video film narratives.

### **1.10 Research Methodology**

At the core of this study's problem is the question of why Kenyan fiction films have had a limited reach within and beyond Kenyan borders. Therefore, this study has chosen a quasi-exploratory approach to explain this question using textual analysis in general, and narrative analysis in particular, to interrogate in detail the selected video film stories and storytelling in the hope that this will give an idea of the typical Kenyan fiction film's narrative form.

#### **1.10.1 Research Design**

On the whole, this is a qualitative research as the topic, purpose and methods chosen call for. Given the breadth of the field that is the Kenyan video film practice, and the fact that not much is known concerning its fiction film narrative form to which this study can anchor itself, the main design opted for is explanatory case study. This design suits the study's purpose of testing what the researcher deems as a universal model (classical film form) and a fresh theory (constructivism) as they can be applied to the Kenyan fiction film situation. It also lends itself conveniently to the study's chosen methodology of detailed interpretive textual and contextual analysis of the said films and their relationships. Although this limits (without eliminating) the capacity to generalize the findings herein, the least that can be hoped for from the three examples analysed is a light (however bright or dim) shone at the anarchic world that is the Kenyan – and by extension African – video film industry. According to Kohlbacher (2006), case study has been found to be a rigorous

research method for ‘generating hypotheses and building theory’ in qualitative inquiry in social sciences especially for the ‘how’ and ‘why’ questions, and where the researcher has little control over the phenomenon under investigation.

This study proceeds in five parts. In between the introduction and the concluding summary, conclusions and recommendations are three chapters tackling its three objectives. What could be considered variables to be analyzed qualitatively here are the six narrative elements (story and plot, time and space, causality, character, narration and meaning/theme) which are measured against the bench mark of classical film narrative form, girded by the constructivist theory of film criticism. Story and plot analysis are crucial in establishing whether or not Kenyan video films really have a storyline to begin with. For this purpose, the second chapter is dedicated wholly to story and plot. It first breaks down each narrative’s story and plot into its basic textual units: acts, scenes, and sequences. This enables an easy analysis of intra-textual and inter-textual relationships of the three films in order to determine their overall narrative characteristics. Using the Aristotelian three-act narrative structure as elaborated for classical film narrative by Field (2005), analysis in this chapter reveals a viable storyline among Kenyan video film narratives. Consequently, the next four variables (Time and space, causality, character and narration) are examined in the third chapter to explore further where the problem may lie. This is because along with story and plot, these four elements are the means by which narrative arts organize meaning. Thematic analysis, the subject of the fourth chapter, therefore examines the interrelation between the first five variables and the sixth (communication of meaning and theme) which is the ultimate end of any narrative. From a critical interpretation of inferences drawn from this analysis of

the six variables, this study proposes a generalizable hypothesis that may be of use in future studies of Kenyan (and African) video films in particular and fiction narratives in general.

#### 1.10.2 Sampling Technique

Case studies generally call for deliberateness in choice of objects of study. The target population for this research was the body of fiction video films of the feature type made in Kenya, by Kenyans, articulating Kenya in her different socio-cultural shades and identities (that is, *Riverwood* films). But film production, distribution and exhibition in Kenya is an extremely informal and localized phenomenon such that no comprehensive data or catalogue exists (or even possible) of all the producers or video films produced. Therefore, the accessible population for the study was the video films peddled by vendors of music and video CDs and DVDs, especially in the stalls and streets of Nairobi, which is the hub of the video market in Kenya. For these reasons, no practical sampling frame could be made, and therefore, a combination of sampling techniques went into deciding which filmmakers and texts ended up in the study.

Firstly, stratified expert sampling was used to determine filmmakers whose works are analyzed. Wandahuhu was deemed preferable in vernacular category because he is one of a few filmmakers that have shown a degree of growth from short farces to sizeable films with legitimate storylines of almost feature proportions. The others in his category (the likes of *Machang'i* and *Kihenjo*) seem to be stuck in a time warp; producing the same situational medium length comic movies they have been doing for more than a decade now. In the English category, Simiyu Barasa was selected based on his track record in television, which includes such works as *Makutano*

*Junction* and *Tahidi High* – the latter of which was voted the most popular television program in Kenya in the KFC survey of 2010. Given the popular response that his previous works have elicited, he is deemed an important representative of the popular (even auteuristic) ‘voice’ in Kenyan film circles, not least because his film selected here features some of the most readily recognizable actors in Kenyan television. The third filmmaker, Simon Nduti, is an upcoming producer and distributor of films who works with established artists and directors in “a mission to popularize local film” (*Daily Nation*, September 3, 2011). He has been involved in Riverwood fiction film production and distribution since the middle of the last decade, steadily moving from English-titled vernacular films to serial melodramas in English and Kiswahili. Kiswahili feature films in Kenya are scarce and he is one of the few producers who do them.

Secondly, purposive sampling was employed in selecting the specific texts used as case studies. From clusters of each filmmaker’s works, one film was selected based on several criteria. The first criterion was that they all had to be typical of ‘Riverwood’ aesthetics and values, which is the film industry that best fits the study’s definition of Kenya’s homegrown film industry. Like Mwakalinga (2010), the researcher concurs with Shaka that “for a film to qualify as African cinema and therefore national cinema, its primary audience must be Africans; the text must be inscribed in the broad range of African subjects, identities, and social experiences; and finally, its director must be African by birth or naturalization.” (Mwakalinga: 83). The second parameter was language. This was meant to arrive at a sample representative of the diversity of Riverwood products which generally fall into vernacular, Kiswahili and English categories. The third criterion considered was

generic. After a random sampling of Riverwood products at the outset of the study, it emerged that the majority of vernacular and Kiswahili products are of a farcical nature with caricature rather than story being the main aesthetic ingredient of such narratives. In the English category, most of the sampled works turned out to be open ended serials. But what the research required were film stories of the feature type. The three chosen came closest to this definition. This and the relatively popular profile and longevity of the filmmakers in their chosen domains convinced the researcher of the reliability of the samples as representative of the cinema movement that is 'Riverwood'.

### 1.10.3 Data Collection Procedures

In conformity to a well established tradition in the history of film criticism, the primary sources of data in this study are the films themselves. A celebrated precursor of the realist film theory, Andre Bazin's "usual procedure was to watch a film closely, appreciating its special values and noting its difficulties or contradictions.... Thus Bazin begins with the most particular facts available, the film before his eyes, and through a process of logical and imaginative reflection, he arrives at a general theory" (Andrew, 1976: 136). This has become a standard practice in constructivist narratology under the label of 'bottom-up' approach that insists on evidence derived from the texts themselves, as opposed to the traditional 'top-down' approach that tends to apply preconceived theoretical or ideological assumptions to the texts.

The primary method of data collection in this study is, therefore, akin to 'data-mining' in textual analysis. This involved interpretive observation and critical analysis of characteristics of the six narrative elements (story and plot, time and

space, causality, character, narration and theme) in the chosen texts with the objective of scrutinizing the patterns and relationships within each text as well as between and across the three texts. According to Patton and Appelbaum in Kohlbacher (2006), "the ultimate goal of the case study is to uncover patterns, determine meanings, construct conclusions and build theory." The main data captured here is, thus, in the form of descriptive observations and their interpretation. Some elements of the text render themselves to direct extraction for analysis. These include frames and sequences of frames from the image track and excerpts of music and dialogue from the sound track, which the researcher has attempted to capture in as raw a manner as possible as evidence of the observations made. Secondary sources of data include books and other reference materials such as other films, reviews and the internet.

#### 1.10.4 Data Presentation and Analysis

The data obtainable from the procedures described in the foregoing is inevitably qualitative in nature. Consequently, the main technique of data presentation and analysis takes the form of descriptive, interpretive and evaluative statements. These are supported by graphic representations of abstract patterns and relationships of some of the elements (story and plot, time and space) as well as photographic illustrations of these and other elements by use of still frames and sequences of frames that illustrate given observations. Strings of text, dialogue and other elements of the soundtrack are also captured and translated where needed. Other tools of data presentation include tables and flowcharts, especially for data that renders itself to categorization and serialization (story and plot, causality).

## 2.0: CHAPTER TWO

### STORY AND PLOT ANALYSIS OF THE KENYAN VIDEO FILM NARRATIVE

This chapter begins with a historical overview of cinema in Kenya before analyzing the story (*fabula*) and plot (*syuzhet*) events of the chosen Kenyan films. The aim is to demarcate the location of the three films of this study in the historical trajectory of development of Kenyan cinema. This should, hopefully, shed light on what history has bequeathed Kenya in terms of filmmaking tradition and viewership sensibilities.

#### 2.1 A Brief Background on Cinema in Kenya

*A History of Film in Kenya 1909-2009* (Simiyu Barasa, 2010) is a documentary that narrates in sufficient detail the journey that Kenyan cinema has traveled for a century. According to Jean Hartley of Viewfinders Limited, who is one of the central interviewees in the documentary, it all started in 1909 when the former American president Theodore Roosevelt came to Kenya on a hunting safari. His expedition was captured in black and white in the era of silent cinema by a British cameraman, Cherry Kearton. The product of this endeavour was *TR in Africa* (1910) which was shown in London and New York and showcased Kenya as a tourist and filmmaking destination. There followed several wildlife documentaries and travelogues such as *Africa Speaks* (Futter, 1930) which documented another wild expedition starting from Mombasa to Lagos overland.

As a result, feature filmmakers were attracted to Kenya and African as a viable shooting location. In 1931, *Trader Horn* (Van Dyke), probably the first feature film of the sound era to be made in this region, was shot in Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania.

Meanwhile, the British colonial government was doing its part to institutionalize film viewing among the natives in Kenya. With such programmes as the Bantu Educational Cinema Experiment (BECE) in 1935 and the Colonial Film Units (CFU) of East Africa in 1939, the colonial masters were able to broadcast films for education, propaganda and entertainment purposes. These are the first category of colonial films of which Shaka (1994) says:

Basically, in colonial African instructional cinema, Africans are constructed as knowing and knowledgeable people able and eager to learn modern methods of social organization and development. The main emphasis in these films is on community mass literacy campaigns, health care, education, rural and urban planning and development, transport and communication, etc. Africans form the centre of attraction in these films, ...

Shaka: 8

This went on well into the 1950s. Levinson Nguru, the founding principal of Kenya Institute of Mass Communication recalls in an interview in this documentary how they used to watch motion pictures that taught Africans such basics as good hygiene, ‘civilized’ behaviour and respect for authority, besides comedies of Charlie Chaplin and the like.

Alongside the instructional films of the BECE and CFU endeavours was what Shaka calls ‘colonialist African cinema,’ of which he expresses a less than favourable view as films “in which Africans are constructed as savage and bestial people always on the verge of slippage into barbarism in the slightest absence of colonial authority” (Shaka: 8). In the case of Kenya, this category would include such films as *African Holyday* (Pearson, 1937) and *Stanley and Livingstone* (King, 1939).

What strikes this researcher as interesting, however, are prescriptions offered by the head of CFU in a speech in London in 1941 as conveyed by titles in Barasa's documentary, as follows:

1. The chicken rule: Africans do not see the whole screen, but notice a chicken in one corner, which distracts them from the main plot
2. The mosquito rule: Africans are confused by camera tricks and flashbacks, thinking a mosquito in close-up is a monster
3. The familiarity rule: Africans grasp only what is familiar to them and are confused by the unfamiliar (because) they cannot imagine a context previously unknown to them
4. The laughter rule: Africans laugh at inappropriate moments if the films are not made by experts who understand native psychology

This gives an insight into what the colonial masters thought of Kenyan viewership of the classical film narrative at this formative stage of cinema in Africa. The truth behind these prescriptions is beyond this study to speculate, but it begs the question of how far they may have informed filmmaking in Kenya during and after the colonial period to this very day. Hopefully, this study may shed some light on that.

The World War II seems to have occasioned a lull in filmmaking activity in Kenya during the 1940s. But the next decade witnessed an upsurge of filming, still driven by foreign interest in the country as an exotic location for an otherwise Hollywood type of escapist narrative aesthetic. During this decade, some of the most glamorous of Hollywood star system, including Clark Gable, Ava Gardner, Kelly Greene, Spencer Tracy, Susan Hayward, Deborah Stewart, Kerr Granger, Ernest Hemmingway and Frank Sinatra featured in one role or another in the production of adventure fiction films against the backdrop of the African wild. From this crop came films such as *King Solomon's Mine* (Bennet, 1950), *The Snows of Kilimanjaro* (King, 1952), *Men against the Sun* (Stafford, 1952), and *Mogambo* (Ford, 1953).

The Mau Mau era in the 1950s was also dominated by foreign filmmakers with less than a friendly outlook on the Kenya liberation movement. In a United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) report of 1961 titled 'The Cinema in Africa – Present Position and Current Trends,' Jean Rouch wrote:

... the Mau Mau troubles in Kenya provided material for the largest number of films. Thus, Peter Brook's Something of Value, made in 1953, seeks to portray the course of a friendship between two young men, one white and the other black, brought up together and driven by circumstances into opposite camps. This film, entirely lacking in subtlety, shows considerable bias and is one of a number of examples of unconscious affronts to African dignity. Once again the African and his civilization are depicted as inferior; ... A film made by Brian Desmond Hirst in 1955, called Simba after the Mau Mau gang which features in it, presents, in terms of unbelievable violence, the drama of an African doctor whose father is head of the gang, and the son's only way out is death.

(13-14)

Apart from *Something of Value* and *Simba* aptly described above, there was also *Safari* (Terence Young, 1956) and *Mau Mau* (Elwood Price, 1955). The first three are fictional and the last, *Mau Mau*, a documentary. But regardless of genre and ideology, these films were groundbreaking in a sense. According to David Anderson (in *South African Historical Journal*, 2003: 71), "Independent feature films about wars have rarely been made in the midst of conflict, least of all when that conflict is an anti-colonial struggle by poorly armed rebels against the might of an empire." Though he goes ahead to admit that these three feature films were more of 'jungle adventure' than movies about Africa, they nevertheless left a colonial voice that has largely remained unanswered to date.

At independence in 1963, Kenya launched its first television station. This opened up opportunities for further filmmaking although much of the work associated with it was in the form of newsreels and documentaries to aid in the africanization program of the post colonial government. However, due to prohibitive cost of equipment and production, few people had access to cinema either at the production or consumption level. By then, the colonial film units had metamorphosed into mobile open-air film exhibitions supported by the government with more or less the same agenda as their colonial predecessor, and to improve access to cinema especially by the rural folk.

The first feature film of note in post independence Kenya was *Born Free* (Hill, 1966), a true story about the husband and wife conservationists, George and Joy Adamson. It continued the colonial legacy of publicizing Kenya as an exotic tourist and filmmaking destination. But the first truly Kenyan post-colonial era fiction film project is traced back to 1968, when *Mlevi* by Ragbir Singh and Kuljeet Pal was released. It starred prominent television personalities such as Athumani Kipanga, Mzee Pembe and Omar Suleiman. Yet it would seem feature-length documentaries about Kenya, her people and ecology fared better in this period than did fiction films. Anthony Howarth and David Koff's *Kenya: Black Man's Land –images of colonialism and independence*, a trilogy including *white man's country*, *Mau Mau*, and *Kenyatta* were made during this period. A Kenyan cameraman, Mohinder Dhillon was instrumental in this project. As the titles suggest, this work retold the history of Kenya right from the pre-Mau Mau period, through the rebellion itself, to post-colonial Kenya under the leadership of Mzee Jomo Kenyatta. It remains the most seminal cinematic record on the subject. But what captivated the world more was wildlife filmmaking in the hands of Alan Root and his wife Joan Root, who

made pictures that glorified the splendours of Kenya's nature. These included *Safari by Balloon* (1975), *The Year of the Wildebeest* (1976) and *Two in the Bush* (1978).

What seemed like a breakthrough in Kenyan feature filmmaking was achieved with the release of *Rise and Fall of Idi Amin* (Sharad Patel, 1981), a co-production of Kenya, UK and Nigeria, courtesy of Film Corporation of Kenya (KFC). But it turned out to be a false start because it was not until five years later, that another government sponsored film project was done. According to Levinson, then the head of KFC, *Kolormask* (Sao Gamba, 1986) was supposed to give Kenya the rights to own her own films rather than depend on international film distribution companies that monopolized the importation of films into Kenya. It is worth noting here that over the decades since independence, Kenyan viewers were exposed largely to western movies both in the indoor theatres of the big towns and open-air theatres in the countryside. Even Kenyan or African films that got exhibited here, such as *Love Brewed in an African Pot* (Kwaw Ansah, 1980) were made in the classical mould. *Kolormask* marked the end of the short stint of government sponsored film production. But international filmmaking continued to flourish. *Out of Africa* (Sidney Pollack, 1985) was and still remains a landmark not just in the history of Kenyan cinema but in world cinema as a whole. *Kitchen Toto* (Harry Cook, 1985) was another important feature film for Kenya produced in the same period.

The 1990s and early 2000s marked a crossover period with Kenyan filmmakers stepping in to take their share of the potential that foreigners had appropriated for so long. It started in 1993 with *Saikati* (Ann Mungai), followed by its sequel *Saikati Enkabaani* four years later. Mungai's effort can easily be said to be the spark that ignited the creative instinct of a crop of filmmakers that have flourished in Kenya

since the late 1990s. But this was helped to a large extent by the proliferation in this period of cheaper alternatives for filming, including video and digital technologies that superseded the traditional 16mm and 35mm film stock. Though western movies continued to be made in Kenya, including *To Walk with Lions* (Carl Schultz, 1995), *Nowhere in Africa* (Caroline Link, 2001), *Tomb Raiders* (Lara Croft, 1998), it is the emergence of video filmmaking that is of concern to this study.

The outcome of the mentioned changeover includes the long running comedy series of *Reddykyulas*, *Kihenjo*, *Machang'i*, *Pengle* and others, fiction dramas such as *Dangerous Affairs*, (Judy Kibinge, 2002), *Naliaka is Going* (Albert Wandago, 2003), *Behind Closed Doors* (Jane Muragu Munene, 2004), and, more recently, *Malooned* (Bob Nyanja, 2007), *Toto Millionaire* (Simiyu Barasa, 2007), *Mung'eng'ano* (Mburu Kimani, 2009), and *From a Whisper* (Wanuri Kahiu, 2008) among others. Most of these are 'feel good' type of stories that exhibit a strong lure towards western style storytelling of local content.

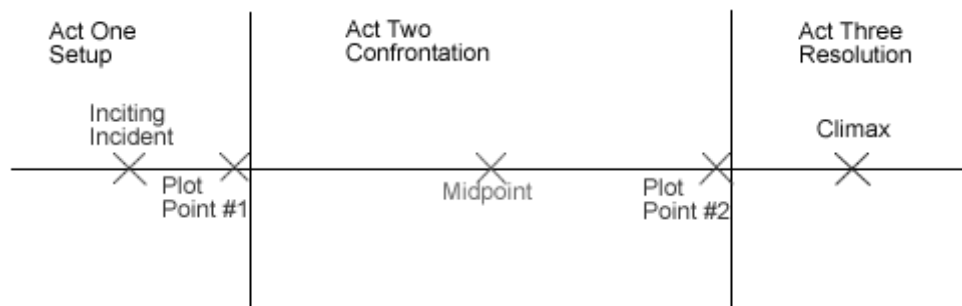
But it is this movement that gave birth to what has come to be generally referred to as 'Riverwood' film industry that is the focus of this study. The greatest percentage of the output of this industry remain out of limelight due to the mode of production, distribution and exhibition it has adopted; that is, cheaply and mass produced videos sold by street vendors on VCD and DVD formats for home consumption. Truth be said, given the amateurish, inexperienced, experimental, and speed of production of the *Riverwood* product, much of it fit into what Pius Mota, as interviewed in Mwakalinga (2010) would call 'garbage' that one cannot watch for a second time (Mwakalinga: 184). But the current researcher is convinced that within that garbage lies sparks that could fire up what Edwards calls the 'Kenyan voice' in the world of

cinema, sparks that serves as the inspiration behind this research. As Mwakalinga goes on to admit, current commercial video filmmakers “produce films that adhere to market demands rather than the professional principles of filmmaking” (145). It is a cinema that is part of what the general discourse on third cinema politics refers to as the aesthetics of poverty or ‘imperfect cinema.’ Given that part of its sources are the commercial and street theatre practices in Kenya, this researcher chooses to go along with Melita Zajc’s (2009:78) summation of such films (albeit in a Nigerian context): that “they are not used as art” or “pure entertainment. Rather, it is a hybrid use, bringing together various existing forms, very much like at the beginnings of celluloid films in US and Europe...” But beyond the uncompromising mercantile instinct, the typical video filmmaker in Africa also responds to the socio-cultural situation and demands of his or her audience. For instance, the works of such as Machang’i, Kihenjo, Kihoto, Warigia and Wandahuhu not only reflect the life, culture and values of the contemporary Agikuyu community, they have gained prominence by the viewership and positive response by that very community, whose life they satirize. That such artists use vernacular medium in their work makes it all the more likely for them to capture that authentic voice that a national cinema movement needs for identity as it grows to international status.

## **2.2 Story and Plot**

What follows is a break down of the three selected narratives into chronological parts in order to delineate the story events and determine their structural placement. Alongside this is another break down of the plot to trace the flow of events in each scene and establish their function within the whole story. This dual analysis should reveal the overall structural character and formal relationships of these events.

It bears repeating that with respect to the overall story design, this research is hypothetically grounded in the canonic story form of beginning-middle-end (equilibrium-disruption of equilibrium-restoration of equilibrium). In the classical film narrative form, this translates to the three-act structure which Field (2005) illustrates in the story arc model below. He gives the three acts functional names, that is, setup-confrontation-resolution. These sections can also be called exposition-rising action/complications-falling action.



**Fig 2.1: Field's story arc model**

The vertical axis in this model represents the rise and fall in action or tension, and the horizontal axis the time progression. The inciting incident is the initial event that sets off the story action while the plot points are those events that significantly change the course of story development in terms of throwing it into a different direction. These are also called turning points, which are themselves inciting incidents for subsequent acts. The climax is the peak of the story arc at which point Bordwell (2001) suggests that the options of likely outcome are reduced to the minimum (usually two, such as life and death). This sets up the resolution of conflict and denouement (the end) in which all the issues raised in the previous sections are settled.

The three-act structure is a universal phenomenon evident even in African traditional storytelling. Shaka cites Diawara’s observation that “in oral narratives, the principles of narrative action, causality, and narrative progression, are based on the subversion of a stable moral order by a negative element and/or vainglorious persona, which are contained or neutralized at the end of the narrative... the griots, being generally conservative and concerned with maintenance of traditional values, always closed their narratives through restoration of order” (Shaka: 77). Although the three-act structure, therefore, becomes this research’s default model, options are left open to accommodate alternatives or variations that the films under study may reveal. In breaking down the plot, the methodology adopted here is tabulation for clarity of categories, which have been expanded to include the function of each event in the story.

### 2.2.1 *Kikulacho*

Kikulacho is the story of Pastor Edwin, a double-dealing man of God who cheats not only on God, but also on his family and the women he befriends. Below is its chronology:

**Table 2.1: Kikulacho’s Fabula**

<b>Structural Chronology of Events</b>	<b>Function</b>
<u>Setup</u> Pastor Edwin starts his ministry preaching in the streets	Exposition
One year later, he is hired by People’s Revival Church as the resident pastor. He immediately starts an affair with Sue, the office secretary.	Turning point
<u>Complications</u> Back at home there is tension in the family. Pastor Edwin’s wife, Gloria, upbraids him for his absence and lack of support. He lies to her that he has important church functions. Their teenage son and daughter, John and Mercy, exhibit delinquent behaviour that could be attributed to their father’s neglect. While he drinks alcohol and jumps from one woman to another, his son is also engaging in substance abuse (cigarettes, bhang, and alcohol) and his daughter in illicit sex.	Episodes
In August 2005, Edwin wins one million shillings in <i>Bambua Tafrija</i> raffle, which leads to his dismissal from People’s Revival Church (PRC) for setting a bad example by taking part in a contest organized by a brewing company.	Turning Point

**Table 2.1, Cont.**

Edwin goes back to preaching in the street and continues his drinking and womanizing. One day, he is approached by Richard, one of his followers, who entrusts the pastor with his daughter for guidance and counseling. The pastor helps himself to her and soon thereafter, the girl is pregnant.	Episodes
In a revenge mission, Richard teams up with Sue, who happens to have had a child by the same Pastor. Richard befriends Mercy (the pastor's daughter) and sets a date with her at the same hotel room and time that Sue has called Edwin to join her. The story ends with Pastor in bed with his own daughter.	Climax

**Table 2.2: Kikulacho's Syuzhet**

Scene	Place	Action	Significance to <i>fabula</i>
1	a	The streets - Credits - A montage sequence of Pastor Edwin preaching at various points in the streets and parks of Nairobi.	Establishes the main character, Pastor Edwin, and his space
	b	Office - Pastor Edwin is hired by PRC. - He meets Sue and immediately starts to touch and make sexual passes at her. They plan to meet at Nandos later.	Reveals Edwin's duplicitous nature as a womanizer, a trait that conflicts his stature as a man of God
2	Edwin's home	- Edwin and his wife, Gloria, at breakfast. She complains of his absence and lack of support. - Their two teenage children, Mercy and John wake up to find a quarrelsome Gloria in a foul mood. They depart in a huff.	Establishes tension and conflict in the family, Edwin's other life
3	Kimotho's Pub	- Edwin walks into a pub and meets one of his church members to whom he lies. - He instructs the barman to serve him alcohol in the 'gents' as usual. - A customer complains over inaccessibility of the toilet.	Emphasizes Edwin's duplicity and hypocrisy.
4	a	Home - Gloria is at home where she is joined by John then Mercy. - They revisit that morning's disquiet and discuss Edwin's absence. - Gloria sends away the kids and calls Edwin to arrange for a family meeting.	- Explores further the tenuous relationship in Edwin's family
	b	Home - John and Mercy at home. - John starts to smoke, mercy threatens to tell on him and he threatens to tell on her goings on with her tutor-boyfriend. - Mother comes back, smells tobacco in the air, chases John away and quarrels Mercy.	Reveals John's delinquency
	c	Home - Edwin arrives home, is informed of John's misbehavior and promises to deal with it. - Before turning in, Edwin hides some bottle-tops in the toilet.	Shows Edwin's lack of seriousness in matters of his family
	d	Home - Mercy's tutor-boyfriend enters and starts giving her lessons. - John, then Mother leave the house. - The two lovers lock the door and start romancing.	Reveals Mercy's delinquency

Table 2.2, Cont.

