

Filming violence in Kenya: From the everyday to the spectacular in Hillary Ng'weno's documentaries

Okong'o, Joseph Basil and Waliaula, Solomon

Source: Journal of African Cinemas, Volume 6, Number 2, 1 October 2014, pp. 185-194(10)

Publisher: Intellect

DOI: https://doi.org/10.1386/jac.6.2.185_1

Abstract

Hillary Ng'weno's documentary series *The Making of a Nation* is a reconstruction of significant events in the development of Kenya from colonialism to post-independence. The authorial vision underlines the role of violence in the formation of the colonial and postcolonial Kenyan State. This is cinematically presented through techniques that distance the viewer from the pathos of the images' violence, such as political assassinations, mass demonstrations, incarcerations and attempted coups. The thesis of the article is that Ng'weno's work is framed within the oral narrative tradition. This can be related to the observation of Tomaselli and Eke (1995: 115) that Third Cinema involves African themes and forms of oral story-telling. Significantly, the voice-over rendition in Ng'weno's documentaries employs the oral narrative technique of mediating the horror of violence in an aesthetically and emotionally acceptable manner. As such, the visual images coupled with the omniscient voice of the narrator distance the viewer from the spectacle while also projecting the