5	a	Street	- John joins his <i>sheng</i> -speaking peers in smoking and drinking.	Reveals peer influence on John's substance abuse
	b	Kimotho's Pub	- Pastor Edwin with another girl who seeks help with finding a job. - Pastor suggests praying for her in a room but she refuses.	Further explores Edwin's womanizing exploits
	c	Home	- John smoking <i>marijuana</i> at home. Mercy arrives and John hides his stuff in the toilet. - John fetches his <i>marijuana</i> and discovers Edwin's bottle-tops. - Gloria catches him with these items and grounds him. He tries unsuccessfully to sneak into her bag.	Emphasizes John's delinquency and sets off a new chain of events
	d	Home	- Edwin and Gloria on a settee. He is distracted by a newspaper as she tries to speak to him about John. - John is summoned and given a tongue lashing by Edwin. - Edwin reads in the newspaper a number that tallies with one of the bottle-tops he's been hoarding – turns out he has won a prize in <i>Bambua Tafrija</i> , a contest sponsored by the Kenyan EABL company in 1985 - But Gloria has thrown away the bottle-tops. - Edwin leads his son in search of them in the streets outside. He finds them in a garbage bag.	Gives a historic context of events and heralds a turning point in Edwin's life
	e	Home	- Mother and children read an article of Edwin's winning in a newspaper. - Kimotho, the bartender arrives to congratulate Edwin on his good fortune and exposes the pastor's drinking habits through flashback shots. The whole family is struck in disbelief.	A paradox of pastor Edwin's good luck in spite of his hypocrisy
6		Church	- Outside the church, Pastor Edwin talks to members with various problems, one of whom wants a child. - Inside church he delivers a sermon, then instructs everyone to close their eyes for prayers during which he surreptitiously motions a certain lady to leave – ostensibly for a rendezvous with him. - After service, church elders meet and decide to relieve Edwin of duties for engaging in a contest that promotes beer drinking.	Emphasizes pastor Edwin's image of a 'wolf in a sheep skin' and marks what should be his downfall
7		Streets	- Pastor Edwin preaching and taking offerings on the streets again just like in the opening scene.	Marks pastor Edwin's reversal of fortune
8	a	Hotel	- Pastor Edwin meets up with another of his followers with whom he seems to have been having an affair. He promises her lots of gifts now that he is one million shillings rich.	Shows Pastor Edwin's extravagance, arrogance and greed
	b	Hotel / Public park	- Mercy and her tutor-boyfriend drink and flirt. - A cross-cut of Edwin continuing his pastoral duties in public space. - Back to Mercy and tutor-boyfriend, planning to spend the night together. She calls her mother and lies to gain her permission to sleep out.	Emphasizes consequences of Pastor Edwin's negligence of his family

*Table 2.2, Cont.*

9		Hotel	- Pastor Edwin eating out with the girl from the church scene. He promises her things including a car, then follows images of his romantic escapades with her and later with another girl.	Epitomizes Pastor Edwin's predatory nature
10	a	Outdoor	- A 'crusade' service with music, offerings and Edwin's sermon, at the end of which Richard approaches him seeking counseling for his wayward daughter. The pastor suggests she comes and spend some time with him at his home.	Sets up a basis for betrayal and conflict
	b	Hotel	- Pastor Edwin with Rita (Richard's daughter) having drinks late in the evening. Sex is imminent	Yet another instance of Edwin using a woman
11		Hotel	- Pastor Edwin in a meeting with a white American who offers him sponsorship to study in America.	Illusions of grandeur
12	a	Richard's home	- Richard finds Rita at home and after a harsh grilling the girl admits that she is pregnant by Pastor Edwin.	Exposes a crime and sets up a basis for revenge
	b	Outdoor	- Pastor Edwin at another outdoor church service. At the back of the congregation, a helpless Richard watches him, seething with anger.	Intensifies conflict
13		A follower's home / Pub	- Pastor Edwin talking to the married childless woman from the scene outside church (scene 6). He suggests they go to the bedroom for 'prayer'. - An intercut showing John drinking with his girl and a friend with whom he talks about events from the church scene. - Pastor Edwin parts with the married woman evidently after the 'bedroom prayer' session.	Belabours the point of Edwin's sex mania and infidelity, and shows John as taking after his him
14	a	Pub	- Richard and Sue discuss pastor Edwin's transgressions – it turns out that she too has his child. They hatch a plan to avenge themselves.	Portends pastor Edwin's downfall
	b	Pub / Shopping malls	- Mercy and a friend meet up with Richard at a pub. - Mercy and Richard out strolling and shopping. It ends with a kiss.	Sets off a treacherous affair between Richard and his nemesis's daughter
	d	Hotel lounge and room	- Richard and Sue laying down their trap. He calls Mercy and instructs her to go up to room 103, get to bed and keep the lights off. - Sue calls Pastor Edwin with whom she plans to meet in same room 103. - Edwin goes up to the appointed room and ends up sleeping with his daughter. - Freeze frame and Credits	Punishment meted

### 2.2.2 *Njohera*

Njohera is the story of Wandahuhu, a family man who leaves home to find work in the city where he meets and marries another woman. Below is its chronology:

**Table 2.3: Njohera's Fabula**

<b>Structural Chronology of Events</b>	<b>Function</b>
<p><u>Setup</u> Wandahuhu leaves his humble rural home to work in the city. He leaves behind a family comprising of Wa Gacuma, his wife, and Gacuma, his son. They are all members of <i>Akorino</i>, a religious sect that uses a turban as symbol of faith. After three days away, Wandahuhu meets up with Nyakirata, a helpful tenant at a compound in a city suburb where he finds a room to stay. He communicates home through a letter and later makes a short visit about three months down the line.</p>	Exposition and inciting incident
<p>Nyakirata is locked out of her house on account of rent arrears and she takes refuge at Wandahuhu's room where she takes the bed and he the couch. After three days, discomfort on the part of Wandahuhu causes them to share the bed with Nyakirata.</p>	Turning point
<p><u>Confrontation</u> After a long absence from home, Wandahuhu's wife decides to send Gacuma in search of his father. He finds him living as husband and wife with Nyakirata. The turban is gone from his head. Gacuma fetches his mother and a verbal confrontation ends with Wandahuhu denouncing his rural family. Mother and son go back home.</p>	Complication / Rising action
<p>Gacuma is hired by some white folks as a film actor and he makes money enough to raise their standard of life beyond his mother's wildest dreams. Meanwhile in the city, Wandahuhu has fallen ill and is thrown out by Nyakirata, in whose name he has registered all his property. He ends up a destitute beggar in the street.</p>	Turning point and Climax
<p><u>Resolution</u> Hunger and desperation drives Wandahuhu back home where he asks for forgiveness. He is received with kindness by Wa Gacuma against her son's disinclination.</p>	Denouement

**Table 2.4: Njohera's Syuzhet**

<b>Scene</b>	<b>Place</b>	<b>Action</b>	<b>Significance to fabula</b>
1	Rural home	<p>- Credits against a still image of an exotic mountainous landscape ends with the message: <i>When the spirit of the Lord moves away from a person, what is left is a void.</i></p> <p>- Wandahuhu says goodbye to his wife Wa Gacuma, and son, Gacuma, and leaves to work in town.</p>	Establishes the family's state of need and their faith in God
2	a Suburban residence	- Wandahuhu meets a tenant, Nyakirata, at a compound where he intends to rent a place to live.	Introduces the 'other woman'
	b Suburban residence	- Wandahuhu settles in with a lot of assistance from Nyakirata.	Develops Wandahuhu and Nyakirata relationship
3	Rural home	- Mother and son receive a letter from Wandahuhu.	Shows the absent man's heart is still with his family
4	a Suburban residence	- Wandahuhu bids farewell to Nyakirata and leaves for a temporary visit to his rural home.	Develops the man's concern for his family
	b Rural home	- Wandahuhu arrives home and is received with joy and celebration.	Family reunited
5	a Suburban residence	- Wandahuhu is back with Nyakirata who has been thrown out of her room and is taking refuge at Wandahuhu's. She sleeps in bed and he on the sofa.	Portends an illicit affair
	b Suburban residence	- Wandahuhu's discomfort on the sofa causes him to share the bed with Nyakirata.	The beginning of the affair, conflict established

**Table 2.4, Cont.**

6		Rural home	- After her husband's long absence, Wa Gacuma runs out of patience. She sends Gacuma in search of his father. - Ends with a flashback of the day Wandahuhu left home.	Sets a nostalgic mood and escalation of conflict
	b	Suburban residence	- Gacuma arrives to find his father living with Nyakirata, having even dispensed with his faith.	Betrayal is discovered
	c	Suburban residence	- Gacuma leads his mother to Wandahuhu's new home and a verbal confrontation ensues. Wandahuhu denounces the two.	Conflict peaks
7		Rural home	- Gacuma has been hired by white filmmakers and is about to leave home to make money	A change of fortune for the forsaken family
8		Suburban residence	- Wandahuhu is sick. He is thrown out of the house by Nyakirata in whose name his property is now registered.	A negative change of fortune to the traitor, beginning of punishment
9		Rural home	- Gacuma is planning to build a new house and other property for his mother.	Continues scene 7
10	a	Nyakirata's work place	- A physical confrontation between Nyakirata and Wandahuhu who is now in a sorry state.	Punishment meted
	b	Outdoor	- In desperation, Wandahuhu now begs in pathways pretending to be blind. Gacuma drops a coin in his bowl but doesn't seem to recognize his father who is being teased even by children.	
11		Rural home	- Weakened by sickness and starvation, Wandahuhu comes back home and begs for forgiveness. Gacuma tries to resist but his mother prevails upon him and Wandahuhu is accepted back home.	Repentance and reconciliation resolves conflict

### 2.2.3 Toto Millionaire

Toto Millionaire is the story of Toto, a little boy who must find money for her sick mother's medication and their upkeep. Below is its chronology:

**Table 2.5: Toto Millionaire's Fabula**

<b>Structural Chronology of Events</b>	<b>Function</b>
<p><u>Setup</u></p> <p>In a single-room hovel in a rural village market, a single mother, Mama Toto, is in bed, sick. Her son, Toto, goes around to relatives and friends begging money for medicine and food but is repulsed with hostile insults. A motorist stops by the market and Toto sneaks into the back of his car and is transported to the city.</p> <p>In a city suburb, Toto runs into Supa and his friend Barry G, two disillusioned city council workers with dreams of getting rich through a three-million shillings <i>Drink and Win</i> raffle contest. Toto immediately gets into trouble with the two, who take him for a street boy, but a certain prostitute intervenes. Supa hires Toto to sell his groundnuts and disguised <i>marijuana</i>. Meanwhile back at home, his sick mother sets out in search of him.</p>	Exposition and inciting incident
<p>Soon, the winning number of the raffle is announced and Toto finds the winning bottle-top at Supa's house.</p>	Turning Point

**Table 2.5, Cont.**

<p><u>Confrontation</u> Toto escapes the two drunken men (Supa and Barry G) and embarks on a little journey to find Mamba Bottlers, the sponsors of the contest. On his way he encounters a taxi driver who assaults and injures him as he robs him of a bottle-top that later turns out to be the wrong one. Thereafter, Toto meets up with a delusional preacher who takes him to his house and sets about coaching him with the intention of using him to get sponsorship money from white philanthropists. But it is the prostitute who finally helps Toto get to Mamba Bottlers, where he meets Philip, the man in charge of the contest. Philip invites Toto to his house and attempts to steal the bottle-top at night. Meanwhile, his mother arrives in the city suburb only to be robbed of her basket of bananas by Barry G.</p>	Escalation of complications
The next day, Toto is presented with his prize of three million shillings on TV.	Climax
<p><u>Resolution</u> Mama Toto travels back home and is shortly followed by Toto. Supa and Barry G arrive at the village and their snooping around in search of Toto's home discloses Toto's fortune and exposes the family to parasitic relatives, friends and neighbours.</p>	Denouement

**Table 2.6: Toto Millionaire's Syuzhet**

Scene	Place	Action	Significance to <i>fabula</i>
1	Village market	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Credits</li> <li>- Toto comes running to his mother who is in bed sick. He promises to find a solution.</li> <li>- He goes around the village market soliciting for money for medicine and food but is repulsed with insults and hostility by neighbours, friends and relatives.</li> <li>- Shortly, a rich man driving by stops to buy foodstuff. Toto sneaks into the booth of his car.</li> </ul>	A single-parent family, and its needy situation is established
2	City (Nairobi)	- Toto is taken to the city and ends up in a suburb where he encounters Supa and Barry G, two council workers whose dismal drunken life they hope to change through a 'Drink-and-win' raffle contest. Before long, Toto is falsely accused of stealing and they rough him up a little before a certain prostitute comes to his rescue. Supa decides to hire him to sell both genuine groundnuts and bhang packed as groundnuts.	The city's precarious life and villains are introduced
3	Village	- Back at home, Toto's mother is searching for him. She gets information from a market woman.	Reveals motherly love and concern
4	City Suburb (Shauri Moyo)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Toto is hungry but his pleas to Supa only elicit abuse.</li> <li>- The winning number of the raffle is announced and none is the winner.</li> <li>- Toto finds the prize bottle-top at Supa's house and starts his search for 'Mamba Bottlers', the sponsors of the contest.</li> </ul>	Portends a turning point in the Hero's life
5	Shauri Moyo	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Barry G. and Supa figure out that Toto could be the winner to the three million prize money. They frisk Toto but cannot find the bottle-top.</li> <li>- Toto runs away and meets up with a taxi man who later assaults and injures him to get the winning bottle-top.</li> </ul>	Presents another obstacle in Toto's struggles

**Table 2.6, Cont.**

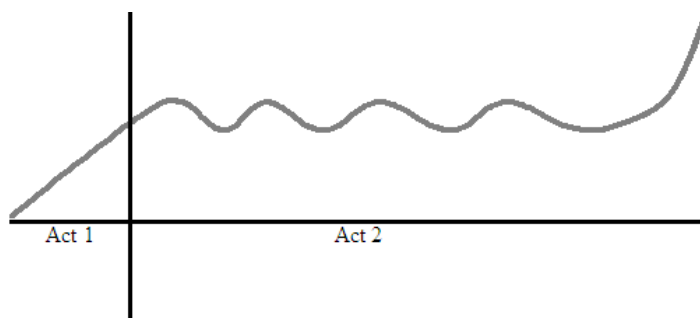
6	Somewhere in the same city suburbs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- A street preacher with illusions of grandeur takes injured Toto into his custody.</li> <li>- Meanwhile the Taxi driver arrives at the Mamba Bottlers offices only to discover that he got the wrong bottle-top.</li> <li>- Back at the preacher's house, the man is coaching Toto so as to use him to get sponsorship money from white people dubiously.</li> <li>- Toto escapes the preacher's house, meets up with the prostitute who instructs her man to guide Toto to the Mamba Bottlers offices.</li> </ul>	More complications for Toto, even from those who are expected to be charitable
7	Shauri Moyo	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Toto's mother arrives in the city. She encounters Barry G who robs her of a basket of bananas.</li> <li>- Supa discovers two bottle-tops are missing and they decide to go after Toto.</li> </ul>	Exposes the dangers of the city and sets in motion the villain's pursuit of the hero
8	Mamba Bottlers and Philip's house	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Toto arrives at Mamba Bottlers offices, refuses to hand over the bottle-top to Philip (the man in charge of the contest). Philip takes him to his house, buys him new clothes and attempts in vain to get the bottle-top while the boy sleeps.</li> <li>- The next day, Philip announces Toto as the "new millionaire in Kenya" on TV and presents him the cash in a briefcase. Various corporate representatives come to entice Toto to put his money on their various products and services.</li> <li>- Toto stashes the cash-laden briefcase into a garbage bag. Out in the streets, he carelessly leaves the money unattended and it is by ironical luck that Barry G and Supa (who are collecting garbage) leave it where they find it.</li> </ul>	More obstacles at the crowning moment of the hero
9	City and village market	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Mama Toto leaves the city for home without her son.</li> <li>- Toto follows her shortly</li> <li>- Barry G and Supa come to the village asking around in search of Toto.</li> <li>- Upon learning of his fortune, relatives, neighbours and other villagers come to Toto's house demanding a share of the money.</li> <li>- They all leave in a procession, ostensibly to take Mama Toto to hospital.</li> <li>- Ends with a title: <i>When God blesses, no man can take it away.</i></li> <li>- Credits</li> </ul>	Even more complications at the denouement of the story

### 2.3 Structural Characteristics of the Three Stories

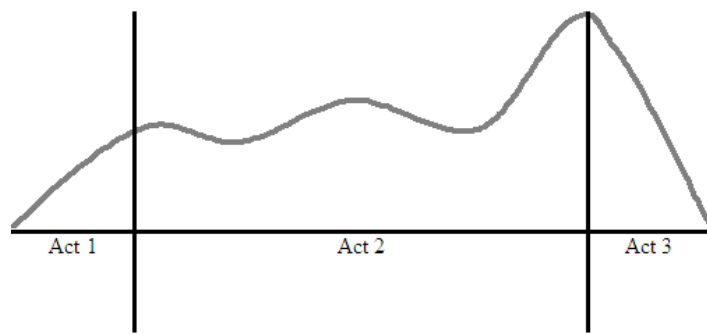
A comparison of story and plot analysis of the three stories presented here reveals a common factor: the plots are largely linear in a way that faithfully follows the chronology of the story. This makes it easy to follow the story development. Only a

few cases of flashback interfere with this design. In *Kikulacho* (scene 5e), Pastor Edwin's drinking escapades in the toilet are presented in flashback shots as Kimotho tells Edwin's wife and children about it. In *Njohera* (scene 5), Wa Gacuma reminiscences in a blurry-edged flashback shot the moment of happiness and hope when her husband left home for the city (*picture plate 5*). Every other event seems to fall into its rightful temporal place in the plot as in the story.

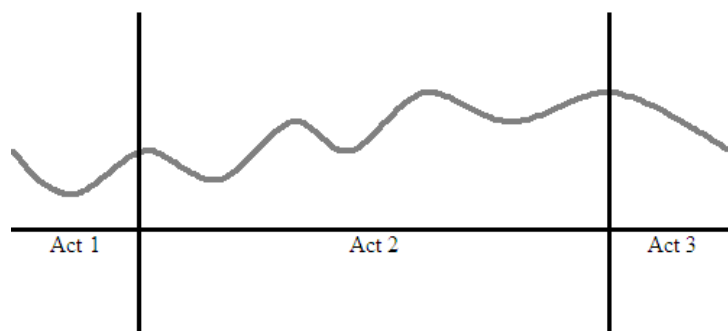
Another observation is that the three-act structure is adhered to in two of the stories and violated in one. They all have a clear beginning and middle section variously structured. But it is at their endings that the clearest discrepancy can be seen. Field (op cit.) gives the temporal balance of the three acts at the ratio of 1:2:1 (that is, quarter of the plot time for act 1, half for act 2 and the final quarter for act 3). Of the three stories, the closest that comes to these ratios is *Toto Millionaire* at 3:5:1. *Njohera* is almost 1:1:1 and *Kikulacho* is defiantly 1:12. Therefore, this study may not analyze these stories in the strict sense of Field's three-act structure, but broadly along the same line. Following this logic, the diagrams below are a visual representation of the story arcs of the three films:



**Fig 2.2: Kikulacho's Story Arc**



**Fig 2.3: Njohera's Story Arc**



**Fig 2.4: Toto Millionaire's Story Arc**

These diagrams are rough impressions rather than exact representations of the rise and fall of action in the three films. As they illustrate, the three narratives begin with a clear introduction. It sets up the genesis of story events and introduces the main characters. *Kikulacho* starts with montage shots of Pastor Edwin's street ministry; *Njohera* with Wandahuhu bidding farewell to his family; and *Toto Millionaire* with Toto running back home from one of his begging missions. This last story seems to start with a bit of tension occasioned by the boy's running and the low camera angle with which this shot is taken (*fig 3.8*). But apart from establishing a motif of the running Toto, it has no other narrative motivation at this point in the story. Therefore, the overall effect of the first act is similar in each of the three stories. By the end of it, the core problem and players in it are well established (*fig 2.5*).



(Above left) Toto tells his sick mother that he will find money for food and medicine in *Toto Millionaire*, (above right) Wandahuhu is seen off by his wife and son in *Njohera*, and (below) a montage of images of Pastor Edwin preaching in the streets and in public parks ends with one that foregrounds his obsession with women in *Kikulacho*



**Fig 2.5: The opening images in the three films**

The middle part of the three films also has a clear progression of complications. However, they differ in their choice of design. *Kikulacho* uses numerous incidences (episodes) of a similar kind to illustrate Edwin's duplicity and its effect on his family. Indeed, the entire narrative seems to split into two serial-like parts right in the middle (after Pastor's dismissal from Pentecostal Revival Church (PRC), at which point the story appears to start all over again in scene 7 with a montage sequence of events very similar to those of scene 1. This gives the story a kind of static oscillatory effect and just as it builds up to a climactic turning point, it ends. *Toto Millionaire* uses a journey-and-obstacles design to construct its complications. Its climax however, fails to raise the stakes high enough to produce a distinctive peak as compared to the other two storylines. *Njohera* uses parallelism by which Wandahuhu's life in town is contrasted to that of his family in the village. Its climax has Wandahuhu as a beggar facing starvation, disease and death, with his only

option being to return home. Generally, *Njohera's* and *Toto Millionaire's* structural choices organizes events in the two narratives better than is the case with *Kikulacho*, whose development seems to be a jumble of iterative incidences.

In their endings, only *Njohera* neatly ties up all its conflicts with Wandahuhu learning his lesson and being reconciled with his family. The most open ending is that of *Kikulacho*, which ends in 'media res' (middle of things) with Pastor Edwin's punishment in the form of sleeping with his daughter. We can only suppose that this incident changes him, but we cannot help questioning why his daughter is dealt with such traumatic cruelty and whether there is any hope for her recovery. Such questions could not arise if the story had a third act that ties up all its loose ends. *Toto Millionaire* ends in a partially closed manner. Although Toto returns home with plenty of money, Supa and Barry G are still on his trail and we can only hope that they don't get to it, especially given that mother and son have left it unattended under the bed.

(Left) a freeze frame of Pastor Edwin collapsed over his daughter (in bed) after having sex with her in *Kikulacho*; (centre) Wa Gacuma receives her husband back home in *Njohera*; and (right) Supa and Barry G stares after a procession of villages escorting Mama Toto to hospital in *Toto Millionaire*



**Fig 2.6: The closing images in the three films**

It is obvious from the above observations that of the three stories, *Njohera* seems to be the most tightly constructed with regard to the three-act structure. This is evident in most Wandahuhu stories, and indeed in the majority of vernacular films including

those of a comedic nature. Likewise, Nduti's other productions portray the same tendency as *Kikulacho* of ending at an anagnoristic 'cliffhanger' turning point that leaves it to the viewer to speculate what happens next, or in anticipation of a sequel. Simiyu Baraza on his part manifests elements of art film in his structural choices by use of events that provoke the viewer's imagination rather than articulate disequilibrium and reestablishment of equilibrium. For instance, his partial ending of *Toto Millionaire* portends trouble not just between Toto and the two villains (Supa and Barry G), but also between Toto's family and its relatives and neighbours in a way as to suggest that money breeds more than solves problems.

The kinds of structural deviations from the classical narrative form described here are not strange in African stories, both filmic and literary. On the Nigerian novel for instance, Haynes (2006: 118) comments that "the western novels on which Nigerian crime and political novels are to some degree based begin and end with a state of order, but the Nigerian fictions, while depicting a Manichaeian battle between order and chaos, typically end in chaos, and in the case of political novels may not have an image of order as a point of departure." And with regard to film specifically, Shaka notes that "in African cinema, the end of most narratives are much more ambiguous and open to several interpretations" (Shaka: 77). As Dancyger and Rush (1995: 262) point out, "if you don't find a resolution necessary or interesting, you may opt for a two-act structure." However, as Dancyger and Rush go ahead to caution, such a choice has consequences, and the loss of narrative wholesomeness afforded by the classical three-act structure should be balanced out by the appeal of other elements, especially characters.

An outstanding feature of the three films is lack of material that could constitute a subplot. The textural character of the line of action is one of a single strand of storyline. This is especially so in *Njohera* and *Toto Millionaire*. Even in *Kikulacho*, what could amount to a secondary plot lacks coherent development. Obviously, the main course of action follows Edwin's sexual and drinking escapades that impact negatively on his family. The second aspect of his life that could have the potential for a subplot is his pastoral work. Although it is intermittently explored from time to time through the street sermons, church and outdoor 'crusade' services, it serves to spice the main storyline rather than provide a well developed counterpoint to it. The same can be said of the little episodes involving his children, John and Mercy, which, like many such episodes in *Toto Millionaire*, appear more like stunted appendages that branch out to nowhere (*appendix 1.2* and *1.3*). This lack of multilayered story structure affects the emotional intensity of the narratives.

## **2.4 Conclusion**

The different structural choices made by the three filmmakers present different strategic viewpoints. The cyclic structure of *Kikulacho*, paints a one-dimensional view of the world. Since it uses similar events to state and restate the same point, it glosses over its issues in a way that does not take the viewer deep enough to view things in their complexity. For this reason, it fails to invite immersion and serious engagement between viewer and narrative.

*Njohera* on the other hand uses a parallel story design that gives us a two-dimensional view of the issues it raises. We sympathize with Wandahuhu at the same time as we empathize with Wa Gacuma and Gacuma at home. This is because

of the relative complexity with which the narrative treats the situation the central character finds himself in. Wandahuhu tries his best not to fall into a sexual relationship with Nyakirata, but physical discomfort and obvious human weakness we can all relate to results in his betrayal, consequent to which he is too guilty to face his suffering family. That we keep shuffling between the two sets of location tracing their changing circumstances gives us a comparatively more complex engagement with *Njohera*'s thematic concerns.

*Toto Millionaire* may be considered multidimensional not so much because of the depth into which it delves into its issues, but because of the multiplicity of issues it raises. It presents a complex society that the main character has to navigate through to achieve his goal. This way, we get a view of the world according to a village market woman, a prostitute, a city council worker, a taxi driver, street preacher and corporate agents, all whose sole motivation is survival. The narrative therefore engages us in a subtextual debate about these issues by presenting the good and the bad – and all the shades in between – side by side without seeming to attach any consequences to, or pass any judgment on them. This gives the viewer some work to do in digesting the import of what the narrative represents. So, where the distinction between good and evil in *Kikulacho* seems diffuse, it is clear-cut in *Njohera* and multifarious in *Toto Millionaire*.

In sum though, the choices mentioned in the foregoing give two of the films (*Njohera* and *Toto Millionaire*) a three-part 'home-away-home' or 'problem-conflict-resolution' structure, and one of them (*Kikulacho*) a cyclic 'situation-complications' or 'crime-punishment' two-part structure (*fig 3.1* and *3.2*). This may mean that Kenyan film narratives ought not to be attributed one all-binding structure – which

is understandable given that they are not products of a tightly controlled industrial system such as Hollywood. Every Kenyan filmmaker establishes his own standard which if well received is replicated even by others.

The next chapter takes a closer look into details of time and space, causality, characterization and narration to see how these four narrative elements contribute to the structural forms described here and communication of narrative information. To this end, the classical film narrative treatment of these elements becomes the basis upon which to gauge the Kenyan filmmaker's choices and their overall effect.

**3.0****CHAPTER THREE****KENYAN VIDEO FILM NARRATIVE VIS A VIS THE CLASSICAL SYSTEM**

In the previous chapter, this study has exposed some discrepancies in narrative structure between the Kenyan film stories and the classical model as well as between the Kenyan stories themselves. Consequently, this chapter is a comparative analysis of the Kenyan film narratives under study against the dominant classical narrative principles pertaining to causality, time and space, characterization and narration. By establishing in what ways the Kenyan film narratives forms conform to or/and deviate from classical standards, a basis upon which to argue for or against their strengths and weaknesses could be established. Hopefully, an alternative that can balance between the classical conventions and Kenyan video film practices may suggest itself.

**3.1 Causality**

Causality in film comprises of how patterns of events connect to each other in a logical sequence and how every element of a narrative can be justified by (an)other element(s) within it (Bordwell, 2001) or by the Aristotelian laws of probability and necessity. At its simplest, causality should be understood as the linkage between events and elements so that the existence of one becomes the reason or justification for the presence of another. The main causal agents in classical narrative form are characters, human or otherwise, who, due to their actions or inactions, behaviour, nature, psychological states and such, cause events to happen. Such events are effects that become causes for other events as the narrative chain develops. Of

course there are other causal factors such as natural forces, social circumstances, artistic and inter-textual dynamics that are not character-centered.

In processing causality from whatever angle, a viewer relies on the different schematic systems available to him or her, and especially the previous experiences of filmic patterning of narrative events and elements. A key term that goes with causality is motivation, which refers to the function or validation of an element in relation to the story or in relation to other elements within the story. Bordwell (2001: 51) suggests that the way to grasp the function of an element is to ask “what other element demands that it be present”. Causality is therefore an ingredient that permeates all other narrative elements. But here, it is dealt with mainly in as far as it is manifest in the sequence of events in the three stories. Its manifestation in other elements is dealt with within the analysis of those elements.

The three figures in *appendix 1* are graphic representations of the causal sequence of events in the three stories. They feature boxed events and link lines (the length or direction does not matter). Any horizontally aligned box that has no line leading to or/and from it (unless it is the very first or the very last in a narrative chain) has broken linkage, meaning it is either uncaused, or uncausing, or both. Vertical alignment of events simply implies concurrence in spatio-temporal or narrative significance terms. For instance, events that illustrate John’s and Mercy’s delinquencies in *Kikulacho* appear in several different scenes but their significance is comparable. Boxes whose borders are dotted represent events that are not explicitly shown on the story’s plot.

As evident in these figures, *Njohera's* cause-effect chain is fairly clear. Poverty causes Wandahuhu to seek work in the city. This translocation leads to his encounter with Nyakirata, which leads to their union. This union causes him to disown his family. His falling sick is not caused by the established chain of events because we have no evidence that he contracted the disease from Nyakirata. Nevertheless it is justified by the law of probability and it becomes a cause for his incapacitation and eventual expulsion by Nyakirata. This in turn leads to his destitution and suffering as a beggar, the effect of which is his repentance and return home.

The only event in this story that does not tie in properly with the main causal chain is Gacuma's sudden prosperity which can be said to be accidental. He does not as a result of being forsaken by his father take decisive action to change their situation at home. Instead, a dialogue with his mother reveals that he happens to have been present at an incident where some white filmmakers' vehicle got a puncture and he helped with the changing of the wheel. This leads to his acquaintance with the strangers and subsequent hiring as an actor. We don't get to see any of these events nor exactly how he makes his money. Only a change of attire attests to this 'rise' in fortune, which is itself alluded to through dialogue rather than visual evidence. This prosperity may therefore be said to have been manufactured as a reward for the victims of Wandahuhu's betrayal to parallel his punishment. It is noteworthy, however, that the narrative chooses filmmaking as the vehicle for this reward, which draws attention to film itself as a profession. This becomes an intra-textually self-conscious comment that is schematic at a socio-economic level to suggest that filmmaking is as viable a profession as any.

Tracing the causal chains of *Kikulacho* is much trickier. We cannot be sure if it is in search of money or a genuine calling to serve God that causes Edwin's preaching in the streets. The latter is doubtful given his sinful behaviour – although it is probable for one to start with a genuine calling to God's ministry and later to transgress. Nevertheless, money comes through as a more defensible cause, although it does not explain his return to the street later having won a million shillings in prize money. His getting hired by PRC follows from his work as a preacher. This gives him the opportunity to meet and befriend Sue with whom it is later revealed (through dialogue) that a child was made that Pastor Edwin denies fathering. Neither is this event nor the child explicitly shown in the plot. But it becomes the reason for Sue's collusion with Richard in a mission of vengeance that ends with the tragedy of Edwin sleeping with his own daughter.

The above chain of events is the main through-line that links the story's beginning to its end. But as noted, a long middle chunk of it (spanning a year or more) is condensed into a two sentence statement that Sue makes to Richard when they meet at a pub towards the film's end. The narrative instead chooses to show numerous other events of a similar nature as Edwin moves from the arms of one woman to another. While this is justified by his womanizing and duplicitous nature, the necessity of choosing to explicitly show these other affairs and leave out Sue's, which is the most causally significant to the narrative, is inexplicable – especially given that apart from the affair with Rita, Richard's daughter, the rest simply serve anecdotal functions.

Numerous other chains of events run parallel to the main one in *Kikulacho*. One is tied to Pastor Edwin's drinking habit which causes him to win a million shillings in

a raffle. This leads to more drinking and womanizing. But the overall impact of these events to the narrative is feeble. They are not only loosely connected from one to another, they just peripherally advance the main storyline as the reason Pastor Edwin cannot commit to Sue. They end up creating a photo-album or casual diary effect of the entire narrative.

Another chain in *Kikulacho* has to do with Rita's affair. It is linked to Edwin's womanizing as well as to his work as a pastor since it is through it that Richard gets to know him and it is at the end of an outdoor service that Richard offers the pastor his daughter for counseling (see last picture of *fig 3.10*). This affair causes a series of events (Rita's pregnancy, Richard's anger and his vengeance) that link to the main causal chain when Richard meets Sue. This brief meeting itself feels somewhat trumped up as it is the first time the two are seen together.

Another causal chain follows the situation in Pastor Edwin's family. His long absence from home and neglect of parental duty causes his wife a lot of frustration. This neglect may also be taken to be the reason for John's abuse of substances and Mercy's double-dealing promiscuity. But much of this causal chain dissipates, with the only strand traceable to it being Mercy's affair with Richard and, later, sex with her father. Other events in it either belong to causal chains that lead nowhere or are appendages pasted onto the narrative to illustrate one isolated thing or another.

One event that stands out as utterly cut off (uncaused and uncausing) is Pastor Edwin's meeting with a white sponsor who in one minute of conversation in scene 11 offers Edwin a scholarship to study in America (*picture plate 15*). This scene feels like an afterthought and unless we apply our social schema so as to read the

episode as an ideological statement meant to allude to the people behind treachery in church ministry, the only other way the incident can be interpreted is as a contrived expression of ‘illusions of grandeur’, that is, to have a white face make a cameo appearance in the film so as to raise its profile.

Where *Kikulacho* is marked by a jumble of causal chains, *Toto Millionaire* is marked by digressions from an otherwise clearly defined causal chain explicitly presented in the plot. Mama Toto is a widow living in poverty and disease. This causes Toto’s begging missions around the village, which in turn elicits hostility and repulsion from neighbours and relatives. In frustration, he sneaks into a car that happens by (as cars are wont to at a village market) and it transports him to the city, where he encounters Supa, Barry G and a kind prostitute among others. His appearance causes him to be mistaken for a street boy and is slightly mistreated by Supa and a barman, causing the prostitute to come to his aid. Supa hires Toto to sell his groundnuts and disguised ‘marijuana’, which results in the two staying together. This provides the opportunity for Toto to find Supa’s prize bottle-top though in a rather coincidental manner. The finding sets off his search of Mamba Bottlers in a race that takes him through several dangerous encounters (with the taxi driver and preacher) that can be justified by the law of probability (the streets are a dangerous place – for anyone with something of value – and full of all manner of people) and artistic necessity (a narrative creates interest through a hero who encounters obstacles and overcomes them).

Having overcome the said obstacles, Toto ends back with the kind prostitute who helps him get to Mamba Bottlers, where a greedy Philip (the man entrusted with running the raffle contest) tries to rob him of the prize bottle-top but fails. This

incident with Philip is rather weak as a causal link as it not only belabours the point that Toto should trust no one, its removal would have no effect whatsoever on the meaning and flow of the story. Indeed, the next event, the announcement and award of three million shillings in prize money to Toto on television, owes more to Toto's success in getting to Mamba Bottlers than to Philip's failure to steal his bottle-top. This crowning moment sets in motion Toto's return journey. He is followed home by Supa and Barry G, who watched the award ceremony and are now after the money. Their inquiries broadcast the news of Toto's fortune throughout the village (see last picture of *fig 4.4*). As a result, relatives, neighbours and villagers converge at Toto's home to demand a share of it. This motivates mother and son to hide the money under the bed before being led out by a relative, ostensibly to take the mother to hospital.

These are the events that form the main causal chain in *Toto Millionaire*. Only one other significant causal chain is annexed to this. When Toto fails to turn up at home, Mama Toto goes about in search of him. She follows him to the city where she meets Barry G. He robs her. Whether it is due to this or failure to locate her son, she gives up the search and goes back to the village. While this chain would have provided great subplot material, given the dramatic and emotional potential of its motivation, it is unconvincingly crafted and still-born. Mama Toto's encounter with Barry G and his behaviour towards her is contrived to illustrate the dangers to the naïve that lurks in the streets of Nairobi. This observation is given credence by the fact that her search is over too soon to have any narrative or dramatic impact – apart from illustrating her motherly concern perfunctorily. Even more contrived is the way she convinces a stranger motorist, in less than thirty seconds of beseeching, to take

her home. We are expected to believe that out of kindness, he instantly changes his itinerary in order to give her a ride all the way from the city to her village. This may be meant to counteract Barry G's behaviour by illustrating that there are some good people yet in Nairobi, but it is a case of probability stretched too thin.

Other events in this narrative have a parenthetical feeling about them, in that they constitute a slight digression to make a comment of one kind or another, but are sandwiched within the main causal chain in a way that is not at all disruptive. The lonesome preacher with delusions of boundless prosperity may be one in Toto's series of obstacles but, more importantly, he illustrates street con artists who go to any length to take advantage of others. The bhang smoking by the prostitute is linked to Toto's newfound 'employment' but it also functions as an illustration of drug trafficking and abuse, and the people associated with it. The taxi driver's visit to Mamba Bottlers follows his mugging of Toto but also serves a comic purpose besides revealing that Toto has a cunning mind that enables him outwit five adults who are after his bottle-top.

However, at some point on his way back home, Toto leaves his money carelessly at a dumpster. Although this defies the established logic, given the fastidiousness with which he had hidden and guarded the bottle-top, it is justified by stylistic demands of the text when a desperate Barry G picks it up only to leave it right where he finds it in a dramatic twist of irony that comments on how 'so near yet so far' we sometime get to the desires of our heart (*picture plate 14*). It also gives Toto the chance to illustrate his kindness and altruism by exchanging his new clothes for tatters with a street boy, to whom he also gives some money – although it could be

argued that he does this to disguise himself from those who may mean him harm, by presenting a picture that belies what he is carrying.

Several other observations can be made here about the causal characteristics common in the three films. First is the significant role played by *deus ex machina* as a causal factor. Each of these stories exhibits this ‘miraculous saving of the situation’ by a stroke of luck. This takes a curiously similar form in *Kikulacho* as in *Toto Millionaire*: a beer bottle-top raffle with a prize tag of seven figures. It plays a more crucial narrative function in *Toto Millionaire* than in *Kikulacho*, which makes it feel more acceptable in the latter, especially because it gives it a historical context that casts the event in the Kenyan social reality schema. In *Njohera*, ‘*deus ex machina*’ comes in the form of the rumoured appearance of white filmmakers who hire Gacuma and bring prosperity to him and his family. What is at once cinematically schematic and artless about this is that it is an ill-conceived version of ‘and they lived happily ever after’. While this is a convention of many a classical film narrative’s closure, this particular instance serves as a case where tactless adherence to a convention becomes counterproductive.

Not much unlike the ‘*deus ex machina*’ is another causal characteristic that can be termed as ‘illusions of grandeur’. These are instances where an event or character envisions great things happening beyond the diegetic scope of the story. In *Njohera*, it is the grandiose projections and structural plans that Gacuma has to change the homestead by constructing a big house, rearing grade cattle and generating electricity out of the biogas they make. While this may be schematic in a social sense as a didactic element to teach useful technology to peasantry, its mechanical integration in the narrative makes it unschematic in the sense of what audience

expectations are of how a story should unfold. In *Kikulacho*, illusions of grandeur occur severally in Pastor Edwins promises to his women (which may be justified as the behaviour of any common liar), but most glaringly in the scene with the white man mentioned earlier. In *Toto Millionaire*, such illusions are voiced by the pastor who wants to use Toto to swindle money from white philanthropists in order to build an orphanage and get even more money in sponsorship deals. We may consider these ruminations of a disconnected mind that the preacher is depicted to have, but the recurrence of ‘white saviours’ in all the three stories may point to a predisposition in the Kenyan psyche to look outward, especially to the West, for solutions to problems and for prosperity.

Another feature that has kept cropping up in the analysis of story, plot and causality, is the illustrational function of many of the events, regardless of whether they fit tightly into the narrative chain or not. Going by this illustrational logic, the cause-effect pattern in the three stories becomes much clearer and justifiable. Every event can be explained away in terms of its illustrational purpose or value. Even the overall causal structure with its digressional (*Toto Millionaire*), convoluted (*Kikulacho*) and hearsay (*Njohera*) events can be defended as illustrative of African speech – therefore storytelling – behaviour. Shaka (1994) sums up the findings of past studies on African oral narratives that have revealed “both linear and episodic plots, with plot structures incorporating embellishments such as narrative digressions, parallelism, flashbacks, dream sequences; ...” (76-77). However, some of these ‘embellishments’ (such as digression) run counter to the convention of unity in a filmic narrative construction whose organizing essence should be the story, and with which any film viewership shaped by classical film style is familiar. Events that

are not tightly synchronized to the cause-effect chain become anecdotal in a way that creates a sketchy rather than cohesive overall picture. The illustrational character of events in these stories also explains the discrepancy in story structure observed earlier. It would seem that Kenyan filmmakers make their narrative choices based on the illustrational impact of each event rather than how that event functions in building up a unified and balanced story structure. However, “if we consider unity as a criterion of evaluation, we may judge a film containing several unmotivated elements as a failure,” (Bordwell, 2001: 56).

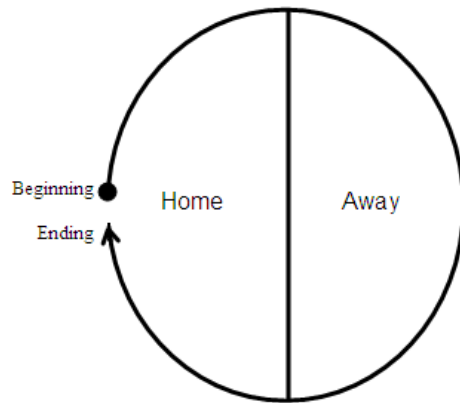
### **3.2 Time and Space**

Time and space in a narrative come together mainly at the level of setting in terms of when and where events take place. At this level, the historical and geographical background of a story form a general backdrop that is significant in understanding the causes and meanings communicated. But beyond this general background, time and space also operate at a more immediate level. According to Bordwell (2001), time can be analyzed in terms of order, duration and frequency of events. It can also be analyzed in terms of the relationship between story time, plot time and screen time. Similarly, space has specific implications in terms of story space (diegesis), plot space (*mise-en-scène*) and screen space (the frame). Like causality, aspects of time and space permeate most other elements of a film narrative. In the analysis of plot for instances, the category of ‘place’ tells us the immediate location of an action. Also, the analysis of causality can be seen as a breakdown of the story in temporal order (that is, what comes after what in time). For this reason, this part of the chapter analyzes those spatio-temporal aspects that the preceding and succeeding parts and chapters do not tackle.

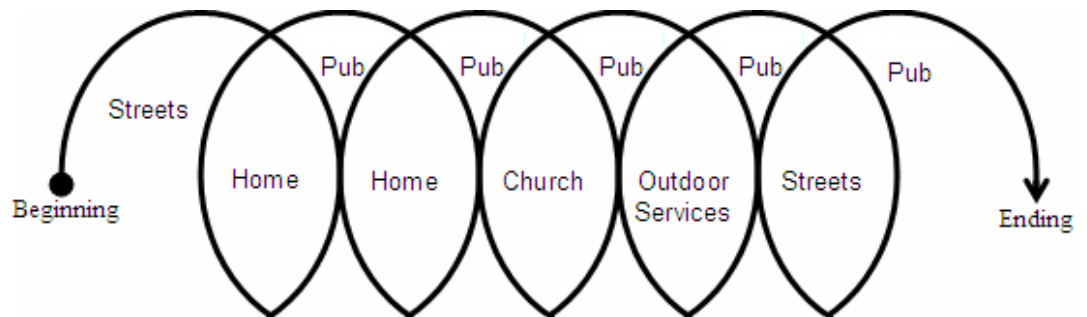
Geographically, all the three stories are set in Kenya. The specific historical backdrop is not given much importance in two of the stories. Only *Kikulacho* casts its events at around the time Kenya had a ‘Bambua Tafrija’ raffle in 2005, sponsored by East African Breweries Limited. The evidence for this is supplied diegetically by newspaper articles read by Pastor Edwin and Gloria, his wife (*picture plate 7*) and non-diegetically by a title: **August 2005** (*fig 3.18*). *Njohera* and *Toto Millionaire* can only be surmised as set in contemporary Kenya given the socio-economic issues they raise and the mise-en-scène (for instance, the use of recently constructed buildings in the city of Nairobi, *fig 3.17*).

The specific location of events in the three films is more clearly defined though generally stated. The rural-urban dichotomy is well captured in *Toto Millionaire*. Even *Kikulacho* uses good shots of the cityscape especially in transitions (*picture plate 10*). In *Njohera* however, the action purports to move to and fro between village and city, but the mise-en-scène fails to adequately support the distinction between the two spaces (*picture plate 4*). So, where dialogue is used to define location in *Njohera*, the mise-en-scène does so in *Toto Millionaire*, while *Kikulacho* uses both. On the whole, however, none can be said to leave the audience confused in terms of the general geo-historical or immediate social setting.

A key component of space and time is movement. Overall, movement in spatial and temporal terms in *Njohera* and *Toto Millionaire* present a Vogler-type ‘The Hero’s Journey’ design while *Kikulacho* paints a static picture since all its events take place within the same city involving the same people in the same situation. *fig 3.1* and *fig 3.2* are graphic representations of these observations.



**Fig 3.1: Time and space pattern in *Njohera* and *Toto Millionaire***



**Fig 3.2: Time and space pattern in *Kikulacho***

These diagrams should not be taken to be absolute representations of the details of story movement in spatio-temporal terms – for instance, Wandahuhu makes a visit back home midway into the story in *Njohera*. Rather, they should be treated as general impressions of the sense of overall spatio-temporal progression of the stories' essential action. At a glance, they may seem to suggest that *Njohera* and *Toto Millionaire* choose a simple design where *Kikulacho* uses a complex one. However, the former have a wider span in geographical space considering that the events indicated in the latter represent details of the episodic nature of the story structure. Where desperate spatial dichotomy (urban versus rural) is important in the other two stories, it is not in *Kikulacho*. The only significant spatial dichotomy in it seems to be between home/church (indoor or outdoor) and entertainment joints

within the same geographical location. This is interesting given that *Kikulacho* is more than twice the screen time of each of the other two, yet moves least spatially.

Screen time and space is also handled variously by the three films. *Njohera* uses shots that are long in temporal duration but mostly short in spatial depth. It is especially notable for its single takes in which much of every scene is shot. This dulls visual spectacle to the advantage of the story itself, which is carried by dialogue. Ironically, much of the action in *Njohera* takes place outdoors in front of a single camera that is capable of deep focus. But the filmmaker's preference of shallow depth is evident by his use of backgrounds such as house walls that obstruct deep focus. He chooses to frame characters' 'talking heads' and little of their surroundings. An interesting example appears in scene 2a where Nyakirata is pointing offscreen at a room available for Wandahuhu, but the camera does not follow her gesture to reveal the house she is indicating in a manner that preserves spatial integrity. Instead, the editing inserts a locked door cutaway perfunctorily to give a graphic illustration of Nyakirata's utterance of the word 'padlocked' (*fig 3.3* overleaf). Much as this is a quintessential 'kuleshov' device popular in classical narrative form, it creates a rhetorical use of space. A classical pan would bring out the spatial relationship between character, gesture and space much better.

*Toto Millionaire* uses both outdoor and indoor shots in equal measure. These shots are comparatively short in duration but long in depth of field. We therefore see a lot of movement of characters through space. *Kikulacho* on the other hand mostly utilizes indoor medium shots that, like *Njohera's*, are frequently shallow in depth and function just to frame talking characters (*picture plate 1*). Zajc (2009: 82) would

blame this on influence of television on the filmmaker. However, editing makes *Kikulacho*'s shots much shorter in duration.

A shot of Nyakirata pointing out a vacant room for Wandahuhu is followed by one of a locked door cutaway (the scrolling title is a commercial advertisement that has nothing to do with the story)



**Fig 3.3: Treatment of space in *Njohera***

In the three films, however, plot and story duration of events is to the most part equal. Only *Kikulacho* attempts one or two isolated instances of slow-motion and fast-motion for stylization more than for any noteworthy narrative purpose.

Leaps in time and space in the three films is achieved primarily through editing. In addition, *Kikulacho* and *Njohera* utilizes titles ('after one year', 'after four months', 'after three nights', 'August 2005' and the like) to indicate passage of story time. Also, all the films use dialogue to keep track of lapses in time and space. For instance, in *Toto Millionaire*, a market woman tells Mama Toto that she has not seen Toto for three days, a period of time that the plot leaps over. Likewise, Gacuma tells his mother that Wandahuhu is staying at a suburb called 'Waithaka', a fact that is not made explicit in the mise-en-scène. *Kikulacho* attempts to fill up such gaps by use of montage technique. At least four instances attest to this. Apart from the opening outdoor preaching sequence, and a similar one midway through the narrative, Edwin's affairs with several women in scene 9 are condensed through

montage imagery. A similar sequence condenses Richard's affair with Mercy later (scene 14*b*). Even so, we are still left with a vague picture of the span of this story in both spatial and temporal terms at the end of the film.

*Toto Millionaire* has a more compact construction of time, spanning just a week or so, with every event significant to the story presented in the plot. *Njohera*'s plot on the other hand implies wide leaps in time and the plot elides many events that are significant to the story. For instance, Wandahuhu's marriage to, and long stay with Nyakirata, during which he works, retires, acquires property and transfers it to her, is leapt over. It only comes up through dialogue, the same ways as Gacuma's financial transformation does. In the latter event, Gacuma's prosperity seems to come too quickly with little of the *mise-en-scène* to account for it (*picture plate 3*). Because of this, the viewer is left with a nebulous picture of the time span of the story. This goes to show that clarity in temporal design is not part of *Njohera*'s nor indeed *Kikulacho*'s narrative considerations, hence violating the classical imperative; that viewers should not be confused about space and/or time (Pramaggiore: 46). In the two stories, events are simply arranged in a way as to illustrate a message in narrative form. Where filmic options demand too much input, the problem is simply solved through hearsay.

Another spatio-temporal factor that needs mention is the diegesis. For the most part, diegetic integrity is maintained in the three films. However, notable violations and casual treatment of the diegetic independence of the storyworld appear here and there with damaging effect as these violations are not narratively justified. The most blatant is *Njohera*, which uses the screen space as a platform for non-diegetic commercial advertisement (*fig 3.3*). Besides being a good example of the casualness

with which the filmmaker treats the visuals of his work in general, it violates diegetic space in the same way that a passing figure looking straight into the camera does in *Toto Millionaire* (**fig 3.4**).

A passing figure turns to look straight into the camera in a way that marks her out as not part of the story



**Fig 3.4: Diegetic space violation in *Toto Millionaire***

Where *Njohera*, and to a lesser degree *Toto Millionaire*, violates diegetic space, *Kikulacho* violates diegetic time. Examples abound of instances where credibility of passage in time is tenuously represented. For instance, an intercut in scene 13 shows John and his friend meeting at a pub and talking about an incident in scene 6 (over seven months earlier) as if it had taken place that very day (**picture plate 2**). And even if the entire scene 13 (whose other events admittedly have a direct link to scene 6) was to be considered a flashback, neither is its narrative motivation and necessity clear, nor its placement framed as such. Besides, this is not the only inconsistency between story time and the plot's organization of it in this narrative. Yet its narration tends to represent other details of time passage with impressive precision. An example is the home transitions where images of the same house are lighted to reflect different times of day (**fig 3.5**). The scene 6 and 13 case therefore also points to narrative choices made on the basis of illustrating a point rather than composing a cohesive narrative unit.

A transitional still shows the same house at:  
day time



dusk



night time



**Fig 3.5: Treatment of Time in *Kikulacho***

As already indicated, the most important narrative element in most shots in the three films are the talking heads of characters. Every other element of the mise-en-scène is made subordinate to this. *Njohera's* largely outdoor setting obviates the need for interior set design and utilizes the abundant natural light. And like in *Kikulacho's* interior setting, most are medium shots that frame characters with little consideration of their environment. This inattention to the mise-en-scène predisposes the two stories to narrative hazards. For instance, a cunningly similar scene in the two films casts foreground events (worship of Christian God) against a contradictory and seemingly unintended background (a cigarette-smoking figure) (**figure 3.6**).

A smoking figure behind prayers in *Njohera* and behind preaching in *Kikulacho*



**Fig 3.6: Treatment of the mise-en-scène in *Njohera* and *Kikulacho***

Although this may be read as a comment on Edwin's duplicity in *Kikulacho*, it serves no such function in *Njohera*. Elsewhere in scene 6 though, *Kikulacho* places

significant action (Pastor Edwin talking audibly to a female member of his church that he later takes advantage of) in the background of insignificant action (John and his friend gesturing in undertones) (*picture plate 2*). This creates two planes of uncoordinated action competing for the viewer's attention in a way that serves no narrative ends. Other instances of such inattention to the details of the narrative image in *Njohera* include discontinuous backgrounds (*picture plate 3*) and shots that make little distinction of the rural and urban settings (*picture plate 4*).

*Toto Millionaire* handles its mise-en-scène more carefully than the other two stories. Its framing of screen space is clearly designed to support the dramatic and narrative contents of each scene. An example is the impoverished interior of Mama Toto's house that accentuates the family's miserable circumstances (first picture of *fig 2.5*).

Interesting though, is the way elements of the mise-en-scène are used to indicate spatial-temporal relationships visually in the three films (*fig 3.7*). For instance, we get to know that the suburb where Toto ends up staying with Supa is Shauri Moyo through a signboard posted on a shop. Although it could well be a product placement gimmick, it serves the narrative just as well. In *Kikulacho*, a clock face tells us the time of night that Pastor Edwin arrives home in scene 4c. More remarkable, however, is *Njohera*'s use of a zoom-in shot on a sheet that curtains off Wandahuhu and Nyakirata at the end of scene 5b. It not only blocks our access into their private space, it also symbolically accounts for his long absence from home that the next scene reveals. These are some of the instances of the video films' capacity to conform to essential classical narrative conventions, in this case to ensure clarity of time and space and to advance the narrative's purpose.

(Right) a wall clock indicates time of action in *Kikulacho*; (center) a sign post reveals location in *Toto Millionaire*; and (right) a curtain seals off our view and portends Wandahuhu's long absence from home



**Fig 3.7: Time and space functions of the *mise-en-scène* in the three films**

In terms of frequency of events, several instances attest to the Kenyan filmmakers' awareness of the capacity of repetition as a unifying technique in a film narrative. Some repetitions are direct, such as the one restating Wandahuhu's departure from home in scene 1 of *Njohera* as recalled by Wa Gacuma in a flashback in scene 6 (*picture plate 5*). Others are varied, such as in *Toto Millionaire* where Toto's award ceremony is presented firsthand then twice in television footage (*picture plate 6*). Also less direct is the repetition in montage of different shots of Pastor Edwin preaching in the streets in *Kikulacho* (*fig 2.5*). More subtle though is the running motif in *Toto Millionaire* taken with a low-angled camera, first in front of, then behind the fleeing figure of Toto (*fig 3.8*). It emphasizes the boy's vulnerability and quest for a solution for the emergency at home.

Two pairs of similar adjacent shots in scene 1 and 5 of *Toto Millionaire* depicts Toto in flight



**Fig 3.8: Repetition in *Toto Millionaire***

The conclusion to be drawn of the three films' treatment of spatial and temporal dynamics of story and plot is one of subordinated functionality. This is especially so in *Njohera* and *Kikulacho*, where these elements serve the story only casually. Although this raises far-reaching questions on verisimilitude as evidence adduced here proves, spatial and/or temporal context and consistency matters little in the two films which use character action and dialogue to communicate the narrative message of each scene. *Toto Millionaire* on the other hand portrays more consciousness of the need for spatio-temporal clarity in cinematic storytelling. But on the whole, the three cannot be said to be reflective of Gabriel's (in Shaka, 1994: 19) summation on conception of time and space in third world cinema, about which he says: "where western films manipulate time more than space, third world films seem to emphasise space over time," a difference he traces to culture and the generally slow-paced tradition of doing things. Once again in the three films of this study, as noted under causality, it is what is available for each filmmaker that he works with for illustrational more than narrative purposes.

### **3.3 Character, Action and Dialogue**

In filmic narratology, character is viewed largely in terms of role, goal, development, psychology, credibility and transformation. In classical film narrative, characters are essentially goal driven and invite identification. However, as Pramaggiore (2006) notes, much of characterization dynamics in this system are determined by genre and the star system. Since neither of these is of much consideration in this study, it deals with characterization more in terms of principle/supportive and protagonist/antagonist dichotomies. Action and dialogues are dealt with in terms of their functioning and balance.

### 3.3.1 Characterization

Two of the stories of this study are to a good degree character driven. *Kikulacho* follows the life and actions of Pastor Edwin to illustrate deception and betrayal that leads to his punishment. Likewise, *Njohera* is centered on Wandahuhu's actions and decisions to illustrate family loyalty and consequences of lack thereof. Only *Toto Millionaire* may be said to be plot driven. In it, the pursuit of a solution for a pressing problem dictates the actions of the lead character. In this sense, Toto becomes a victim and beneficiary of circumstances rather than the primary cause of those circumstances. This difference notwithstanding, the three stories have one central character around whom the narrative revolves.

In terms of character role and development, the three narratives present a varied picture. This variation appears in the degree of the perennial contest between protagonistic and antagonistic forces. In *Kikulacho*, Edwin represents an antagonistic character in relation to others, who collectively represent the society. His actions are not only antisocial, they are also anti-family and go counter to the very morals his Christian 'calling' champions. His goal is to take advantage of people's trust in order to make money and to sleep with every woman that crosses his path. As he gloats at his achievements, he epitomizes callous selfishness. Everything about his life is a lie. Even his family, which he is completely out of touch with, is a toy in his egotistic game of deceit. He succeeds rather admirably in eliciting our disinclination.

But his antagonist role is substantially weakened by the distribution of the protagonist role among so many individuals, the most prominent of whom are Richard and Sue. These protagonists are themselves superficially developed in that

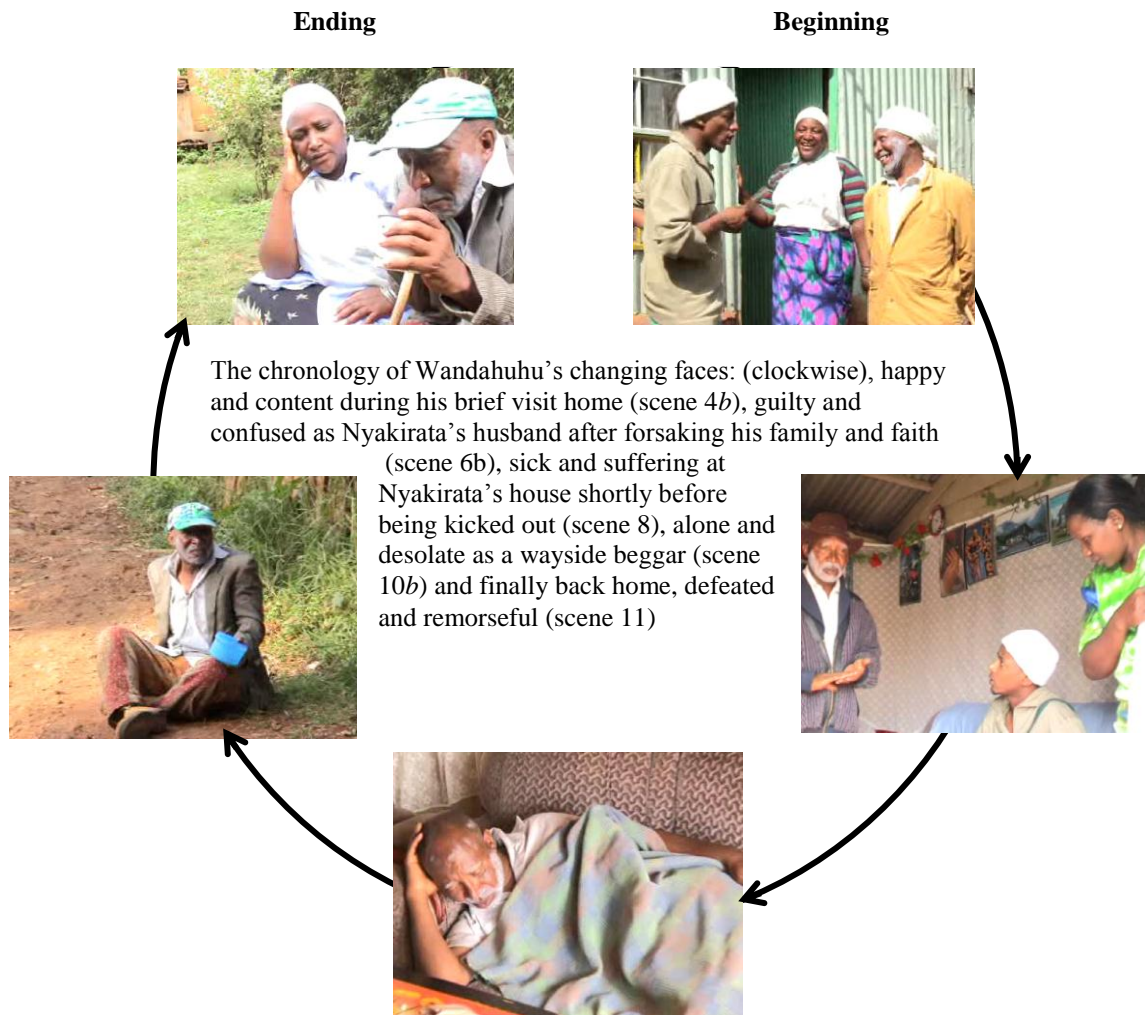
respect. For instance, Richard does not appear in the scene until way into the second half of the film. And of over a hundred and ten minutes of screen time, Sue appears only in the first ten and the last twenty – with almost three years of story time in between – only for us to learn that she has had a baby by Pastor Edwin, the reason for her vengeance and his ultimate punishment. Besides, the two are not themselves defensible guardians of protagonistic values to categorically counteract Edwin's vices. Sue is portrayed as a gullible, if loose, woman, while Richard's malicious affair with Mercy, Edwin's daughter, does not put him on any higher pedestal than the wayward Pastor. Their use of Mercy in their revenge mission is itself quite unprotagonistic.

Apart from Richard and Sue, the other characters who could fulfill the protagonist role are Pastor Edwin's family. But they too are superficially and negatively developed. Gloria is a naïve, hapless housewife who does not last beyond the first half of the film's plot. She reacts to, rather than act on, her family problems. She cannot even tell when her son, John, asks for money to buy bhang to her face. And the children are no better. John is a substance abuser and a petty thief who invites little sympathy. Mercy is a promiscuous cheat who touches our tender feelings only as a victim of his father's transgressions in the final ordeal of the narrative.

All the other characters, including the church, are victims of Pastor Edwin's duplicity. This is to say that apart from Pastor Edwin whom we abhor, none of the numerous characters in *Kikulacho* invites identification or empathy. To aggravate this distancing, the antagonistic Pastor is rewarded with a coterie of women and a million shillings in prize money. This may be by design: to hold up the mirror of social reality as it were to our face. But in so doing it distances the viewer,

especially one whose sensibilities favour classical film immersion through empathy and identification with characters in both sides of the good-evil divide. In the end, *Kikulacho*'s characterization acquires a fanciful aura to it. One fails to see the whole point of the characters' portrayal in the said manner, and the 'so what' question remains lingering in many a viewer's mind.

The clearest distinction between hero and villain is to be found in *Toto Millionaire*. Toto is the clear-cut protagonist of the story. He comes up against a problem in the form of his mother's illness and their condition of destitution and decides to do something about it. His actions are consistent with a goal driven character whose desire and purpose are clearly delineated. But like *Kikulacho*, it lacks a well defined antagonist. Supa and Barry G are more of foils than antagonists who come between Toto and his goal. All they do is put up a few half-hearted obstacles along his way in a manner that does not amount to real confrontation between the two diametrically opposed forces. The conflict thus created ends up being just a race for the prize money; which explains the lead character's constant running that ends the minute he gets it. Similar obstacles that lie in Toto's way include the taxi driver, the preacher, Philip and the corporate reps, all who have nothing to do with Supa and Barry G. Other characters fall on either side of this race in a less direct way. Toto's mother is obviously behind Toto. He can also count the prostitute on his side. Neighbours and relatives at home are antagonistic in their hostility and lack of support early in the story, and their lust for (even jealousy of) Toto's fortune later in the story. The primary conflict therefore remains that between our hero and his family's situation of poverty. But such a weak contest between the good and evil characters in a story waters down conflict and results in one that engages the viewer only superficially.



**Fig 3.9: Character arc in *Njohera***

On its part, *Njohera* has a more subtly discernible tension between virtuous and villainous characters. However, the definition of virtue and villainy is borne more on the shoulders of events than persons. Wandahuhu is the lead character whose goal it is to fend for his family. He takes the hero's decision to find work away from home, only to end up in circumstances that put his original goal in jeopardy when he finds himself in a marital relationship with another woman, Nyakirata. In this sense, Nyakirata would be the default antagonist of the story, especially given the way she physically kicks out Wandahuhu at his lowest moment in spite of his earlier benevolence at hers. Yet her villainy is also a product of circumstances rather than

design. When we first meet her, she is on the virtuous side of things as she becomes a helper to our hero. Our sympathy at this point lies with both as we hope that they will develop a friendship that will aid our hero along his purpose of ridding his homestead of poverty. When their relationship threatens that goal, they both embody antagonism and our sympathy shifts to Wa Gacuma who takes up the mantle of heroism as the quintessential strong African woman. At the same time, the pursuance of the goal is transferred onto the shoulders of Gacuma. In this complex way, the goal is achieved, not by a single hero's action, but by change of circumstances. The principle character becomes a victim and the protagonist/antagonist dichotomy becomes plot-centered rather than character-centered. Our sympathy returns to Wandahuhu at the point of his redemption through punishment and repentance.

Of the three stories, therefore, *Njohera* stands out as having the most developed characterization as evident in Wandahuhu's character arc above. That the story features only four major characters enables the narrative to explore their traits and motivations more intimately. Each of the four is well rounded within the limits of the narrative's cause-effect logic. Wandahuhu is generally a good family man who loses his way for a while in the hands of a cunning woman. Wa Gacuma is a kind and strong woman whose readiness to forgive and dependence on the two men in her family may be considered a weakness. Gacuma is a loyal son who is given to violent temper and insolence. Even Nyakirata is a hardworking and welcoming albeit self-seeking woman who has no qualms taking advantage of an opportunity regardless of who gets hurt in the process. The other two stories have numerous characters that are to the most part typical and flat: either good or bad.

As evident here also, only in *Njohera* do we see a main character who undergoes significant transformation. In *Kikulacho*, characters are stuck in their ways. Only Richard seems to move from being a pious churchgoer to a ‘sinner’ after what Pastor Edwin does to his daughter. In *Toto Millionaire*, characters seem to be caught in a time warp. “We are losers,” Supa keeps saying. Even Toto remains the same at the end as at the beginning despite being three million shillings richer. The very gloomy ending of the story only accentuates this stasis. We may therefore surmise that *Kikulacho* and *Toto Millionaire* opt for character consistency over transformation. However, the consistent narrative schema of classical film favours some degree of character growth.

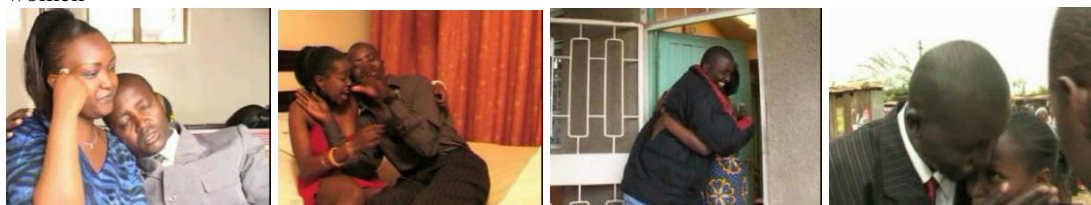
In all three stories, though, little of character psychology – in terms of their pasts that may explain their current behaviour – is explored. For instance, although we may attribute Toto’s actions to the absence of a father figure, the filmmaker does not make use of the *mise-en-scène* to explicate this fact. Nevertheless, this does not hinder our understanding of the characters given that their current circumstances suffice as motivation enough to propel the story action. Yet one cannot help but wish for a deeper peek into the psyche of such an individual as Pastor Edwin to understand how one gets to become so heartless. From some of his actions, one gets the feeling that he is just a child trapped in an adult’s body and that his insatiable appetite for women is actually an oedipal compensatory expression of desire for maternal love as evident in the shots in *fig 3.10* overleaf.

### 3.3.2 Action and Dialogue

The balance between action and dialogue in the three stories likewise presents a varied picture. In *Njohera* and *Kikulacho*, action is largely staged in a theatre-like



(Above) Pastor Edwin runs barefoot leading his son by the hand to search for his bottle-tops in the garbage before flying off down the street in puerile excitement, and (below) his tendency to ‘lean on’ women



**Fig 3.10: Character portrayal in *Kikulacho***

fashion with characters seated or standing and dialogue dominating the proceedings. Many events significant to the development of the story are relayed in these dialogue sections. As already noted, the change of fortune for Gacuma and his mother is relayed in scene 7 where he recounts to her how he met white filmmakers who hired him as an actor. When we meet him next in scene 9, he asserts himself as a rich man who is planning vast property developments, the credibility of which is not evident in the *mise-en-scène* (*picture plate 3*). Such dialogue circumvents visual time and space and appeals to the viewer’s sense of make-believe, forcing us to make arduous leaps of faith to accommodate an event that is obviously contrived to create a turning point in the story development. In classical film narrative conventions, such an instance would have called for a condensation of action using montage imagery as happens in *Kikulacho*.

But *Kikulacho* too has its share of confounding omissions in its sequence of action. The most narratively significant is Sue’s affair with Pastor Edwin (reported via dialogue in scene *14a*), which results in a baby that we never get to see, and which

becomes her motivation for revenge. This also forces us to make strained connections and to ‘re-view’ the narrative in retrospect in order to accommodate this event in the background of all the other narratively less significant affairs that are explicitly shown in the film’s line of action; thus calling to question the film’s sense of priority. *Toto Millionaire* tends to have a better balance of action and dialogue. We follow Toto’s every move and action, such as his constant running. Perhaps the only significant action that remains a matter of conjecture to the end is how exactly he hides the prized bottle-top, which enables him to outwit all the adults that are after it. This is important as it paints him as a street-smart kid who can read thoughts and anticipate others’ actions well ahead of time. However, it is also part of classical narrative schema to let the viewer do some work by not revealing everything.

Of interest is the nature of dialogue in the three films. *Kikulacho* and *Njohera* come through as unscripted. In the former, Kiswahili is dominant although code-switching to English and even Gikuyu is prevalent throughout. Young characters are aptly given ‘sheng’ (street jargon). But in almost all situations, conversation is marked by inconsequential trivia and hanging lines of dialogue as characters play off each other in a game whose communication runs beneath the surface. A good example occurs in scene 3 where we encounter Pastor Edwin in a pub for the first time:

		<b>English translation</b>
Edwin:	Aa, ii Kimotho (laughs).	<i>Aah, hi Kimotho</i>
Kimotho:	Hallo	<i>Hello</i>
Edwin:	Kuhana atia (shaking hands)	<i>How are things</i>
Kimotho:	Aa, gutiri na kauru	<i>Aah, there’s no problem</i>
Edwin:	Ii	<i>Is that so</i>
Kimotho:	Ii	<i>Yes</i>
Edwin:	Yes. Sasa?	<i>I see. Now?</i>

Kimotho:	Ee	<i>Yes</i>
Edwin:	U... Yaani... Watu wako aje	<i>You... I mean... How is everybody</i>
Kimotho:	(overlapping) yaani umenitembelea leo.	<i>You mean you've come to visit me today.</i>
Edwin:	Ee, habari ya job	<i>Yes, how is the job</i>
Kimotho:	Aa. job si mbaya	<i>Aah, the job is not bad</i>
Edwin:	Ee	<i>Is that so?</i>
Kimotho:	Ee	<i>Yes</i>
Edwin:	Ok	<i>Ok</i>
Kimotho:	Ndiyo	<i>Yes</i>
Edwin:	Aa, sasa,	<i>Aah, now,</i>
Kimotho:	Ee	<i>Yes</i>
Edwin:	Si ni... nimecome	<i>You see, I've... I've come</i>
Kimotho:	Ee	<i>Yes</i>
Edwin:	Ee, si... pale pale unafanyaga nini	<i>Aah, you see... same same place you usually do whatever</i>
Kimotho:	Ee, ok	<i>Is that so, Ok</i>
Edwin:	Si ufanye hivyo	<i>Do so then</i>
Kimotho:	Sasawa	<i>Alright</i>
Edwin:	Ee, hapo hapo tu	<i>Yes, Just the same same place</i>
Kimotho:	Ee	<i>Is that so?</i>
Edwin:	(leaving the bar counter) Ee	<i>Yes</i>
Kimotho:	Pale pale tu	<i>Just the same same place?</i>
Edwin:	(Walking offscreen) Hapo tu	<i>Just the same place</i>
Kimotho:	Ok	<i>Ok</i>
Edwin:	Ee	<i>Yes</i>

*Kikulacho* is replete with such dialogue (including gibberish) that is characteristic of the absurdist theatre, and indeed everyday speech behaviour between acquaintances that share a common context. The viewer is therefore supposed to see through it in

order to get to the real dynamics at play in any situation. In this example, we can see straight away that Pastor Edwin's purpose here is clandestine. Shortly later we learn that the 'same same place' actually refers to the toilet where Edwin hides to drink.

*Njohera* on the other hand is almost entirely in Gikuyu with code-switching to English and Kiswahili appearing in one or two instances, especially to mark Gacuma's rise to a sophisticated lifestyle. Here, dialogue communicates deeper than in *Kikulacho*. In addition, its flow is more natural and less affected.

*Toto Millionaire* comes through as scripted in English. Although it features code-switching to street jargon, Kiswahili and Gikuyu (inconsistently translated in English subtitles), it has a mechanical quality to it. Many characters, such as Toto's mother and other village market women obviously strain to articulate English words through their ethnic accents. This becomes a verisimilitude barrier that raises issues of character credibility – especially where such characters are conversing amongst themselves – hence damaging the illusion of realism. But perhaps more jarring is the rhythm of conversation, which is characterized by an intermittent flow as if the characters are struggling to recall their lines. An interesting example occurs in scene 2. Toto has just met Supa and Barry G at a drinking joint and has been chased away. A short while later, the bartender approaches the prostitute leaning against a wall outside and starts to induce her into sleeping with him. She rebuffs him:

- Prostitute: Aah, *Kwenda huko*. I'd rather sleep with that little boy there. Come here little boy. (Toto comes over and she touches his head caressingly). How are you doing? You are so sweet. You are not like this toilet cleaner here.
- Bartender: You know this boy stole my wallet. This boy is a thief. This... He s... He stole... thief!
- Supa: (picking Toto and holding him up in a dangling manner). Yah! What have you stolen?

- Prostitute: (overlapping) That boy...
- Supa: (with Toto kicking out and grunting in protest) *Nani*, bring a child.
- Prostitute: (overlapping) *Wee!*
- Bartender: He has stolen my wallet
- Prostitute; That boy is not a thief. Just because I told you I gonna sleep with him now you call him a thief. *Ati* he stole your wallet. You are so broke you can't even afford supper how can you afford to...
- Supa: (overlapping, with Toto still struggling futilely) Wh... wh... where is the wallet you young boy.
- Prostitute: He... leave him alone. Put him down Supa. Put him down or I will step on your... (Supa hurriedly puts Toto down and steps back)
- Supa: (after ten seconds of blinking in hesitation, turns methodically to look down at the boy) You boy, where're you from? What do you want? What's your name? (pause) Eeh? (pause) Where do you stay? (Toto utters something inaudible). Do you want work?
- Barry G: Ooh come on, leave this kid alone. He can't do the *kanjo*'s work.
- Supa: No. (stammering) H... h... he's the one who's going to... t... t... to sell the groundnuts for me.

It is evident, especially from Supa's words, that this dialogue is not only inadequately internalized, but that the editing does little to hide even the most glaring of errors, such as the long silence as Supa struggles to recall his lines and his earlier utterance: "*Nani*, bring a child," which is obviously out of place.

Another feature of dialogue common in the three narratives is gossip. By this the researcher means conversations that extend the spatio-temporal and thematic dimensions of the story in a manner that does not directly arise from or impact the narrative cause-effect chain. As in the case of causality seen earlier, these are a feature of natural African speech and oral narrative behaviour where it often digresses away from a subject under discussion for comic effect, to diffuse tension or even for its own sake among other reasons. A good example appears in *Njohera* (scene 4*b*). Wandahuhu arrives from the city and is joyfully received by wife (Wa

Gacuma) and son (Gacuma). They are standing at the doorstep and he gives his son some money to buy some foodstuff from a local shop in order to make a small feast:

		<b>English Translation</b>
Wandahuhu:	<i>(to Wa Gacuma)</i> Riu we nawe to kiria ugugithii gucaria	<i>Now, as for you, you will look for that other thing, won't you?</i>
Wa Gacuma:	Ii	<i>Yes</i>
Wandahuhu:	Niuguthii gucaria rugio	<i>You will look for a pan</i>
Gacuma:	Ii, Rugio... <i>(pause)</i>	<i>Well, a pan...</i>
Wandahuhu:	<i>(demonstrating)</i> Niguo mukiruge...	<i>So that you can make...</i>
Gacuma:	Rugio...	<i>A pan...</i>
Wandahuhu:	Tumigate	<i>Some chapatti</i>
Wa Gacuma:	Ii-ni! uhoro wa... <i>(laughs in excitement)</i>	<i>Yes! Instead of...</i>
Wandahuhu:	Ii-ni	<i>That is it</i>
Gacuma:	Rugio ruu ruria rwi ho ri,	<i>The pan that is here,</i>
Wandahuhu:	Ee	<i>What about it</i>
Wa Gacuma:	Ruu rwi... rwiu rutingiruga. Niuguthii kuhoya guku <i>(points offscreen)</i>	<i>That... ours cannot bake. You will fetch one from there.</i>
Wandahuhu:	<i>(simultaneously with Gacuma)</i> Rwa... mutu... oo, Bitirethi uyu wari haha <i>(pointing)</i> wa k... k... <i>(gabbles trying to recall)</i>	<i>From... that wom... Beatrice, the one who lived here who...</i>
Gacuma:	Ai	<i>I doubt</i>
Wa Gacuma:	<i>(simultaneously with Gacuma)</i> Rwa Bitirethi...	<i>Beatrice's...</i>
Wandahuhu:	<i>(in a raised voice simultaneously with the other two)</i> Ma kiri na rugio	<i>They had a pan</i>
Wa Gacuma:	N... ni... niruo...	<i>It...</i>
Gacuma:	<i>(simultaneously)</i> Rwaturikire	<i>It wore out</i>
Wa Gacuma:	Nirworire irugaini ria kamweretho	<i>It disappeared during the kamweretho feast</i>
Gacuma:	Kwanja niguturika	<i>First it wore out</i>
Wa Gacuma:	Oo, nigutu... <i>(trails off)</i>	<i>Oh, so it...</i>
Gacuma:	Rwacokire rukioneke rwatetwo mugunda	<i>They later found it</i>

		<i>discarded in the farm</i>
<b>Pause</b>		
Wa Gacuma:	Na aturaga augaga ni kura...	<i>Yet always claims it disappeared...</i>
Wandahuhu:	<i>(simultaneously with Wa Gacuma)</i> Na niguu! <i>(reaching out for Gacuma's shoulder for emphasis)</i> Rugio ruu muthuriwe akirehe ri,	<i>And you are right! That pan when her husband brought it</i>
Gacuma:	Ii	<i>Yes</i>
Wandahuhu:	Ndui ni rwa cuma iria cia reri,	<i>You know it is made of railway steel</i>
Gacuma:	Ii	<i>Yes</i>
Wa Gacuma:	<i>(simultaneously with Gacuma)</i> Hmm	<i>Hmm</i>
Wandahuhu:	Rwari rugio rweга muno. Riu... nimugugicaria	<i>It was a very good pan. Now... you will find another</i>
Wa Gacuma:	<i>(overlapping)</i> Nitukumenya. Thii ugiure indo, thii ugiure indo	<i>We will find a way out. Go buy the stuff; go buy the stuff.</i>
Wandahuhu:	Nimukumenya. Wee teng'era ii	<i>You'll find a way out. You hurry.</i>
Gacuma:	Ii	<i>Yes</i>
Wandahuhu:	<i>(as Gacuma exits and he and Wa Gacuma turn to enter the house)</i> Ii, na ugi... riu... mwathani ni mweга	<i>Yes, and you... well... God is good.</i>

**Fade to black**

The above exchange is of little, if any, value to the story's essential cause-effect chain. But it feeds the diegesis with contextual detail that makes the viewer more intimate with the characters. We get to know that their space includes friendly neighbours who, although we never get to meet them, have little life stories of their own. Besides enriching the diegesis, it also reiterates a sense of community that is vital to this story as first demonstrated by Nyakirata's generosity towards a stranger (Wandahuhu) as he settled in the suburban environment. On the whole, it radiates a warmth that envelops this family in an atmosphere of happiness and harmony with their environment.

Another vital aspect of character, action and dialogue is identity, by which characters are given physical or behavioural traits that set them apart as individuals. This ranges from items of clothing and personal props to habits of action or speech. For instance, the white headgear worn by Wandahuhu and his family in *Njohera* identifies them with their faith, while Supa and Barry G in *Toto Millionaire*, who are city council workers, wear blue overcoats. In *Kikulacho*, the quantity and flamboyance of Edwin's wardrobe is only comparable to that of his women, and symbolic of his chameleon-like deceitful personality.

Besides creating characters that stay longer in our memory, some of these individuating traits are meant for comic effect. For instance, *Njohera* utilizes what the researcher chooses to call 'zangalewa aesthetics' associated with River Road street thespians and comedians of Nairobi. This comes out through Wandahuhu's whitewash facial make-up – that calls to mind the image of a village old man – and his wobbly walking style (*fig 3.11*).

Wandahuhu's wobbly gait and (right) his whitewash facial makeup



**Fig 3.11: Humour in *Njohera***

What is interesting about Wandahuhu's image above is that, although the clownish white-washed face ought to act against the verisimilitude of the narrative, besides portraying the Kenyan filmmaker as one who is not averse to revealing his apparatus of representation, it goes almost unnoticed in this film due to years of exposure to it

through music and other performing arts in Kenya. A viewer who is foreign to the ‘Zangalewa’ image may not so readily assimilate this element of Kenyan vernacular film iconography into his or her schema of character portrayal. However, it gives the narrative local colour and flavour that could be part of what Edwards calls a ‘Kenyan voice’.

*Toto Millionaire* also features character idiosyncrasies that are used for comic effect, especially through individual speech behaviour. Supa is a stammerer who blinks a lot whenever a word gets stuck in his throat. The taxi driver’s speech is marked by a heavy ethnic accent that is complimented by his slow drawl and unkempt ‘mousy’ facial features to complete a caricatured image of a street con artist (*fig 3.12*). Philip likes to have a lollipop sticking out the side of his mouth (first picture of *fig 3.23*), and Toto is in flight most of the time. There is also slapstick humour in this film, for instance when Supa and Barry G speak and totter in a drunken daze, and when the preacher falls off a settee upon watching Toto receive his prize on television.

The ‘mousy’ taxi driver (sc. 6); Supa and Barry G drunk (sc. 5); preacher falls off a settee (sc. 8)

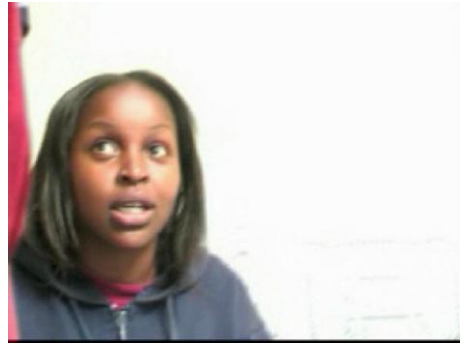


**Fig 3.12: Humour in *Toto Millionaire***

Apart from the case mentioned of Pastor Edwin, *Kikulacho* does little to assign its characters unique identities. Perhaps due to the large number of them, they tend to exhibit similar traits where they belong to the same category (*sheng*-speaking teenagers, sexy-looking women and such).



“Are...you...pregnant!?”



“Yes”



“By who!?”



“Pastor”



“Instead of getting smart you got pregnant!?”



“O mama... Jesus Christ!”

A seething father standing over a relaxed ‘pregnant’ teenage daughter



*Fig 3.13: Unconvincing action in Kikulacho*

Some shortcomings in casting, action and dialogue in the three films raise questions of credibility in as far as character believability is concerned. It must be said, however, that this emanates more from the supporting than the principle characters who are consistent (Pastor Edwin and Toto) and fairly well developed (Wandahuhu). The most grating inconsistency occurs where discordance between dialogue and action is obvious. A good example appears in scene 12a of *Kikulacho* in an exchange between Richard and his daughter (Rita) as summed up in the images and translated excerpts of their accompanying dialogue above (*fig 3.13*).

The emotional flux in this scene is well captured by the father who is obviously irate as evident in his movements and body language. But it is undercut by his daughter's nonchalant response as read in her facial expression and manner of speaking. But what undercuts it even more is an earlier scene (10a) where Richard offers his daughter to Edwin for counseling (last image of *fig. 3.13*). The latter holds Rita inappropriately, touching her face in a way that foregrounds his taking advantage of her sexually – an action that ought to have forewarned Richard. Other instances of unconvincing action in this film include the final sequence when Edwin enters Room 103 speaking loudly, yet the daughter fails to recognize the father's voice. Similar cases abound in all the three films and although it may be blamed more on individual inexperience, they nonetheless impact negatively on the viewer's engagement with the narrative.

Overall, much of character, action and dialogue reiterate the illustrational manner of using elements in the three films in particular and Kenyan video films in general. This feature is symptomatic of many an African moral tale and the generally didactic function of African narratives; oral, filmic or literary. The purpose of such

narratives is to pass a lesson, be it overall, at specific points in the narration, or with specific narrative elements. Details or refinement and degree of accuracy of the agents of such a lesson – be they characters, actions, words, places or objects – are of secondary importance. They become only vessels in which the lesson is contained and it matters little that it is presented visually or aurally: ‘the end justifies the means’. The example of the exchange between Rita and her father, for instance, is meant to make the point that illegitimate sex leads to unwanted pregnancies, which is cast in the overall lesson of the narrative; that some of the leaders we trust with our lives in general and our children in particular are ‘wolves in sheep skin’. Rita may be incapable or unwilling to bring out her part perfectly, but at least she approximates the image of a pregnant daughter to a didactically functional degree.

This approximal, hence illustrational, use of narrative elements is evident in the way some characters are used conveniently, then discarded once their usefulness is expended with, even where their use in this way raises pertinent narrative questions. For instance, the prostitute in *Toto Millionaire* is not acknowledged for the assistance she offers the hero. She appears twice to help Toto through a difficult situation, and once to illustrate how drug peddlers adopt ingenious ways to sell drugs (in this instance by disguising it as groundnuts). The same use is made of company agents, who attempt to woo Toto into putting his money into their firms in scene 8, to illustrate corporate greed (*picture plate 8*).

As earlier shown in the analysis of causality, each of these events is an isolated incident whose narrative consequence does not last beyond the minute or so of its depiction. Similar cases appear in *Kikulacho*. One instance is where an anonymous girl in scene 5a is depicted as part of John’s substance abusing street mates. Later in

scene 14*b*, the same girl reappears, this time as a dear friend to both Richard and Mercy, whom she intends to make a pair of (*picture plate 9*). While this scenario is plausible given the spatial relationship of the characters involved, the ill prepared switch of roles by the girl is narratively disorienting though, it may be said, illustratively functional. Her first appearance illustrates teenage delinquency, while her second illustrates the role of go-betweens in the game of courtship.

But perhaps the most interesting example of this carefree characterization is to be found in identical instances in *Njohera* and *Kikulacho* where a prominent character is ‘re-used’ with little consideration of their narrative role. In *Njohera*, Gacuma drops a coin into his father’s begging bowl in scene 10*b* without recognizing him. It is not clear whether the intention here is dramatic irony or to pass Gacuma off as a stranger ‘just’ to illustrate Wandahuhu’s desperation. A cunningly similar incident occurs in the very first montage sequences of *Kikulacho*. Here, John is seen giving an offering to his father as part of an anonymous crowd to illustrate how Edwin earns his money. Later at home, John expresses little knowledge of his father’s street ministry.



**Fig 3.14: Re-usage of characters in *Njohera* and *Kikulacho***

The effect of this illustrational type of narrative construction in general, and characterization, dialogue and action in particular, is that it risks making the film narrative appear too obvious and general. It kills empathy and causes aesthetic dissociation between viewer and story. As Devereux (2010: 8) says, “Empathy is the vehicle that pulls us in and engages us. When we are told stories that do not trigger our empathetic response, the connection we form with a film is almost fully intellectual, like reading a newspaper. Often it does not exist at all.” This disconnection is what this researcher calls aesthetic dissociation that fails to provide us “with an easy, unconscious, and involving way of constructing our world” as Graeme (1999) stipulates a story should. Since the spectator is supposed to take what the plot and story presents as annotations that are of insignificant interest unto themselves, he is bound to overlook their aesthetic value and simply pick on their functional value. For instance, all minor and major crimes in *Toto Millionaire* (the prostitute smoking bhang, the taxi driver’s assault of Toto, Barry G’s snatching of Mama Toto’s basket) have no consequence in terms of punishment or at least some rationalized resolution or explanation. The same can be said of most events in *Kikulacho*. For this reason, there really would be no motivation on the viewer’s part to consider the film text beyond its functional meanings, and certainly no motivation to see it again. Dovey (in Khatib, 2012) finds such approximate forms low in aesthetic quality and unlikely to be tolerated by audience elsewhere.

### **3.4 Narration**

Shaka (1994: 92) aptly points out that “comprehending the nature of film narration is a prelude to understanding film and of rendering a critical analysis that is responsive to the specificity of the medium.” The term ‘narration’ in the classical

narrative system spans a wide spectrum of strategies and techniques of story delivery, that is, how the narrative puts together story information and relays it to the viewer. In constructivist conception, it is the narration that provides cues for the viewer to form and test hypotheses, and make inferences that help him or her build the story from the plot. It is therefore infused within all other elements: story and plot, time and space, causality, character, cinematography and post production processes of image and sound editing. The cumulative effect of the manipulation of these elements in narration, according to the constructivist approach to understanding film narrative, results in different levels of range and depth of information accessible to the viewer (Bordwell, 2001: 70-75). Range of information refers to the extent of knowledge that the narrating agent makes available. This can fall anywhere between the extremes of restricted and unrestricted depending on the point of view of narration. Depth of information on the other hand refers to levels of subjectivity and/or objectivity of that knowledge in terms of how deep the narrative agent allows us into the characters' psyche. Both range and depth are therefore relative terms that occur at different levels at different points of the narrative. This study approaches narration as it is prominently manifest in the three Kenyan video stories in relation to narrational techniques prevalent in the classical film style whose basic principle is immersion through unobtrusive narration; that is, one that does not attract attention to itself.

#### 3.4.1 Point of View and Cinematography

Point of view (POV) primarily means the eyes and ears through which we see and hear the goings on in the narrative – regardless of whether it is the vantage point that the film's narrating voice places the viewer or the optical/aural point-of-view (POV

shot) that relays events through the eyes and ears of a specific character. As such, the main component of point of view is the camera, through which we can get varying degrees of restricted / unrestricted and subjective / objective view of events.

The three films of this study use omniscient narration. The camera takes us from one place to another, showing us events that happen independently, and without privileging any one character's view of things or psycho-emotional disposition. Characters' internal states are accessed through external monologue, as in the instance where the deluded preacher in *Toto Millionaire* addresses an empty chair as if talking to Toto, who has already fled. The range and depth of knowledge in omniscient narration is therefore largely unrestricted and objective. Only at one point in *Njohera* does the narrating agent get subjective when we penetrate Wa Gacuma's memory of the moment she bade farewell to her husband. This invites viewer's identification as it intensifies her feelings of loneliness to which we get intimately involved:

A 'water drop' dissolve in close-up marks our entry into the memories of Wa Gacuma



*Fig 3.15: Subjective narration in Njohera*

The autonomy of the narrating agent afforded by omniscient narration suits the three stories given their illustrational nature and purpose. Every incident is slotted in to fit

into a framework of thematic significance, which seems to be the foremost organizing principle of events in the narratives. Differences in narration occur at the level of attitude and nuances of view in what can be termed ‘camera personality’.

In *Kikulacho* and *Njohera*, the narration proceeds in a way that the camera is largely uninvolved in the story’s goings on. Its only concern is to record characters, their situation and their actions without meddling in or commenting on them or their environment. Where in the former, it does this in a methodical manner that is sometimes frivolous, in the later, it does so in a passive and servile manner. But in both, it mostly maintains an almost stand-offish attitude that borders more on observation than on narration. This is marked by a stationary camera whose occasional movement is essentially for reframing rather than narrating purpose. The net effect of this method is that we end up interacting with the film in a rather superficial manner that does not delve into details that would engage us deeply with the narrative’s world, events and characters. For instance, this lack of intimacy compels some of the characters to express their intentions and emotions by indicating them externally as evident in the following images in *Kikulacho*.

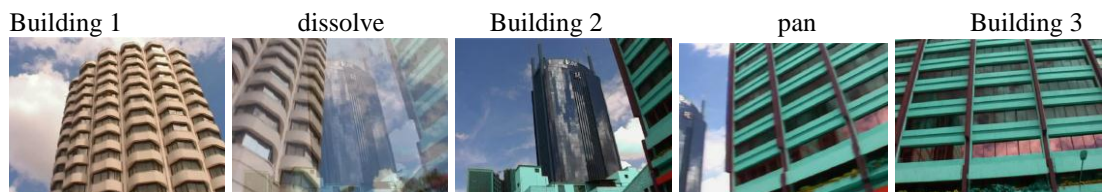
(Left) Pastor Edwin behaves in a way that suggests ill intention and (right) Richard indicates how aggrieved he feels after discovering that his daughter is pregnant



**Fig 3.16: Externalization in *Kikulacho***

But *Kikulacho*'s methodical manner is best exemplified in its use of conventional techniques such as shot/reverse and establishing shots without making more spatial meaning than just to tell us 'this is where we are and this is what is going on'. For example, the series of long shots of buildings and other objects that depict the Nairobi cityscape at the start of the second part of the film (scene 7) are all at a low angle that establishes little spatial relationship, neither between them nor with the significant action that follows (*picture plate 10*). A classical establishing shot would use an aerial angle that zooms in from extremely long shot in a manner analogous to literary description passages, and zero in on the significant action in a manner analogous to literary dialogue passages. However, given the illustrational functioning of the sequence in *Kikulacho*, the viewer gets a good, though approximate, picture of the location of action the same way he does from the transitional shots of a mansion (*fig 3.5*).

A comparison with *Toto Millionaire*'s treatment of similar images, indeed starting with the very same building and using the same low angle shots in an establishing-cum-transitional sequence (scene 8), shows what difference conscious narration rather than illustration can make. Here, the shot on the first skyscraper dissolves into the next before a pan takes us to the building in which the significant action is taking place.



**Fig 3.17: Transitional-cum-establishing shots in *Toto Millionaire***

In *Kikulacho*, methodical narration is also evident in dialogue scenes where characters are observed from three vantage positions in space: together, from character A's position and from character B's position. This is the classical shot/reverse-shot convention, but in *Kikulacho* it gives little of the characters' psycho-emotional relationship by avoiding a direct point-of-view or a close-up reaction shot of any character. This way, it serves only a spatial function. But in a few instances in *Kikulacho* (that reiterate this film's inconsistencies as earlier noted in its treatment of time and space), the narrating agent acts out of its methodical character and develops a fleeting subjectivity mostly through editing. An example occurs at the end of scene 5*d* and beginning of 6 (*fig 3.18*).

John's receding back is followed by a zoom-in on bottle-tops in the dust, a crossfade to crystal balls bearing a title and a cut to John and Gloria days later



*Fig 3.18: Narration in Kikulacho*

Here, we watch the receding back of Edwin then John's. But we stay behind and the camera zooms in on the bottle-tops the two have just discarded on the ground. We then crossfade and enter the next shot looking at crystal balls of a chandelier imitation that shortly gives way to the characters in the new scene (Gloria, John and Mercy). The narrative conception and artistic intent of this sequence is quintessential classical style especially in the way the image of bottle-tops in the dust transmutes to 'chandelier' crystal balls minutes after one of them (bottle-tops) wins Edwin a million in prize money. It portends a metamorphosis from dust to gems; from poverty to wealth. But this narrative import is watered down somewhat by the

sequence's frivolous execution. Firstly, the camera seems to follow John's receding back for a slight moment then 'changes its mind' and 'noses about' over the trash in search of the bottle-tops. A classical camera would remain dead still 'watching' the receding figure of John before smoothly tilting down to contemplatively 'look at' the bottle-tops. Secondly, the 'crystal chandelier's' location in space relative to the characters is not established as a cut (instead of, say, a zoom out) links this shot with the next (that of Gloria and John). This makes it feel like the crystal balls are there to serve a non-diegetic function, as a nice backdrop to the transition title 'August 2005', rather than a narrational role. Although its symbolism is apt, we are left to wonder whether the 'chandelier' is indeed in the same room as the characters.

In comparison, the identity of *Njohera's* narrating agent is lifeless, if unintended technical hitches that draw attention to the camera apparatus (handheld shaky recording, manual light and colour adjustment and other evidences of the cameraman and postproduction picture correction) are ignored. Action in this story is viewed from a single camera position in a theatrical style. This creates a disinterested passive narration. Where the camera 'fetches' other images to enrich the main action image, it does so with a servile – or what Barthes as quoted by Thompson (in Rosen, 198: 131) might call obtuse – manner as exemplified in *fig 3.3*. In another instance, when Wa Gacuma and Gacuma are through listening to Wandahuhu's voice-over reading his own letter in scene 3, we rise from an eye level position to approach mother and son from a slightly over-the-head angle, then stoop to a low angle, before clumsily rising again to circle behind their backs in a maneuver that attracts attention to the camera movement more than to anything else (*fig 3.19*). The intention of this camera movement is, understandably, to mimic the

mobile frame of a classical tracking shot. But in the absence of a well thought out succession of camera positions, and perhaps the equipment to facilitate its smooth execution, this sequence ends up being little more than a wishful approximation of camera mobility:



Camera movements in *Njohera* start with eye level, through high and low angle (above) to end with a semi-circular movement round the backs of the characters (below)

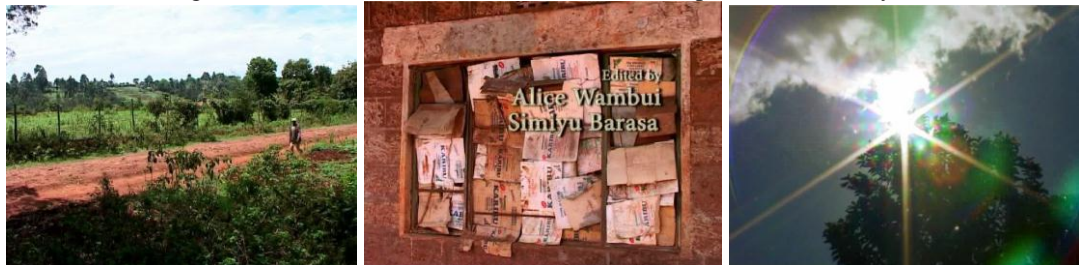
**Fig 3.19: Narration in *Njohera***

While the frivolity of the camera in *Kikulacho* may be said to match the frivolity of its main character (Edwin) and the narrative as a whole, the servility of *Njohera*'s camera is not defensible in the same way. It only shows that narration was not considered much of a factor in the conception of this narrative, its end being only to illustrate a moral lesson using recorded images and sounds. But as Andrew (1984: 14) puts it, "the sheer recording of an event... fails to attain the level of *cinema*..." because the implication of "the twin experience spectators are given in every film: that of recognizing something they can identify and that of constructing something worth identifying." Generally though, these two Kenyan films tend to favour recognition at the expense, or to the exclusion, of construction.

A more 'constructivist' identity of the narrating agent is crafted in *Toto Millionaire*. The camera in this film manifests awareness of exactly what it wants to tell by

positioning itself strategically and showing us as much significant detail as possible. For instance, it sets the narrative's tone right from the first expository shot of a lone figure against an open field in deep focus (first picture of *fig 3.20*). This not only establishes the rural setting, it foreshadows Toto's vulnerability in a wide unfathomable world later in the story. The camera then takes us to another significant image: a window boarded up with old carton papers in place of glass panes (second picture of *fig 3.20*). This signifies the poverty, perpetual state of want and sense of a world off kilter that pervades the film throughout. The very last shot of the film recaps this sense of gloom and stasis as the camera leaves the earthly characters and tilts upwards as if in appeal to the celestial (third picture of *fig 3.20*). These images lead one to infer that unlike in *Kikulacho*, the bottle-tops in *Toto Millionaire* are not likely to metamorphose into crystal chandeliers, in spite of the sentimental title on the latter's final frame (*fig 4.5*).

The first two images and the last of *Toto Millionaire* that set the pathos of the story



*Fig 3.20: Narration in Toto Millionaire*

A good example of strategic camera (hence viewer) positioning in this narrative has already been noted in the flagrantly low-angled front and rear shots of Toto running (*fig.3.9*) to exaggerate his flight through space as indicative of a race against time, both in his quest for a solution to the emergency at home and in his desire to get to Mamba bottlers before his enemies catch up with him. The reverse take of these shots can found in scene 6 when Toto escapes from the preacher's house. This high

angle shot from a stationary camera draws out our sympathy by creating a sad picture of a diminutive Toto against a big, hostile and impersonal world in a way as to say, ‘there he goes again’ (*fig 3.24*).

Toto’s flight from the preacher’s house from a high angle



*Fig 3.21: The running motif in Toto Millionaire*

The inquisitive character of the narrator in this film has already been established in the analysis of causality. The parenthetical events mentioned are bracketed by a ‘sneaky’ camera that keeps ‘peeking’ at events that are somewhat contingent, though not pertinent to the story. This ‘nosiness’ of the narrating agent explores space better in this film than in the other two. For instance, it takes us through narrow alleyways through which sneaky thieves like Barry G disappear after robbing naïve strangers like Mama Toto (first picture of *fig 3.22* overleaf). It also reveals details that could otherwise be overlooked unless borne on dialogue or monologue. An example is the discovery by Toto of the winning bottle-top at Supa’s house and his treacherous hiding of it in his hip pocket (second and third pictures of *fig 3.22*). This could paint Toto as dishonest, but given the way the narrator presents it, coupled with our knowledge of the gravity of his situation, a little dishonesty is a small price to pay; and so we accept to tacitly collude with the narrator to let Toto keep the bottle-top.

(Left) Barry G disappears down an alley with Mama Toto's basket, (centre) the winning bottle-top in Toto's hands and (right) Toto hides the bottle-top in his pocket.



*Fig 3.22: Prying camera in Toto Millionaire*

However, this prying ‘personality’ of *Toto Millionaire’s* narrator is exaggerated in certain scenes. The most obvious is at the award ceremony in scene 8 when Philip announces Toto the winner of three million shillings. The narrator positions us behind a diegetic television crew recording the event, over whose shoulders we view the action through the feedback screen of the crew’s cameraman. Its narrative and artistic intent would serve as an exemplary instance of the way a film narrative can circumvent classical conventions in a way that is fresh and enriching. For instance, it creates a diegetic distancing that allows Philip to look straight into our camera with the illusion created being that this is mediated by the diegetic camera, hence acceptable. But the length of time this scene is allowed to run (including the diegetic post-recording comments by Philip) is meant to ‘rub in’ this ingenuity, greatly diluting its effect by calling attention to itself (*fig 3.28*). A classical rendition of such an instance would show a brief part of the live recording event and, using a match-on-action cut, take the viewer to the television footage reporting the event in the pub and at the preacher’s house.

*Toto Millionaire* also uses the conventional shot/reverse-shot, POV and close-up shots to capture more than just spatial dynamics. Unlike *Kikulacho* and *Njohera*, characters are shown in these types of shots even where they are not the ones

speaking. This reveals characters reactions and emotions. For instance, Philips contempt for the taxi driver is captured in a reaction shot while a point-of-view shot accurately captures the latter's brutality earlier when he attacks Toto (*fig 3.23*). Toto's own state of wretchedness, suffering and vulnerability is indelibly captured in medium close-up shots (*picture plate 13*).



*Fig 3.23: Some types of shots in Toto Millionaire*

### 3.4.2 Sound

Sound in filmic narration can be analyzed at two major levels: diegetic and non-diegetic. Diegetic sounds are those that are deemed to emanate from the storyworld, such as those that are made by the characters or that are environmental. Non-diegetic sounds are those that are inserted into the plot and that are obviously not part of the storyworld, such as voice-overs and mood music. In the three films both these types of sound exist. Their nature and design may vary, but their functions remain comparable.

*Njohera* has a simple design of the sound track that is characteristic of the film's essentially simple construction. There is only one non-diegetic 'theme' song: *Be Magnified* (Don Moen), which announces the central theme of the story right from

the opening titles accompanied by introductory diegetic clips of the characters inset against a non-diegetic still background. The words of the song makes it obvious why it is chosen:

I have made you too small in my eyes, oh Lord **forgive me**  
 And I have believed in a lie, that you were unable to help me  
 But now oh Lord I see my wrong  
 You're my heart and show yourself strong  
 And in my eyes and with my song  
 Oh Lord be magnified, oh Lord be magnified

The film's title '*Njohera*' means 'forgive me' in *Gikuyu*, captured in the first line of the song, and the same words that Wandahuhu utters upon his return home at the final scene of the film. Besides its touching message, the song's instrumental track paints a poignant tone that recurs at every transition as a premonition of the sentiments on which the story concludes. The film ends with the same verse of the song against the same non-diegetic background as if to appeal to something, someone, beyond the diegesis of the story, which reiterates the religious anchorage at the core of the film. Although the overall character of the soundtrack in this respect is rather static, its illustrational function in the narrative is apt and complete.

The only other instance of non-diegetic sound in this film is that of Wandahuhu's voice over reading his letter in scene 3. While the idea of it is conventional in classical film mode of narration, its execution violates narrative integrity the same way other elements have been shown to do. First, it is Gacuma who is asked by his mother to read the letter. Second, Wandahuhu's voice does not flow the way words of a letter would; at some point he repeats words or rephrases a sentence in a live speech manner. Thirdly, and most jarring, the two characters in the diegesis behave towards the paper the way one would to a person in live conversation, including waving goodbye at the end (*fig 3.24*). If this is intended as a personification

technique, a better manner of executing it would be to superimpose a clip of Wandahuhu's image on the paper. This is one instance that demonstrates the distancing effect of illustrational storytelling.

Some of Wa Gacuma's and Gacuma's reactions to Wandahuhu's voice-over reading a letter



**Fig 3.24: Excess in narration of *Njohera***

There are several instances of diegetic singing in *Njohera*'s plot. When Wandahuhu leaves home for work in the city at the end of scene 1, Wa Gacuma escorts him as they sing happily together Agikuyu song whose words translate to 'travel with Jesus, He is the rock'. This reaffirms their faith and signifies hope. This is in sharp contrast with a song she sings him in the last scene upon his return. Its central line translates into the question: 'what did you find that caused you to backslide?' It both bemoans and reprimands his slip in faith. However, it also serves a non-diegetic end; that of publicizing Beatrice Wangui (Wa Gacuma in the film) and her music album that features the song, as captured in the last frame of the film (*fig 3.25* overleaf).

Other diegetic sounds are environmental. They include birds chirping, a cock crowing, a cow's moo, a radio and other noises that serve spatial and contextual functions. Unfortunately, due to the narrative's inattention to detail as already established, some of these sounds also invade the diegesis. Examples include where an unintended grating sound causes Wa Gacuma to cringe, and the sound of a cup's contact with Wandahuhu's teeth, which betrays it to be empty while purporting to be at least half full of porridge (*fig 3.26*).

Wa Gacuma sings to Wandahuhu a song that is advertised in a title on the last frame of the film



**Fig 3.25: Diegetic and non-diegetic use of song in *Njohera***

(Left) Wa Gacuma cringes at unintended diegetic sound and (right) Wandahuhu's empty cup is given away by the sound of its contact with his teeth



**Fig 3.26: Diegetic violation of sound in *Njohera***

*Kikulacho*'s sound scheme is comparable to that of *Njohera* with the only difference being – as is the difference in amount of narrative material – scale. Non-diegetically, where *Njohera* utilizes only one recorded song with precision, *Kikulacho* uses numerous recordings mostly for mood and to fill up the textural spaces of the audio spectrum especially in transitions and wherever else that dialogue is muted. Like *Njohera*, western music, mainly of a hip-hop, rhythm and blues and love ballad character is chosen. It includes songs by Blackstreet, Snoop Doggy Dog, Peabo Bryson, Maria Carey, Michael Learns to Rock, and such. These are used judiciously

for an unobtrusive effect. Hip-hop is associated with youthful characters, while R&B and ballads go with romantic scenes, with occasional muting of the diegetic ambience to let the words of a song carry the narrative. Such words as ‘I’d give anything to fall in love’ and ‘Love me please, just a little bit longer’ accompany images of Pastor Edwin’s escapades with several women (scene 9) and Richard’s outing with Mercy (scene 14*b*) respectively. But unlike in *Njohera* where the words of the song reflect the core meaning of the story with precision, the words here do not reveal the duplicitous nature of these two affairs. They just set a general tone to illustrate the mood of romance.

In other instances, *Kikulacho* uses instrumental music whose sound punctuates and intensifies the emotional atmosphere and its fluctuation in a scene. For instance, as Richard and Sue are putting together the final details of their trap in the last scene of the film, a foreboding instrumental piece gathers momentum in the background. Its volume is highest as Pastor Edwin enters Room 103 and has sex with his daughter. Then follows an ominous, discordant tune played in the lower registers of bass and piano accompanied by thunderous sounds. It runs relentlessly to the end with a finality that paints an atmosphere of doom as final credits roll up. In the absence of action showing the consequence of this final event, this sound is all we have to work with in speculating what becomes of the characters. Needless to mention, it does not bode well.

Diegetic music is also present in *Kikulacho*. Pastor Edwin sings during his sermons in the streets, and with his congregation in church and outdoor services. This happens as a matter of course within the context of worship. Like in *Njohera*, other diegetic sounds are environmental: the television, cars honking, the clamour and din

of life. There is little violation of the diegesis apart from a few instances where the sound track inexplicably disappears and silence pervades the atmosphere, which can be blamed on post-production glitches more than on narrative intent.

The choice of western recorded popular music (sang in English) in the two films whose medium is largely African (Kikuyu and Kiswahili) may be said to be indicative of Kenya's socio-cultural environment. Nevertheless, it reinforces the 'illusions of grandeur' noted under causality, especially given that there exists an inexhaustible body of similar music done by Kenyan musicians. It is important to note with regard to music what Shaka (1994) has to say concerning its place in the popular appeal of the 'New Nigerian Cinema': "... the commercial success of African films, among African spectators, apart from other narrative contingencies, is the adoption of traditional African performance elements such as song, music, dance, etc, not just as narrative embellishments, but as elements within the narrative structure." Though both films may be said to have attempted to incorporate elements of Kenya's contemporary oral culture through performance of religious songs, it is not in as significant a manner as to consider them part of the narrative structure.

As in its use of camera, *Toto Millionaire* presents a more deliberate design of the sound track. Little, if any, pre-recorded music is used in preference for simple tunes, rhythms and sound bites that unobtrusively serve the story non-diegetically at four major levels: mood, character/action identification, transition and general commentary. The film starts and ends with plaintive yet playful sounds of an instrumental ensemble that includes African percussive rhythms, the most prominent of which is a xylophonic rhythmic pattern that is mostly associated with Toto's running action (*appendix 3.1*).

But the dominant mood of the story is established in the first scene. As Toto talks to his mother, we hear a melancholic tune that recurs throughout in the background of the film's action and dialogue. It is a simple intermittent melody in minor tonality that is accompanied by similarly intermittent arpeggiated piano sound bites and an occasional bass that often carries the melody (*appendix 3.2*). Together with the xylophonic rhythm, which fluctuates according to the tempo of action, this melody is the aural narrating agent that sets the static, bleak yet light tone of the film. It also marks most of the transitions where it is sometimes joined by flowing strings for a fuller aural texture. Notably too, it marks Toto's discovery of the prize bottle-top with a rise in volume that foreshadows the suffering Toto would go through as a result of his discovery. Another set of 'ostinato' sounds appears twice to imitate Toto's frenetic action of changing clothes in scene 8, to communicate his impatience and the urgency of the moment.

But what may be considered the theme tune of the film, due to its memorability and prominence in length and volume, is a groovy *genge*-type piece that recurs especially during considerable spells of action without dialogue (*appendix 3.3*). It is associated mainly with Toto's two car rides: with the stranger who unknowingly transports him to the city, and with the taxi driver who assaults him. Its upbeat character creates a sense of hope and promise that goes well with the journey segments. Its function in this manner is however negated where it accompanies Supa and Barry G's search for Toto's home in the village towards the end of the film. This way, it ends up serving more as a substitute for dialogue.

Other non-diegetic musical sounds in this film include a reggae rhythm that accompanies the prostitute's action of smoking marijuana. It appeals to our

stereotyped social schema that associates reggae music with this drug. But whether by intent or mere coincidence, a soft sustained crash of a cymbal in the sound track is heard at the same time as the prostitute inhales a lungful of bhang smoke with an expression of ecstasy on her face in a fleeting powerful moment that fuses the diegetic with the non-diegetic (*fig 3.27*).

Ecstatic sound and action of this prostitute coincides with the crash of cymbals in the sound track



**Fig 3.27: Synchronization of non-diegetic and diegetic sound and image in *Toto Millionaire***

Diegetic sound in *Toto Millionaire* also functions at both the literal environmental level as well as symbolic level. Apart from such sounds as of cars driving past, constructors hammering or grinding at something, people coughing, the radio and others that give the narrative ambience and spatial depth, some sounds have been deliberately selected to comment on significant aspects of the narrative. An example is the sound of bottle-tops, when a barman throws them at Toto, when Toto himself is playing with them or when Barry G is playing draughts with Supa or somebody else (*picture plate 11*). The image and sound of them is a constant pointer to ultimate part that a bottle-top plays in the narrative outcome of the film. They become narratively unifying by creating a motif that raises their stature above the other objects, with the same effect that wistful piano chords draw our attention to the poster announcing the raffle competition in scene 2. Another interesting treatment of diegetic sound in this film occurs in scene 6 where pieces of the preacher's words 'The Bible says repent now, the time is near' are repeated over and over with a

‘staccato’ effect that makes the line ring unreal. Besides being consistent with the preacher’s delusional state of mind, it lampoons profit-driven religiosity.

As evident in choices made especially in *Kikulacho* and *Njohera*, the audio track design of Kenyan fiction video films is largely perfunctory. This happens to be largely the case even with the classical film tradition of which Stam (2000: 222), with regard to music, notes that “the leitmotif became a rather mechanical device for allying particular themes to particular characters, themes which were returned to with minimal variation during the course of the film” and “tended to be redundant, subliminal, hackneyed, and comfortably tonal.” This implies that not much creativity or freshness generally goes into the design of a film’s ‘soundscape’. But Stam goes further to point out that “since music is closely tied to communitarian culture and “structure of feeling,” it can tell us where a film’s emotional heart is.” *Toto Millionaire* and *Njohera* seem a little conscious of this ‘soul-locating’ function of music in filmic narration.

### 3.4.3 Rhythm and Editing

Rhythm refers to the flow or patterning of events in the plot, especially with regard to tempo and its fluctuation. This is mostly determined by editing, which in turn is determined by the length of shots and the kind of action they bear. The three films under study may be said to fall under the melodrama genre in a broad sort of way. The heterosexual romance in *Kikulacho*, the family drama of *Njohera* and the sentimentality of *Toto Millionaire* are all hallmarks of this genre, oftenly marked by a sedate pace. We may therefore characterize the tempo of the three stories as such. While on average *Kikulacho*’s pace may be said to be quicker than *Njohera*’s, with *Toto Millionaire*’s falling somewhere in between, they all fall within the same range.

The classical continuity style of editing is largely unviolated in the three films. Instances that could be deemed a violation, such as in scene 2 of *Toto Millionaire* where Toto is seen heading screen-right in one shot then screen-left in the next, can be explained away by the context (city streets can lead you one way then another) or circumstances (Toto is new in the city and trying to find his way about). Most shot-to-shot transitions are ordinary cuts that link complete units of action and dialogue. This means that shot length is determined to a large extent by the action or dialogue it contains. For this reason, the fairly long single take dialogue scenes of *Njohera* gives it a comparatively slow pace that is well suited not only to its simple narration style, but also the rural “sense of time and rhythm of life” (Shaka, 1994: 20). *Kikulacho*’s shots are fairly short, while *Toto Millionaire*’s prying and reflective narration makes the camera linger on a shot a while longer. But it is in this last film that more sophisticated editing techniques are used. For instance, the match-on-action cut is utilized to take the viewer from a general view of things to details. An example of this occurs in scene 4 when Toto discovers the winning bottle-top. We see him pick it up in a medium shot before zeroing in on it in his hand and then on his hip region in close-up as he stuffs it away into his pocket (see the last two pictures of *fig 3.22*).

Scene transitions in the three films are also kept simple with fades, crossfades and simple cuts being the most common. *Njohera* especially avoids stylized transitions apart from an instance where a spin is used in a narratively significant way (*fig 3.28*). In this poignant transition, Wandahuhu’s downturn in life is contrasted with Gacuma’s upturn in a way that casts the former’s mistakes into sharp relief. A

comparably stylized transition used in *Kikulacho* can hardly be said to serve any such purpose apart from just marking temporal and spatial changeover.

Wandahuhu's suffering on one scene (left) spins into Gacuma's grand property plans in the next (right) in *Njohera*



A stylized transition indicates passage of time (left) and space (right) in *Kikulacho*



**Fig 3.28: Stylized editing in *Njohera* and *Kikulacho***

As mentioned earlier, *Kikulacho*'s use of transitional objects, crosscutting, intercuts and montage sequences also add to the vitality of its rhythm. So too does the use of sound bridge in several scenes where, for instance, the voice of a character is heard slightly ahead of his entry into a scene so that for a while the visual is out of sync with the aural in a way that does not compromise the narration, but in fact adds to its elegance. *Toto Millionaire* seems to avoid any such overt transitions in favour of the conventional cut and fade. However, its rhythm is adversely affected by its entry of several scenes too early and exit of them too late, in a technique that Branigan in

Shaka (1994: 98) would call ‘unmotivated camera’. The most grating of this is the one at the live recording of the award ceremony mentioned earlier. The scene is allowed to run to ridiculous excesses where we see the post-recording goings on as Philip looks at the diegetic television crew and grinning awkwardly says:

I... I think I've... I have finished. (awkward pause). You have... you have taken enough pictures, now we are good. (faltering)  
Was it ok – the sound maybe? I don't know what people think.  
Was I being heard clearly? Eeh? (pause). I... we are now on air,  
isn't it? (cameraman nods). Yah! (laughs).

Philip addressing the diegetic television crew with Toto seemingly switched off after the live recording of his award event.



**Fig 3.29:** Late scene exit in *Toto Millionaire*

If this incident was intended for comic effect, it not only falls flat, it also succeeds in unnecessarily disrupting the rhythm and pushing many a viewer right out of the storyworld in the way it stands out more as an editing error. Even the mediation of the diegetic camera is missing as evident in the figure above. The film also abounds with early scene entries, frequently marked by perfunctory phone calls, characters whistling or time-filling dialogue that includes gibberish. For instance, when the taxi driver, and later Toto, come to Mamba bottlers to claim their prize, we arrive at the office several moments before the significant action, ‘compelling’ Philip and his secretary (Rebecca) to ‘entertain’ us with time-filling pretexts of romance that are

not only unconvincing and mechanical, but of no narrative consequence (*picture plate 12*). They end up being feeble and incomplete illustrations of workplace romance as their words attest in the following exchange that takes place before Toto's arrival.

Seated at her desk, Rebecca picks up a phone receiver as Philip approaches her from behind.

Philip: *Sasa* Rebecca  
 Rebecca: (to the phone, simultaneously) Yes, hallo!  
 Philip: Rebecca  
 Rebecca: (still to the phone, simultaneously) Umm... ok. (continues talking on phone as  
 Philip leans on the back of her seat) I'll... ok. Hey, just a moment (puts down the phone)  
 Philip: (straightening up and holding his hip self-consciously) Now, why didn't you hug  
 me this morning?  
 Rebecca: (self-consciously) Oh, hallo! Hey Philip, you are really looking good in that shirt,  
 eh?  
 Philip: Do you know I bought it on my trip to Germany.  
 Rebecca: Are you sure?  
 Philip: Yeah – designer. (bending to show her the design label on the inside of the shirt  
 collar) Van Basten.  
 Rebecca: *Wewe!* Now that's why I say you are my man.  
 Philip: (overlapping) But why didn't you hug me?  
 Rebecca: (ill at ease) *Ai*, but why should I hug you? That's... that's... *ai*, surely  
 Philip: I thought it was because of yesterday. Anyway, I am expecting somebody,  
 Rebecca: Aha  
 Philip: Tell them I am not around, and... (gesturing towards his office shyly) you know...  
 Rebecca: (overlapping) Ok, *sawa*  
 Philip: ...*si* you said you are coming over now.  
 Rebecca: I'll come over.  
*Philip heads back to his office as Toto enters the frame.*

#### 3.4.4 Style

Consequent to the disparities so far observed, style in the three films is as diverse as their narration is. While *Njohera* has a documentary quality about it, *Toto Millionaire* exhibits some art film element and *Kikulacho* is essentially melodrama. *Njohera*'s documentary style comes out in its use of long outdoor shots using natural lighting that renders much of its other narrative elements natural. Little about it comes out as premeditated or stylized. The characters, their physical and psychological appearance, their actions and dialogue, the setting, the soundtrack and editing are kept as basic as possible. This sets a matter-of-fact tone about its whole

rendition which suits its bucolic character in such a way as to tell us that ‘this is how the Kenyan rural folk look, talk, behave and live’. Although it has several instances of unconvincing action, its use of a medium that the actors are comfortable with (Gikuyu) somehow frees them to embody their character more comfortably and interact with ease.

*Toto Millionaire* on the other hand tends to go out of its way to deliberately design its content. From the scripted dialogue, through the trash-and-cans suburban setting and designed soundtrack to the hues that give its visuals a ‘burning’ effect (symbolic of the severity of the characters’ life conditions), this film speaks of deliberate selection of elements. It sets a sentimental melancholic tone with some light touch here and there to present both the tragedy and folly of static existentialism. Despite, and perhaps because, of its deliberate construction, this film has an artificial aura that makes it deliver less than it promises. Its dialogue is erratic (at some points studio pasted and unsynchronized with the image), its mise-en-scène, while well selected, is poorly staged (the village market is markedly deserted as is the Mamba Bottler’s premises for such a ‘rich’ company), some actions are knee-jerk and it raises a host of issues that are not satisfactorily treated.

*Kikulacho*’s melodramatic style emanates from its content and rendition which is romantic in both senses of the word. The tragedy of frivolous life and vanity is presented with affected sophistication characterized by movement and activity that is essentially cyclic. The succession of ineffectual action and dialogue in exotic-looking settings by a string of loosely related characters all presented in a convoluted narrative strategy is symptomatic of the loss of purpose in today’s

Kenyan urban society and its preoccupation with the wishful and mundane as much as it constitutes a narrative approach that is pretentious and carefree.

On the whole, however, these films share elements of the different styles. Being family dramas for instance gives them all a quality of the melodrama, which Haynes (2006: 522) considers “the queen of the video genres”. Their visual style also contains a lot of documentary qualities. For instance, they are shot on location to the most part using natural light. In addition *Toto Millionaire* incorporates many unstaged events, such as the views of the streets of suburban Nairobi with its characteristic hustle and bustle of people who are part of the scenery but not part of narrative action. Even *Kikulacho* seems to document Edwin’s debauchery using an iterative documentary approach that Bordwell (2001) calls categorical in which “progression from segment to segment depends too much on repetition (“and here is another example...”)” (Bordwell: 115). Bordwell goes further to state that the simple development of this form “risks boring the spectator” as “our expectations will be easily satisfied.”

But perhaps the most outstanding quality about the three films’ style is their theatricality. The ‘zangalewa’ iconography of *Njohera*, the improvised dialogue of both *Njohera* and *Kikulacho* and the mechanical dialogue and action in *Toto Millionaire*, the stagey ‘loud’ projection (externalization) of action and feelings in the three films and their general viewer positioning all bespeak of what Abiodun Olayiwola (2011: 189) describes as transference of theatre into the video genre “without first understanding the requirements of the new form.” Although Dovey (in Khatib, 2012) may find this to be reflective of a strong relationship between

performance and storytelling in Africa generally, this study exhorts African filmmakers to adopt aesthetics that can have a wider global appeal.

### 3.5 Conclusion

This chapter has traversed with a broad stroke the essential elements that are central to classical film narrative; namely, causality, time and space, characterization, narration (visual and aural) and style. It has clearly demonstrated that in manipulating these elements vis a vis classical film narrative conventions, Kenyan filmmakers exhibit skills that range from rudimentary to occasional flashes of brilliance with the common pattern lying somewhere between the two extremes. Unfortunately, the world of global cinema favours brilliance and precision. Anything more or less is considered excess. It is no wonder then that Gabriel in Shaka (1994: 19) has the audacity to state that “what is considered cinematic excess in western cinematic practice, is therefore, precisely, where Third World cinema is located.” That may have once been politically and ideologically expedient, but not any more in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, this researcher believes. Excess needs to be cut down rather than encouraged in African filmic storytelling. On the question of balance between visual image (spectacle) and dialogue in narration for instance, it has been noted that the Kenyan films, especially *Njohera* and *Kikulacho* rely more on dialogue in a narrative medium that is essentially visual. Comey (2002) puts it bluntly that “in film, when dialogue explains the story or the situation or feelings, it comes across as fake and boring” (Comey: 15). Comey represents the world viewership that this study is exhorting Kenyan filmmakers to aspire for. If they are to reach it, a lot needs to be down to cut down not only on this over-reliance on dialogue, but also on what Comey calls mechanical indication or projection of

sentiments rather than genuine emotional expression that emanates from characters' interaction with each other and their situation. That said, however, there remains the question about what purpose the video film serves within Kenya's unique socio-cultural situation. It has emerged clearly in this analysis that Kenyan filmmakers, driven perhaps by socio-cultural demands placed upon them by its audience and society as a whole, make their narrative choices based more on illustrational than narrational considerations. The next chapter delves deeper into this aspect of the Kenyan film narrative form to try to reveal whether it serves its overall purpose better than what the classical alternative offers.

**4.0****CHAPTER FOUR****MEANING AND THEME IN THE KENYAN VIDEO FILM NARRATIVES**

In the previous chapter, this study has exposed the prevalent narrative and technical practices pertaining to what Andrew (1976) would call cinematic ‘means and matter’ of the selected Kenyan video fiction films. This chapter goes ahead to interrogate the purpose to which the said means and matter are intended and the level at which it is achieved. Narratives in all their generic manifestations are primarily charged with communication of themes and meanings in the form of information and ideas. This is the thematic and semantic significance of representation. In constructivist theory, Bordwell (2001) offers four levels at which meaning in film narratives may be analyzed: referential, explicit, implicit and symptomatic. Referential and explicit are lower levels (surface) of meaning, the former being descriptive and the latter summative of story events. Implicit and symptomatic meanings are higher levels (deep); the former being subtextual and thematic, and the latter symbolic interpretation of a narrative.

In chapters two and three, this study has largely dealt with referential and explicit levels of meanings in the three films. It has even touched a bit on implicit meanings in attempting to interpret the narrative significance of the various techniques operating within various elements. This chapter elaborates more on this implicit level through thematic analysis of the three films, and attempts to deduce the symptomatic interpretation of the themes within the broad socio-cultural discourses that inform various theoretical and ideological standpoints in the world of Kenyan cinema. It also examines how the films communicate meaning generally in relation

to their structural choices and the four Bordwellian levels. Finally, given that meaning is culturally nuanced, and in light of the prevalence of ‘illustrationistic’ manner of storytelling exposed in the preceding analyses, this chapter attempts a constructivist interrogation of whether it could be the case, then, that Kenya as a distinct cultural entity is served best by this less meticulous ‘illustrationism’ in filmic storytelling.

#### **4.1 Thematic Concerns**

The old adage that art mirrors society holds especially true in film, which many a realist considers a ‘slice of reality’ Olagoke Alamu (2010: 166-167) has this to say about the place of the video film and filmmakers in Nigerian society:

To the filmmakers, therefore, Nigeria itself is a narrative entity ... Nigerian films are stabilizing forces that contribute to the maintenance of social order. They reinforce the collective mentality of Nigerian society, educating large audiences along certain established lines: developing collective memories of the past, maintaining a distance from the threatening present, and projecting life in the future... The didactic elements in Nigerian films are somewhat similar to the moral and cultural ideology of the Nigerian people... urbanization and industrialization have created an excessively volatile and unstable Nigerian society... they must use their films to rescue contemporary Nigerian society from the erosion of its value systems caused by decadence...

Similar claims can be made of Kenyan video films in general and the three under study in particular. To start with, *Njohera*, *Toto Millionaire* and *Kikulacho* are stories about life in Kenya, a society that has a lot in common with Nigeria in socio-cultural and economic terms. On the whole, therefore, these texts may be said to deal with more or else the same issues: family, loyalty, responsibility, poverty, religion, betrayal, immorality and such. In other words, they offer their audience

what Okuyade (2011: 2) would call a “visual topography of localized dramas of everyday life.” Although Okuyade considers video films to be generally ideologically bankrupt, this researcher believes that the subtextual nuances in perspective that each text gives to these themes reveals some degree of ideological orientation, if not of the filmmaker, then of the social context that informs his choices. As such, where *Toto Millionaire* takes an existentialist worldview with a tinge of satire, *Njohera* can be said to be socialist with a tinge of religious fatalism, and *Kikulacho* postmodernist with a tinge of psychoanalysis.

#### 4.1.1 Family

The theme that best explains the narrative structural choices made by the different filmmakers dealt with in this study is that of family. *Njohera* begins by stating the social order, division of roles, and values of the family. It presents the traditional nuclear family, in this case man, wife and son, each with a distinctive place in this most basic of social units. The man has to work to keep it going, the wife has to tend to it and take care of the homestead to keep it together, and the son has to chip in by running errands and contributing whatever he can the way Gacuma does when he throws in some money for his father’s journey. This social norm and order is disrupted by Wandahuhu’s betrayal when he forsakes his legitimate family to live with a younger woman. As a strayed individual, Wandahuhu has to be punished. He falls sick and ends up destitute in what Wa Gacuma calls ‘mbara ya Ngai’ (Gods battle) to imply that God is on the side of, and will fight for, the collective. Wandahuhu’s suffering becomes a cleansing that reconciles him to the social order when he submits to it. This way, the story reaffirms social values by becoming a lesson of how stepping out of the social order can lead to an individual’s downfall.

The manner in which this film treats this theme is commensurate with the three-act narrative structure the filmmaker chooses. The social order that this theme seeks to establish corresponds to the state of events at the beginning of the narrative, which is restored at the end. These are the states of equilibrium of act one and act three respectively. The family betrayal that comes in between is the disruption of equilibrium that is articulated in act two of the narrative. This development of the theme plays out at all the four levels of meaning that Bordwell prescribes. The actual experiences that both the hero and his family undergo are at the referential and explicit level of meaning while their thematic and ideological interpretations discussed here are their implicit and symptomatic significance.

*Kikulacho* on the other hand paints a picture of individualistic self indulgence at the expense of the family. Once again, the transgressor is the man in a nuclear family. Unlike in *Njohera*, the man here does not marry another woman. Rather, he treats women as objects for his sexual gratification in a postmodern consumerist context where family and social ties are loose and expendable. As a result, the family unit becomes dysfunctional with delinquent children who take after the irresponsible parent. In fact, the film ceases to show the family unit at the half point of the plot and instead follows the lives of individuals in their narcissistic pursuits. Punishment meted on Edwin at the end of the story is less to reconcile him to any social order than to gratify the hurt egos of other individuals (Richard and Sue) in a way that does not amount to a negation or denunciation of his duplicity/immorality. Although we may not consider the central character's point of view as necessarily concurring with that of the narrative, or indeed the filmmaker's (Shaka: 77), *Kikulacho* succeeds more in valorizing individual satisfaction and marginalizing the family.

Just as noted in the case of *Njohera*, the narrative structure *Kikulacho* takes closely reflects the narrative's treatment of this theme. In its whimsical pursuance of an individual's gratification, this story plays down the interplay of order and disorder and ends up being little more than a sensationalist tale of crime and punishment corresponding to act one and act two. It starts with a state of equilibrium and ends with a state of disequilibrium. Although family and other values of social ideology run beneath its surface meanings as evident in the results of the hero's action, their implicit and symptomatic impact is not as categorical as in the case of *Njohera*. Where the latter story closes with a feeling of "and the family lived 'orderly' ever after", *Kikulacho* closes with a feeling of "and so the family ended up in disorder".

*Toto Millionaire* on its part presents a family at the brink of extinction in the traditional African sense. First, the family we find here is of single-parent and child. This depicts a family reduced almost to the level of individual. Second, its survival is in the hands of a fragile little boy who is not even pubescent. The child hero takes up this responsibility out of an innocent sense of duty driven by a basic instinct for survival rather than a concrete awareness of his role in the family unit. Third, neither the extended family nor the society can be relied upon to save the family. Jimmy, Toto's uncle, would rather buy a newspaper than help Toto's mother, yet when fortune smiles upon mother and son the whole village descends on their homestead like vultures upon a carrion. The violation of values is hereby not by the individual against family, but by society against family and society/family against the individual. That is why Toto and his ilk do not come out guilty for breaking some social rules such as sneaking into a stranger's car and stealing something to eat or stealing Supa's prize bottle-top. It is a case of survival for the luckiest / smartest that

supersedes social order. So, rather than affirm any social or family values, this film only seeks to capture a reality of life in a harsh and impersonal social environment.

Much as this story begins in the middle of disorder in the family, the initial order is implied by the attribution of this disorder to the absence of the hero's father. The viewer, therefore, easily constructs this initial equilibrium at the background of the unfolding events. As in *Njohera*, this state of order tends to be restored when the hero seems to solve the financial problem that underlies the state of disorder. But as in *Kikulacho*, this is a partial resolution that lacks a clear-cut sense of finality. A sense of stasis saturates *Toto Millionaire* narrative at all its levels of meaning such that both the narrative and its treatment of the family as a theme create a feeling of "and so life goes on in a constant cycle of order and disorder".

These structural and ideological differences notwithstanding, the three stories are essentially socio-economic dramas – in Diawara's (1992) social-realist mould. They all portray the current precocity of the family unit in Kenya, and by extension Africa. While the rural communities as depicted in *Njohera* still cling desperately to the old social order, the urban communities are represented in *Kikulacho* as being well on their way to disintegration with such devastating consequences as of a father sleeping with daughter. The net result of this disintegration is the prevalent single parenthood, individualism and bleakness illustrated in *Toto Millionaire*, which is cunningly comparable to what the family in *Njohera* experiences for a while.

#### 4.1.2 Gender

Gender is an aspect of meaning within the broad family theme. There is a marked similarity in the way man, woman and child are represented in the three films. The

man is portrayed not only as the provider, but as the very bastion of the family without whom a family degenerates to the levels we see in *Toto Millionaire*. The man is therefore expected to be actively at work away from home. The woman on the other hand is domicile, staying at home to do little chores of housekeeping, gardening and attending to children's needs. She is passive and entirely dependent on a male figure; if not the husband, then the son.

(From left) Mama Toto (*Toto Millionaire*), Gloria (*Kikulacho*), Wa Gacuma and Nyakirata (*Njohera*) undertaking different domestic chores



**Fig 4.1: Representation of the woman in the three films**

Similarly, the boy child and girl child are differentiated. Two of the stories (*Njohera* and *Toto Millionaire*) are indeed about the coming of age of the boy child, circumscribed by circumstances to take over the father's role. Even in *Kikulacho* (with its central male character, Edwin, seemingly in perpetual adolescence), John seems to come of age in his own way as he takes after his father in drinking and womanizing (*picture plate 2*). The girl on the other hand is treated as a sex object for male pleasure. Whether it be Nyakirata in *Njohera*'s rural setting, the prostitute in *Toto Millionaire*'s suburbia or the countless females Pastor Edwin 'consumes' in *Kikulacho*'s urban society, the girl's survival is at the mercy of the male folk. They are docile and hardly take any initiative to shape their own destiny. Their ultimate sacrificial role is illustrated in Mercy's fate (even the narrative seems to consider them expendable). The balance of power is therefore acutely tipped in favour of the male. Whether this is a true reflection of social reality is a matter of debate. What is

not debatable is that it tends to go against the grain in a world sensitized by the feminist movement to portray the roles of both sexes on equal or at least complimentary terms.

This theme informs several elements and aspects of narrative choices that the three films make in common. As the dominant gender, the male is the main causal agent of events in the story, which, inevitably, takes on his point of view, both narrational and ideological. The female character occupies the receiving end of the film action. Where she takes some form of initiative, it is either ill-motivated (Nyakirata in *Njohera* and Sue in *Kukulacho*), doomed to fail (Mama Toto in *Toto Millionaire*) or self-demeaning (the prostitute in *Toto Millionaire*). Okome (2004: 8) would call this the “phallogentric regime of constructed images of women” that “weakens even the rather weak presence of women’s images” in which “we find the “suffering mother,” the “weak and feeble mind” caught in an incomprehensible whirlpool, the prostitute who lives the precariousness of city life and the house-wife who must suffer for the sake of her children while the man goes philandering in the world.”

This treatment of the gender issue also runs down the four levels of meaning. At the referential level, the higher proportion of action in terms of narrative importance and screen time is devoted to the male character: he is after all the active goal seeker and the narrative has to follow him. At the explicit level, each of these stories can be summed up in terms of the principle male character, that is, the journey he travels, as evident in the summary of the stories’ fabulae given in chapter two. Implicitly, therefore, the films present a masculine worldview that is symptomatic of the prevalent social ideology, especially in Africa, where man still reigns over woman in

almost all spheres of socio-economic and political life. Okuyade (2011: 9-12) makes the same observations on Nigerian video films, about which she says:

Men regard women as commodities that must be used, drained and discarded... These films enunciate the helplessness of women as objects rather than subjects in their own right. This belief is deeply entrenched in society. Given that art mirrors and recreates social, historical and economic realities, it becomes the medium through which negative attitudes and stereotypes of women are perpetuated and created... They are polarised into either the trope of the suffering good wife or that of the cynical modern woman... Sometimes the pains of women are adequately captured in the films only to emphasise their weakness... Women are not discussed in these films in any serious dialectical manner... the female is voiceless. The filmscape reverberates with masculine voices.

But it is not just women who suffer narrative neglect in the Kenyan video films under scrutiny here. They also mask the emerging issue of ‘endangered boy-child.’ *Kikulacho* seems not to mind – it even frivolously exploits some of the negative factors associated with the boy-child situation (such as substance abuse) as part of its narrative material; *Njohera* seems totally oblivious; and *Toto Millionaire* goes about it in a naïve manner (choosing to valorize the boy-child within a situation that is really far-fetched).

#### 4.1.3 Religion

Religion as a social factor is a major theme in *Njohera* and *Kikulacho* and a minor one in *Toto Millionaire*. *Njohera* treats religion as the glue that solidifies family ties. Because Wandahuhu and his family subscribe to the same religious beliefs, they share a destiny. They pray together, sing together, and share the word of God. They even wear the same symbol of faith on their heads (see second picture of *fig 2.5*).

So, when Wandahuhu abandons his family, it is tantamount to abandoning this union of religious identity, and therefore a sin. In a way then, his suffering can be viewed as double punishment for forsaking both his family and God.

*Kikulacho* treats religion from a rather different angle. It shows how faith has been appropriated for personal gain. Pastor Edwin is a preacher, not because he believes in what he preaches, but because it is a means to material ends. He enjoys the power, money and women that come with it. Like Wandahuhu, he forsakes God the same way he does his family. Through Edwin, this story raises the questions of what value religion really has in a society whose sense of morality is so eroded that it is the debauched that get rewarded. It is the same question that *Toto Millionaire* seems to raise in its portrayal of a similar preacher whose sole motivation is to get rich through religious treachery. By giving this preacher a delusional mind, *Toto Millionaire* reduces religiosity to insanity. In the two stories also, the foreign sponsors of this religious madness are implicated. This is reflective of the status of the Christian movement in Kenya today, in which religion has not only been commercialized and used as a means of attracting foreign patronage, but also as a channel of fleecing and taking advantage of the weak in society.

The treatment of this theme in the said manner in the three stories presents a varied picture. In *Njohera*, this theme runs mostly on the surface (referential and explicit levels) as articulated by such narrative elements as the iconography (costumes) dialogue, action (prayers and songs), the sound track and editing (titles), all which make direct reference to the immediate place that faith occupies in both the characters' lives and the narrative's motivation and intent. Little, if any, of this theme runs beneath the surface in this film. Likewise *Kikulacho* plays out aspects of

this theme using elements at the referential and explicit level of meaning given the pastoral occupation of the main character. However, since it raises questions of truth concerning current practice of religion, it adds a substratum of meaning at the implicit level. As it were, it holds up the mirror for society to see the hypocrisy prevalent in the church today. *Toto Millionaire* goes even further by equating religion to madness along the lines of Marx's 'opium of the masses' dictum. This places this film's interpretation of religion as a whole firmly at the symptomatic level of meaning.

#### 4.1.4 Poverty

Another theme that informs much of the three films' narrative choices is poverty. As the root condition that triggers the events in the three films, poverty is indeed a key causal agent. It is an integral part of the inciting incident that drives the hero away from home in *Njohera* and *Toto Millionaire*, thus causing disruption of the established equilibrium. Even *Kikulacho*'s back story suggests that Pastor Edwin began his ministry as a poor street preacher. Therefore, the state of disequilibrium that constitutes act two of the three films amounts to actions and obstacles arising from the paths that the characters take in their struggle against poverty. In two of the films, it is the presupposed 'defeat' of poverty that re-establishes the state of equilibrium, hence act three and the end of the story. Only *Kikulacho* abandons poverty as a core causative factor in its desire to indulge the vain lives of the petty bourgeois – perhaps the reason it ends on act two. It does what Mwakalinga would call "fetishizing wealth ..., emphasizing glamour over substance" in the name of giving people what they want (Mwakalinga, 2010: 118-119). Nonetheless poverty explains much of causality in the three films, especially in terms of character

motivations. For instance, Pastor Edwin's women in *Kikulacho* are lured to him in the hope of benefiting materially, the same prospect that makes Nyakirata glue herself to Wandahuhu in *Njohera*. Even ten-year old Toto in *Toto Millionaire* intends to buy 'Fanta soda', 'biscuits' and 'lollipop' for himself and his friends besides medicine and food for his mother. This overall capitalistic preoccupation with materialism portrays the three narratives as bereft of higher ideals of life, such as political engagement with the reality they expose. Even such a basic issue like education as a means of social mobility are not considered. *Kikulacho* treats education with the same frivolity it treats everything else by depicting school-going children engaging in substance abuse and sex instead of studies.

Poverty also explains plenty of the choices that the narratives make at the level of space in terms of general fictional setting and the mise-en-scène. The rural and suburban settings in *Njohera* and *Toto Millionaire* carry ideological connotations of poverty. This is affirmed by the mise-en-scène use by the two narratives, featuring poor-looking structures and objects, poor-looking characters, and an all consuming barrenness and austerity amounting to what can be termed a 'décor of deprivation'. Besides, much of the dialogue in the two films revolves around this theme. The heroes leave poverty at home only to find more of it in the city – perhaps the reason *Njohera* does not make much visual distinction between the two spaces.

Conversely, *Kikulacho*'s city setting carries ideological connotations of affluence. As such, the film's iconography seems designed specifically to portray a wishful triumph of man over poverty. The hero's attire, the city skyscrapers, up-market mansions and 'crystal chandeliers' (even where they only serve an editing function), swimming pools, exclusive ornate hotel lobbies and rooms, consumerist shopping

malls and rich white benefactors all constitute cues for the viewer to construct a narrative that stands in contrast to deprivation within a Kenyan social schema. Inadvertently or not, it succeeds in evoking a parallel subtext of poverty if only by way of many a viewer's internal debate or / and desires.

Inevitably, poverty is the one theme that plays mostly at the referential and explicit levels of meaning in the three films. While *Njohera* and *Toto Millionaire* show us how poverty has plagued its characters, *Kikulacho* shows us what life can be if poverty is vanquished, notwithstanding the negativity attendant to such a life. Interestingly, none of the three films exploits this theme deeply enough to articulate a universal statement about poverty especially in terms of causes; political, cultural or otherwise. Their implicit association of the countryside with life in poverty and the city with opportunity or escape from poverty is too simplistic.

#### 4.1.5 Deception

Deception as a theme appears in all the three films with little variation in treatment but with substantial differences in consequence. Across the narratives, deception serves as a motivation for action, hence a causal factor. The three heroes perpetuate the story events by different imperatives of deception. For *Njohera*, it is the guilt of deception that compels the hero to forsake his family. In *Kikulacho*, it is by deception that the main character moves from one situation to another. In *Toto Millionaire*, the little hero achieves his goal by deception. In all the narratives therefore, deception is central to the turning points of the narrative structure. It is by its consequences that the story development veers off into new directions. The final outcome of deception poses another major disparity among the three narratives. In *Njohera*, deception is atoned for through penitence and forgiveness, a hallmark of

the narratives overall religious ideology. In *Kikulacho*, deception is punished through more deception in a manner that is not conclusive of its cycle as characteristic of the narrative's overall 'anything-goes' attitude towards its thematic meanings. In *Toto Millionaire*, deception is rewarded as a means of social survival.

In all the stories, however, deception plays out mostly on the surface level of meaning. The spectator is present to witness each moment it is committed and its consequences remain predictable. However, there are instances in the three films when deception, or at least aspects of it, are left to the viewer's imagination. In *Njohera*, we do not directly witness the Wandahuhu-Nyakirata marriage. Although this is later relayed to us through dialogue, it is by this concealment that we imply Wandahuhu's guilt, given the circumstances in which we next find him. In *Kikulacho*, we for a while remain in suspense over what Richard and Sue intends with Pastor Edwin's daughter until the final scene. This makes us look forward to the climax with several options of the outcome teasing our intellect. In *Toto Millionaire*, we never get to know where Toto hides the bottle-top, an act that enables him get round five adults, and by which we infer his cunningness. In this manner, even the narrative itself uses deception as a ruse in construction of meaning by concealment of information, a key convention for creating suspense and surprise in classical film narration.

#### **4.2 Communication of Meaning**

The five themes analyzed here are not exhaustive of the ideas the three films raise. Nevertheless, they suffice as testimony of the Kenyan filmmakers' ability to communicate at the four Bordwellian levels of meaning. That said, it is clear from this analysis that these narratives communicate much of these themes and other

meanings more at the surface, and less at the deep levels. Even those that seem to communicate in depth, such as family and gender, do so only by appealing to common ideological schemas that the spectator brings into the narrative. Otherwise, the narratives generally tend not to grant the spectator's interpretive capacity to figure out the implications of the story events and to arrive at their thematic significance through a constructivist process. This way, they (narratives) tend to talk down at the viewer through preachy dialogue, on-the-nose action and other such banal devices that characterize most of the narrative elements.

For instance, at level of action, *Njohera* captures the conflict arising from family betrayal in an acrimonious scene in which a son attempts to physically assault his father, an abomination in any African social schema (*picture plate 16*). Similarly, in order to represent the symptoms of poverty at the level of character, *Toto Millionaire* depicts prostitution through an image that expresses a prostitute's 'prostituteness' in a manner that leaves little to imagination (*fig 4.2*).

The 'prostituteness' of the prostitute



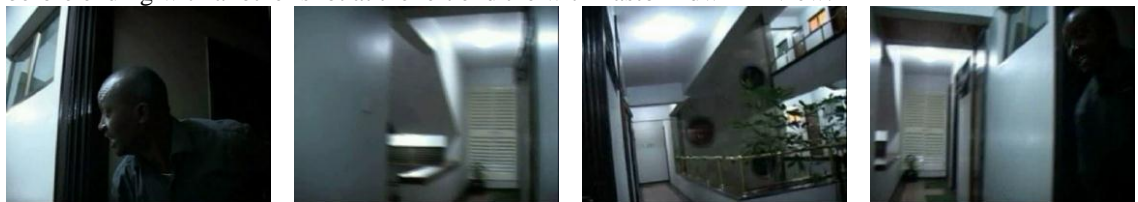
**Fig 4.2: Surface communication** *Toto Millionaire*

The resultant images of such a strategy are of a general type whose meaning is easily accessible and that do not amount to a new experience. For instance, the

character of prostitute here appeals to our stereotypical image of a common street prostitute (exposed flesh, beer swigging, cigarette smoking) more than it creates an iconography that is true only to diegesis of the narrative. A comparison of this image with a similar portrayal of the Wandahuhus in an image that makes obvious their religious identity (mostly through their headwear) reveals a crucial distinction. In *Njohera*, the headwear is a cue that explicates a deeper thematic meaning as we follow the transformation of Wandahuhu. Its disappearance from the man's head alerts us at an implicit level of meaning to a fundamental shift in the dynamics of character (*fig 3.9*).

Even at the level of cinematography, similar examples of unsubtly overt techniques of communication can be cited. In the last sequence of *Kikulacho* (scene 12), as Pastor Edwin goes into Room 103, the camera mounts itself onto his eyes as he stops to scan up and down the corridor to make sure that no unwanted witnesses lurk out there. It is a well executed point-of-view shot that captures accurately the anxiety of the moment through a blurry shaky pan. But it ends with a shot taken from a position similar to that which it begins, but this time with the pastor's face in the frame as if to reiterate that "this is the man whose point of view you have just experienced" (*fig 4.3*).

A shot on Pastor Edwin is followed by his point of view down the left end of a corridor, then the right, before ending with another shot at the left end the with Pastor Edwin in view.



*Fig 4.3: A POV shot in Kikulacho*

Then we are led into the darkened room 103, where for almost a minute we bear witness (albeit aurally) to the uncomfortable episode of a father making love to his daughter as punishment for his deception. Another comparison between this event and a similar one in *Njohera* reveals an essential difference resulting from a filmmaker's choice of manner of communicating meaning. When Wandahuhu goes into bed with Nyakirata, an event that marks the start of his deception, the camera does not make it beyond the curtain that conceals that private space (see last picture of *fig 3.7*). This does not leave the viewer wondering what happened between the two when the narrative resumes in the next scene with a long leap in time. In this instance, *Njohera* lets the spectator to construct meaning by filling in such gaps, an allowance that *Kikulacho* denies him.

Needless redundancy is another device by which the three video film narratives communicate on the surface. This mostly takes a horizontal form in temporal terms, such as the superfluous repetition noted in the award scene of *Toto Millionaire*. It also occurs where events in the future are alluded to beforehand, leading the spectator to anticipate certain outcomes in a way that affects the narrative's capacity for suspense and surprise. But the more interesting form of redundancy occurs vertically where a message is passed by more than one element of the narrative at the same time. The most common of this form occurs between the visual image and the sound track as demonstrated by the images in *fig 4.4* (overleaf) and their accompanying pieces of dialogue.

Besides being a feature of African speech behaviour and storytelling technique, such redundancy is itself characteristic of classical narrative form; repetition being after all a unifying device in all narrative forms. But here it plays more of a rhetorical or



Wandahuhu: And you folded them for me.  
Thank you  
Nyakirata: (overlapping) And I folded them for you.



Mercy: John, you are smoking?



Supa: He won three million



Market women: (together) Toto? Three million?  
Supa: Yes, it's here, in this newspaper

**Fig 4.4: Needless redundancy in the three films**

emphatic role that restates this study's earlier conclusion on the Kenyan video film's strong desire to illustrate rather than narrate. For the most part, its strategy is to represent by demonstrating meaning in as no uncertain terms as possible, a method that greatly dilutes the fiction. This may sound contrary to this study's earlier valorization of exactitude in filmic narration. However, there exists such a thing as

‘too much exactitude’; the kind that reduces the viewer to an automatic receiver and recognizer of audio-visual information. Exactitude serves the narrative when it remains precise and true only to the diegetic demands of the story, and is artful enough to sustain viewer’s interest. But when it appeals too much to our ordinary view of reality (such as our stereotypes), it fails to attain the level of fiction. As Devereux (2010: 17) asserts, “in order to sustain the viewer’s emotional and intellectual appetite, filmmakers must employ a discourse that reaches beyond issues and facts. Compelling films require thoughtful and intentional manipulation of structural elements in order to inform the viewer in a memorable way.”

### **4.3 Illustrational Narration and Communication of Meaning**

Shaka (1994: 74) makes the observation that “there is now a general acknowledgement of the fact that Third World filmmakers are adopting into the cinematic medium, oral narrative structures and styles that are quantifiably differentiating their filmic narrative style from mainstream classical Hollywood narrative model.” Mwakalinga (2010) agrees that “these films/videos utilize indigenous folklore, themes, and settings to explore socio-economic experiences such as polygamy, class, corruption, deception, wealth, power, and love.” Analyses of the three video film narratives in this study have also pointed towards traditional moral tales as a factor in the illustrational narrative choices that the filmmakers make in organizing their artistic and thematic ideas. As a way of putting this study’s summations in the cultural context of the three texts, and to grasp how this illustrational narrative construction works, it is imperative to examine the design of an ordinary oral African moral tale and how it communicates meaning and theme. Consider this simple fable:

Once upon a time, Hare and Chameleon were great friends. One day Hare boasted to Chameleon, saying: “see how agile I am. You could never stand against me in a race.” Feeling demeaned, Chameleon challenged Hare to a contest and he accepted. On the day of the race, many animals came to cheer the contenders. Tortoise was the judge. He started the race and as the Hare dashed forward, Chameleon jumped on his tail. They ran and ran and ran. When they came up to the finishing point, Hare pranced proudly; totally convinced that he had beaten Chameleon by miles. But Chameleon jumped over Hare’s head and crossed the finish line first. *That is how the Chameleon learnt how to grip hard and the Hare learnt to respect other animals. This story teaches us that ‘pride comes before a fall’.*

An analysis of the narrative elements dealt with in this thesis in relation to this little story reveals the logic in the crafting of the three film narratives. At the level of story and plot, the kernel three-act structure is evident as follows:

Act 1	Exposition:	Hare and Chameleon are friends
	Inciting incident:	Hare boasts and Chameleon challenges him to a contest
Act 2	Confrontation:	The race: Chameleon jumps on Hare’s tail. They run and run and run.
	Climax:	Chameleon jumps over Hare’s head and finishes first
Act 3	Resolution:	Hare is humiliated
	Denouement:	Both characters learn something important

Causality and temporal scheme of events is also logical. Hare’s bragging *causes* Chameleon’s challenge *causes* the race *causes* Chameleon’s treachery *causes* Hare’s defeat. However, some events, such as Chameleon’s ability to jump, defy the reality schema but are explained away by the generic logic of the fantasy – ‘this is just a story’. By the same logic, the space is generally implied as ‘animal land’ because it serves little function in the illustrational purpose of the story. The main characters are presented as they are at this point in time with little reference to their past to explain, for instance, why the Hare is a braggart and Chameleon astute and ‘athletic’. Even other animals, such as Tortoise, are brought in and discarded as and when needed to fill out the diegesis and fulfill a specific function. The narration is likewise functional. Its purpose is simply to transport us from one event to another.

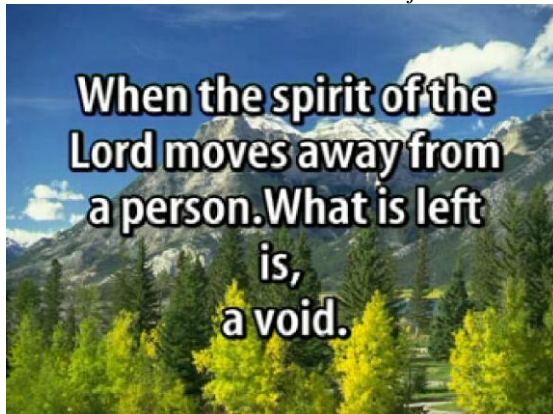
What matters is the moral of the story, which is captured in the last statement. It is purposely emphasized here because it often is not part of the storyworld (diegesis)

but a deduction by the storyteller, and can vary according to his or her thematic inclination. All the elements are there to illustrate this one moral lesson, and if a chameleon has to jump in order to do this, so be it. It would seem, therefore, that while didacticism is the end of such a story and style of storytelling, illustrationism is the means by which it is reached.

In terms of levels of meaning, this little narrative communicates as well as any classical film narrative. The referential meaning is the synoptic description of its events as outlined in the analysis of story and plot above. At the explicit level, this is simply a race. Its implicit meaning is borne in the second last statement. It explains the mythological import of the story. As noted, the final statement is the symptomatic meaning that extricates the essence of the story and casts it within the universal human values of which the story is but a negligible illustration (any number of stories could illustrate the same point). But in making this general point, the story pays little attention to detail. This inattention to detail in illustrational storytelling is best demonstrated by the moral lesson titles to be found in *Njohera* and *Toto Millionaire* as captured in the frames in **fig 4.5** below.

Errors in titles on the first frame of *Njohera* and

the last frame of *Toto Millionaire*



**Fig 4.5: Moral lessons in *Njohera* and *Toto Millionaire***

Thematically, the two frames reveal a common ideology: the belief in an all powerful God without whom, and against whom, man is impotent. But at the level of language, the first frame has at least three instances of punctuation errors as underline here: **When the spirit of the Lord moves away from a person.What is left is, a void.** Instead, it should read: **When the spirit of the Lord moves away from a person, what is left is a void.** Likewise, the second frame has a semantic inconsistency. The clause ‘**When God blesses**’ does not cohere properly with the answering clause ‘**no man can take it away.**’ Perhaps it should have read: ‘**When God blesses, no man can reverse it**’ or ‘**When God grants a blessing, no man can take it away.**’

In an ‘illustrationist’ frame of mind, however, both the filmmaker and viewer would consider such typographical, syntactic and/or semantic inaccuracies inconsequential as long the core message is passed. Regrettably, it is with the same frame of mind that the same filmmaker puts together all the other elements of the narrative, simply to serve illustrational ends, either locally or within the whole, in the hope that as long as each one of them illustrates to a satisfactory degree, the viewer, who is conversant with the moral tale form, will rationalize its presence. Even the repetitious nature of events in *Kikulacho* can be likened to ‘they ran and ran and ran’ in the little story above.

The moral lessons the three video film stories under study are meant to illustrate can hereby be summed up as: ‘Do unto others as you would have them do unto you’ (*Kikulacho*); ‘East or west, home is best’ (*Njohera*); and ‘Survival for the smartest’ (*Toto Millionaire*). The names that the filmmakers choose for their works are reflective of these moral lessons to a varying degree of precision. ‘Kikulacho’ (What

bites you) seems to be a truncation of a common Kiswahili saying: '*Kikulacho ki nguoni mwako*' (what bites you is in your clothes). It captures the predatory nature and role of the leading character, analogous a blood-sucking bug that hides in the 'clothes' of society. The story's moral lesson would therefore be used to warn not only those of his kind in society, but everybody else to be wary of such unscrupulous comen that would use anything, even the pulpit, to satisfy their greed. As already noted, 'Njohera' means 'Forgive me,' a statement that the lead character uses to reconcile himself to his family; that is, to come back home – the moral of the story. 'Toto Millionaire' is the one title whose meaning, relative to the narrative, runs beneath the surface of the words. It seems to valorize consumerist materialism rather than existentialist survival which the narrative foregrounds, although given that it is 'toto' (Kiswahili for 'child') who gets the millions against obstacles thrown his way by numerous adults, at least the 'smart' part of the film's moral lesson is brought out. So, as noted on surface communication earlier, the almost direct correlation between these titles and their respective stories means that little interpretation is required to access their significance to the narratives.

#### **4.4 Conclusion**

This chapter has closely examined some of the thematic concerns treated by the three video films of this study. It has emerged that while many of these themes are common among the stories, their portrayal is inflected by each narrative's unique ideological perspective. It is this perspective that determines the theme's relationship with each film's narrative's choices. Another aspect of this is communication of meaning, an analysis of which has shown that Kenyan filmmakers can, and do, communicate at both surface and deep levels. That said,

evidence adduced confirms a tendency for the narratives to communicate more on the surface and less in depth. This has far reaching implications on the spectator's construction function and involvement in the general process of storytelling. When a film narrative communicates much of its meanings on the surface, the spectator tends to engage with it in a likewise shallow manner as a passive perceiver and recognizer of audio-visual information. This is further aggravated by the filmmaker's inattention to detail in most narrative elements. As in the preceding chapters, the explanation for these observations is the illustrational functionality of the narratives, and elements thereof, in a style symptomatic of the African moral tale methods of communicating meaning and theme. This illustrationism portrays Kenyan (and by extension African) filmmaker as one who is committed, not to the story, but to the reader; hence his obsession with theme, which he 'serves' using an interpretive approach and in a form that is as easily accessible to the reader as possible. From a constructivist point of view, such illustrationism in (especially cinematic) storytelling is inappropriate because it constructs for the reader meanings and interpretations that the reader ought to be constructing for and by themselves.

The persistence of this phenomenon that this researcher has chosen to call 'illustrationism' means that it cannot be divorced from the identity that Kenyan video film narratives have created and the impact they have had (or failed to have) in the world of cinema. The next chapter ties up this study's summations on illustrationism and attempts to reveal its strengths and weaknesses in light of the expectations that classical film criticism has exposed over the years concerning filmic representation and spectatorship.

**5.0****CHAPTER FIVE****SUMMARY OF FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMENDATIONS**

The preceding three chapters of this study have built up to a point analogous to the final act of a classical narrative. In keeping with the same analogy, this chapter ties up the loose ends by restating the pertinent observations made and projecting them onto the field of practice with a view to pointing out a way forward.

**5.1 Summary of Findings**

At the outset, this study was premised on three Assumptions. The first concerned story structure with regard to the classical three-act form. Analysis in this study has shown a good degree of familiarity with it among the Kenyan filmmakers, which puts it within their reach should they choose to use it. That it is the most indigenous of the selected films (*Njohera*) that comes closest in conformity to this canonic form validates this study's initial presumption of its universality, a truth that this study has put to test using a traditional oral narrative. *Toto Millionaire* also obeys the general configuration of the three-act structure. Only *Kikulacho* disregards this form and opts for an episodic two-act structure, which suits its treatment of its subject matter just fine. However, its other narrative elements are not enhanced enough to make up for the loss of the unifying effect afforded by the three-act form.

The second assumption concerned classical conventions that govern composition and organization of film narrative elements. Findings in this study have revealed varying degrees of compliance and violation of these conventions. There are few narrative elements analyzed in the chapters two, three and four that do not appear fairly well crafted in at least one of the films. As already noted, *Njohera* employs the

classical canonic structure of story and plot construction. And besides having good character development, it also passes the verisimilitude test at the level of language by the use of a native idiom that allows dialogue and gesture to flow more naturally. But its treatment of spatio-temporal and narrational elements violates conventions. It is in these elements that *Toto Millionaire* conforms to conventions comparatively better, in addition to also having a viable story structure. However, its action, characterization and application of the principle of economy in narration are wanting. *Kikulacho* is the one story that can be said to conform to and violate conventions in equal measure in keeping with its generally carefree character – but at least it gets the scale of a feature film right. Besides, its montage technique is rather impressive. All three stories, however, suffer from a loose cause-effect and motivation element, a product of the illustrational functionality that characterizes all aspects of their narrative form. So, although Edward (2008) may be right up to a point in his assertion that the story lies at the centre of the problems bedeviling the Kenyan indigenous film industry, findings presented in the three chapters have shown that Kenyan filmmakers are aware of most, if not all, the conventions that can craft a good story in the classical mould. Limitations lie not so much in the stories themselves, but in the application of these filmic conventions, whereby a filmmaker chooses to employ a few and disregard others, or use them in a manner inconsistent with the established norm.

The third assumption had to do with communication of theme and meaning. The video fiction narratives under study have reaffirmed the widely acknowledged African cinema's preoccupation with didacticism and social realism (Stam, 2000; Diawara, 1992; Shaka, 1993; Bakari and Cham, 1996; Diang'a, 2007). But much as

each of the stories under study provides us with a distinct perspective of the similar themes that they treat, this research has demonstrated the predisposition of the Kenya filmmakers to illustrate a theme rather than narrate a story in the classical style. This researcher hastens to clarify that illustration here carries not a negative connotation, but a sense of difference. In fact, to many a critical viewer, classical narrative style in many ways demeans its audience by tugging them gently into what Thompson (in Rosen, 1986: 140) calls ““escapism” inherent in plot... a preordained path, trying to come to the “correct” conclusion... The viewer may be capable of understanding the narrative, but has no context in which to place that understanding.” This is where the practicality of the Kenyan (and by extension African) filmmakers’ didactic, socially conscious illustrational style of storytelling betters the “arbitrariness” of the classical film narrative. Illustration, especially at the socio-thematic level, gives our stories context that the viewer can relate to and apply his understanding. Yet to the most part, the film stories of this study can only be said to provide ‘probable’ rather than ‘typical’ contexts of life in the Kenyan society.

## **5.2 Conclusions**

Given the observations summed up above, it seems that what stands out to be questioned is the illustrationism of the means and matter of Kenyan video film narratives. In this study, this has manifested itself in two contradictory ways of representation, namely:

- i. Approximational: by which an element fails the test of exactitude or precision in representation, which the classical form aspires for.
- ii. Overt: by which communication of meanings and theme is made to play out too much at the surface level of meaning and less at the deeper level.

The first case could be referred to as ‘approximational mimesis’ and the second ‘surface mimesis.’ The former offers the spectator less than exact and leaves him feeling deceived. The latter offers him too much exactitude of little value and leaves him feeling belittled because it ‘outs’ every one of its meaning to the surface, leaving little for the viewer to construct. Its net effect is a merging of the narrative’s diegesis with the viewer’s reality in a way that dismantles the imperatives mentioned in chapter one. It obliterates the clarity of parallel existence of independent narrative time, space, events and characters; it invades the narrative unity by imputing to its cause-effect chain motivations that are extraneous; it kills the viewer’s empathetic identification with the characters, which it uses only as puppets; its closure is predetermined in a way that is not obliged to tie up any loose ends; its overall craftsmanship throws the viewer right out of the diegesis as it brings the story to him rather than invite him into the story. As Gunning in Devereux (2010: 15) puts it, like a documentary “its energy moves outward towards an acknowledged spectator rather than inward towards the character-based situations essential to classic narrative.”

For these reasons, the types of video film ‘illustratives’ (as opposed to ‘narratives’) represented by the three of this study end up exhibiting one or more of the following characteristics:

1. Approximational and overt use of the elements makes the story come out of theme rather than the other way round. For instance, the story circumvents visual telling by other means, such as dialogue or titles, because as long as the message is passed, the means and precision by which that happens is of secondary importance. The image and action also tends to copy the story’s thematic reality so closely that it fails to “simulate an intensified, dramatic

existence and stimulate experiences which transport us to an illusionary play away from the humdrum reality that is our average life,” (Phillips, 2000).

2. Therefore, the choice, relationship and unity of elements is determined by the moral or message rather than the story (character and situation). The message itself may be fragmentary or multiple as expedient to the narrative’s local or general purpose.
3. Closure does not have to resolve all issues because significance of an event is often localized, hence, the likelihood of multiple starts and stops, surprise motivations and unexpected turning points, all serving a thematic logic.

### **5.3 Recommendations**

Why is the abovementioned illustrational form and techniques unlikely to take the Kenyan video fiction film to the next level in the world of cinema? Rifkin (1994: 5) quotes Jean Mitry’s observation that film is ‘a world that organizes itself into a story.’ What this means is that the internal mechanisms of a film narrative work with a certain degree of independence that appeals to little outside of its diegesis (it is unified, complete and set apart). That is why time and space in the storyworld of a film in the classical mould is supposed to give the impression of independent pre-existence, and the viewer is shown just an optimum amount of relevant events in a causal chain that will assist him to create a story within that world. That is also the reason character is more about ‘being and becoming’, and less about ‘acting’, and narration is more about ‘immersion’ and less about ‘telling’ or ‘showing’ (Comey, 2002). Being entails embodiment (where a character becomes what he, she or it represents), whereas acting implies demonstration (where a character illustrates what he, she or it represents). Immersion invites the viewer into the storyworld whereas

telling / showing presents the storyworld to the viewer. These differences have enormous implications on how a viewer interacts with a story. The one positions the viewer in the storyworld as an active participant in construction of meaning, and the other positions him outside as a receptive perceiver. The latter is the overall effect one gets from the illustrational character of Kenyan film narratives as they are represented by those analyzed in this study. Inadvertently or not, they tend to lend credence to the four rules coined by the head of the colonial film units in London in 1941 as earlier cited. However, this is not to suggest that Kenyan film narratives should lose their illustrative function because it is not compatible with filmic narrativity. Rather, this functionality should be embedded into the narrative form so that it results in stories that are more than just a patchwork of illustrative incidents that are more 'rhetoric' and less 'poetic' or 'prosaic,' and that are liable to be read more as anthropological artifacts than art (Dovey in Khatib, 2012).

This study has also proved that unity and clarity of elements and sub-elements of space, time, causality, character and narration, has far reaching effects on the interactiveness, overall style and pleasure value of the stories. This unity and clarity is ensured by a deliberate application of the classical narrative conventions. Although it is true as Kristin Thompson in Rosen (1986: 141) says that 'each film dictates the way it wants to be viewed by drawing upon certain conventions and ignoring or flouting others,' there is much difference between discarding or contravening rules out of conscious narrative intention and doing so out of ignorance. Unfortunately for any filmmaker, the audience can tell the difference; if not consciously, intuitively

The challenge therefore lies in striking a balance between captivating narration in the classical sense and pragmatic illustration to achieve what Devereux would call a multi-level ‘teach and touch’ effect (Devereux, 2010: 29). It is the conviction of this researcher that the two (narration and illustration) are not mutually incompatible; indeed, that put together their value is more than their sum. If the Kenyan film narrative can attain this balance, it can move from what Bazin (quoted in Stam, 2000: 94) calls “shallow ... naturalism, which seeks superficial verisimilitude,” to “a profound realism which plumbs the depths of the real,” a heightened realism that does more than “literal mimetic adequation between filmic representation and the ‘world out there’”. Sembene has been known to prefer a non-elitist African cinema that is close to its audience (Dovey in Khatib, 2012). While that should largely be the case, it is also true that the filmmaker is a shaper of that audience’s worldview.

It is imperative for the Kenyan filmmaker to also note Bordwell’s summation of how a film narrative form as a system operates. The narrative elements analyzed in this thesis amount to what he considers subsystems, all of which need to work for the entire system to function (Bordwell, 2001: 40). If some aspect of a system or a subsystem thereof does not work, the whole system grinds to a halt. And in film particularly, “every component *functions as part of* the overall pattern that is perceived,” or else one ends up with incomplete or incongruous patterns and relationships that do not “create the sense that “everything is there”” (Bordwell: 41) – and nothing is extraneous or out place, it may be added. Although no film can be said to achieve everything to perfection, the degree to which the Kenyan video films deviate from this classical norm as demonstrated by the findings of this study means that there is still some way to go before Kenyan films can be, as Edwards (2008: 2)

says, “shown and celebrated beyond Kenyan borders.” And though narrative forms other than the classical system (and that are as valid) do exist, it is the opinion of this researcher that at this formative stage, Kenyan cinema needs at least the three-act structure in order to appeal to a wider global audience. Details of plot enrichment such as intensification of conflict and subtext can easily follow where this armature narrative structure is perfectly mastered.

Finally, as earlier noted, until and unless the homegrown film industry in Kenya shuns ‘isolationism’ and jells into an institution with standardized principles and codes of production, limitations highlighted in this study may never be overcome. Our filmmakers will keep operating with the ‘fake-it-till-you-get-it’ principle mentioned: ‘the end justifies the means’. But as Higson in Shaka (1994: 10) puts it, “to identify a national cinema is first of all to specify a coherence and a unity; it is to proclaim a unique identity and a stable set of meanings.” Hopefully, the maturation of institutional film festivals inaugurated in Kenyan in April 2012 will chart a way towards the desired standardization.

#### **5.4 Suggestions for Further Research**

As a platform for debate, this study offers a broad sweep over the essential elements of fiction film narratives as they apply to Kenyan video films. Future studies ought to take each of these elements and examine them in greater detail. It may also help to do an audience response study to find out the degree of homogeneity of Kenyan cinema viewership and how it responds to these video film narratives as they are. And since the ultimate aim is to raise Kenyan film narratives to global standards, it will also be vital to do comparative studies with practices in other established film industries in the East African region, Africa and beyond.

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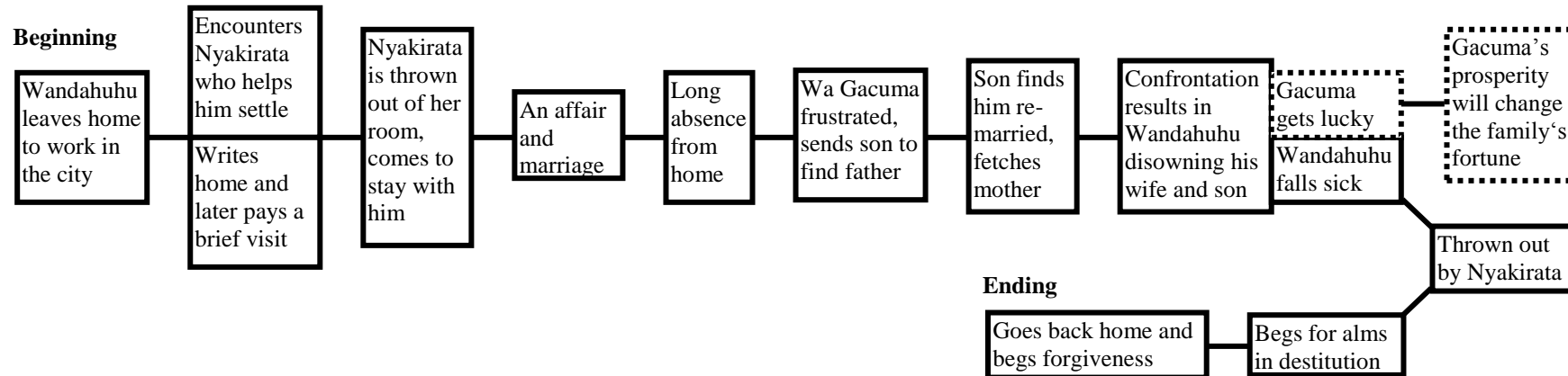
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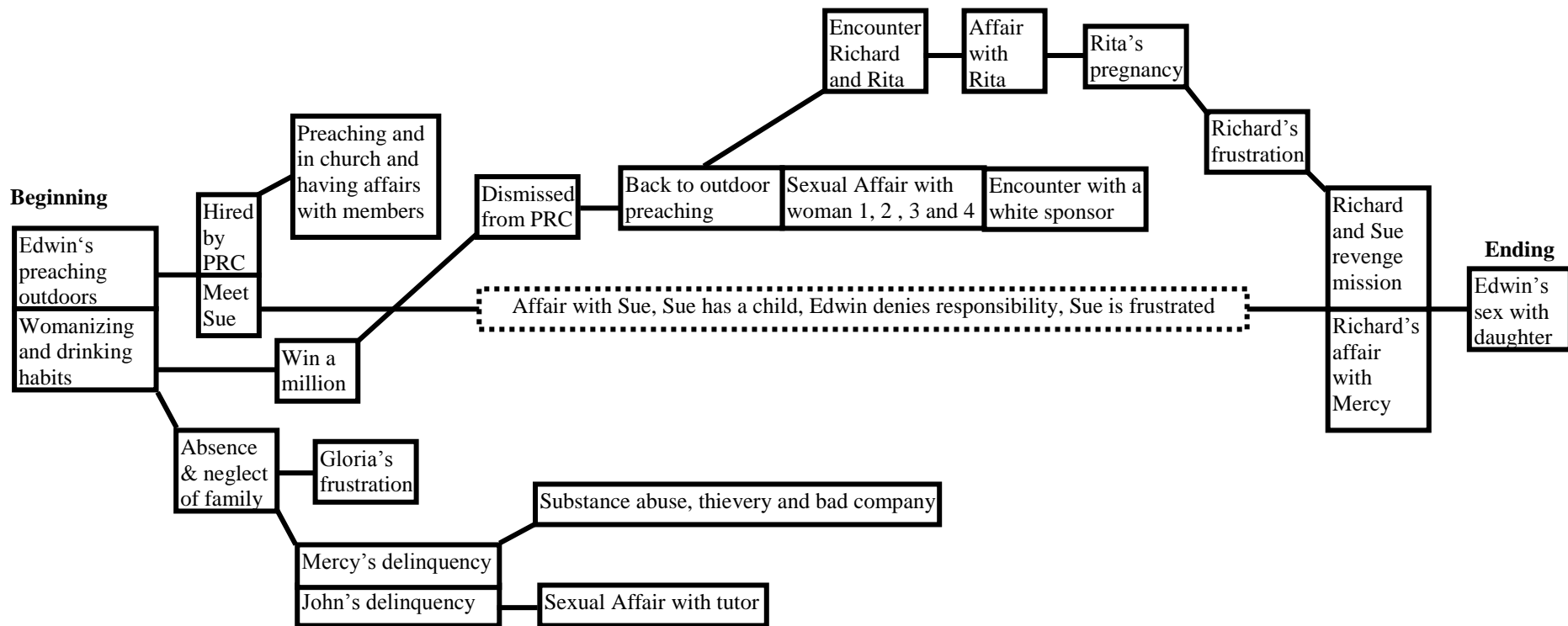
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## Appendix 1: Flow Charts

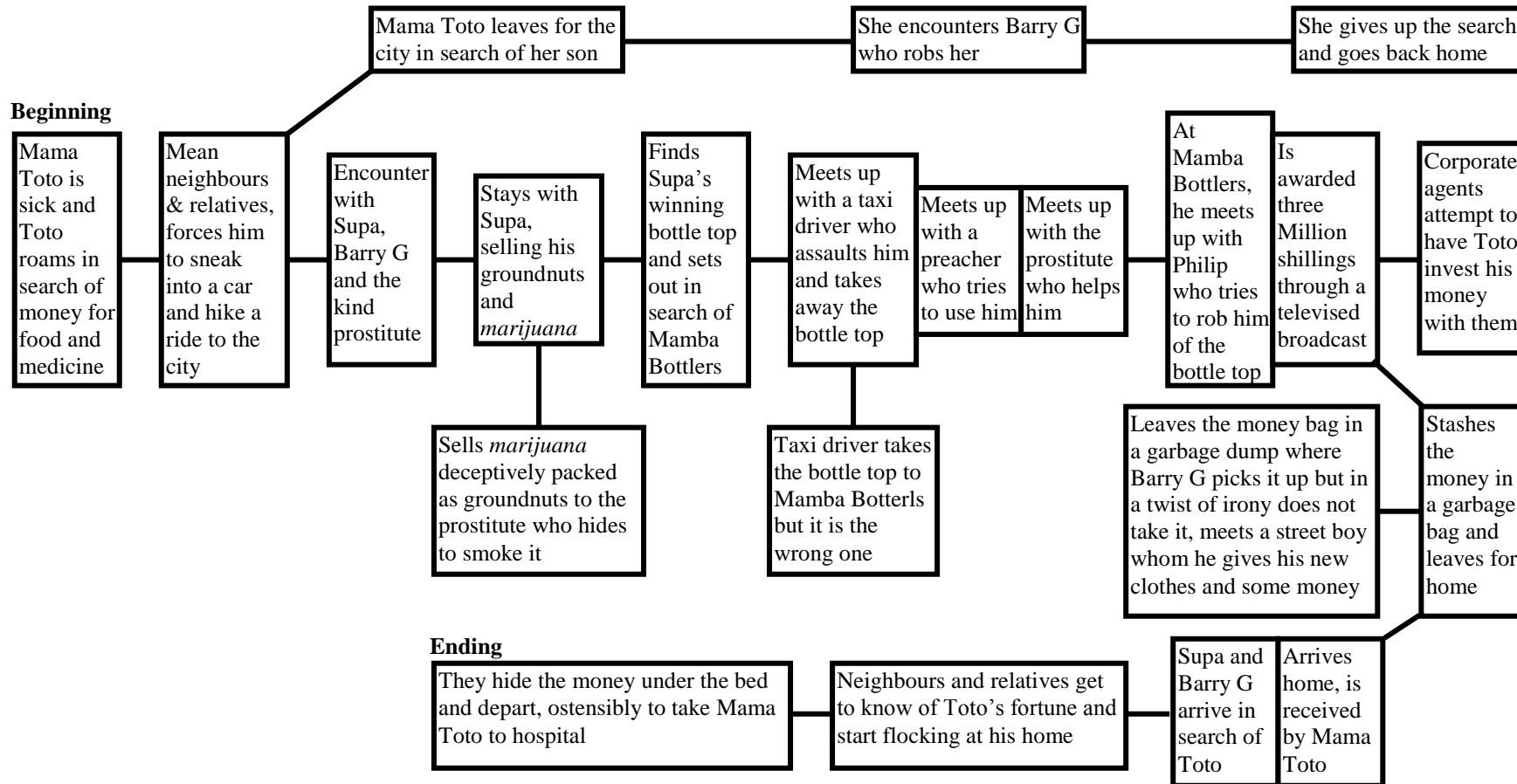
### Appendix 1.1: *Njohera*'s causal chain



Appendix 1.2: *Kikulacho's* causal chain



Appendix 1.3: *Toro Millionaire's* causal chain



## Appendix 2: Picture Plates

(Left) deep space composition in *Toto Millionaire* and (right) shallow depth in *Kikulacho*



**Picture plate 1**

John and his friend in scene 6 (church) and, over seven months later, in scene 13 (pub)



**Picture plate 2**

As Gacuma unveils great home improvement plans to his mother, a tin-house background changes inexplicably into a wooden house in *Njohera*



**Picture plate 3**

An establishing shot of rural and urban setting makes little difference in *Njohera*



**Picture plate 4**

Wandahuhu's departure (scene 1) is repeated in a blurry-edged flashback shot (scene 6)



**Picture plate 5**

(Left) the live recording of the prize award ceremony and its television footage later at the bar and the preacher's house



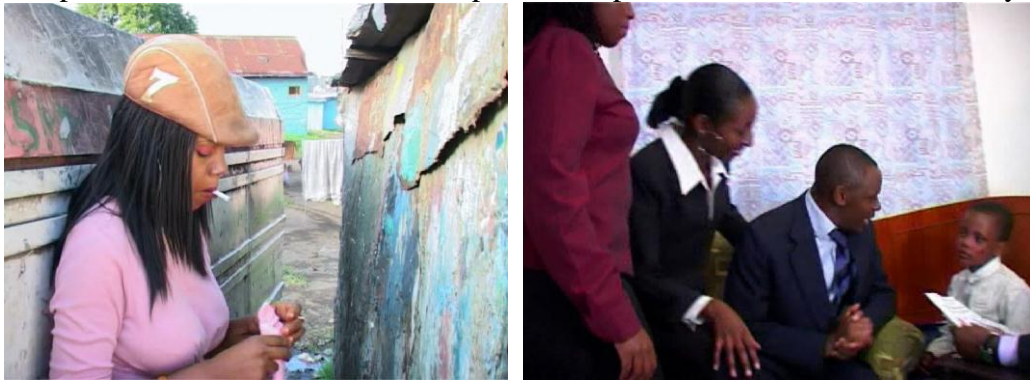
**Picture plate 6**

Pastor Edwin (left) and Gloria (right) read newspaper articles that contextualize Edwin's winning



**Picture plate 7**

The prostitute in *Toto Millionaire* smokes bhang packaged as groundnuts and corporate representatives try to persuade Toto to invest with their different companies later in the film are examples of the parenthetical events in the story

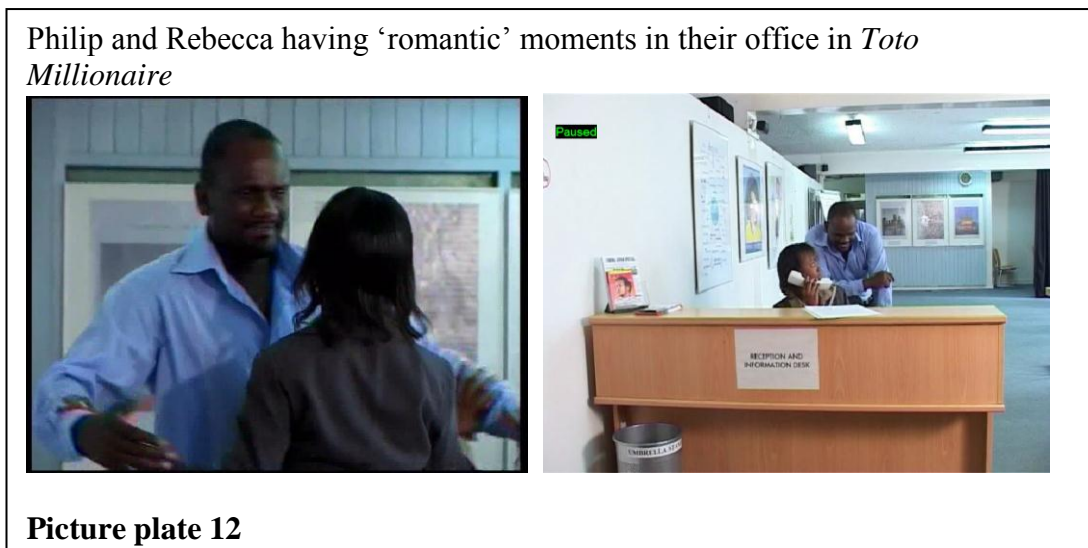
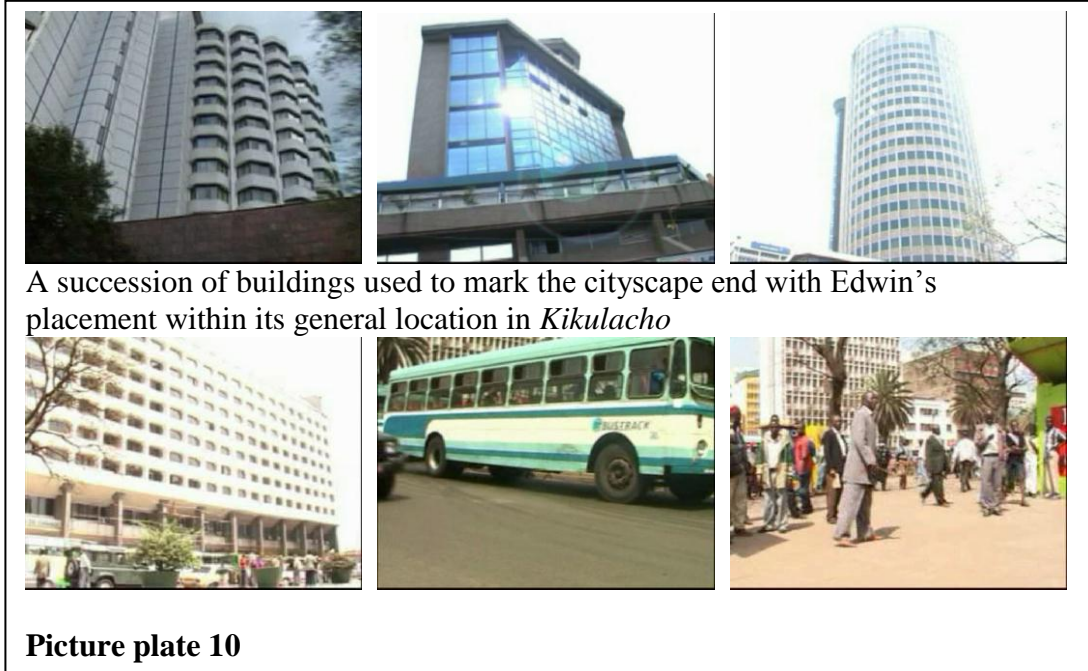


**Picture plate 8**

An anonymous girl as part of John's delinquent street friends and (right) as catalyst for Mercy and Richard's sexual affair



**Picture plate 9**



The miserable faces of Toto captured in medium close-up



**Picture plate 13**

(Left) Toto abandons his stash of cash at a dumpster, (right) Supa picks it but then changes his mind about taking it



**Picture plate 14**

Pastor Edwin meets a white philanthropist in *Kikulacho*



**Picture plate 15**

Gacuma manhandles his father in *Njohera*



**Picture plate 16**

### Appendix 3: Rhythmic and Melodic motifs in *Toto Millionaire*

#### Appendix 3.1

A playful xylophonic rhythm mainly associated with Toto's running action (repeat marks are used to indicate its length and not the number of times it is repeated)



#### Appendix 3.2

The dominant melodic motif that recurs in various timbres, textures and fragments throughout the film



#### Appendix 3.3

The upbeat *genge*-type instrumental groove that recurs with some variation in the film (repeat marks are used to indicate its length and not the number of times it is repeated)

A musical notation for an instrumental groove in 4/4 time, featuring three staves: Strings, Bass, and Percussion Set. The key signature is one sharp (F#). The Strings staff has a melodic line with eighth notes and quarter notes. The Bass staff has a simple bass line with quarter notes and rests. The Percussion Set staff includes Hihat, Snare, and Kick patterns.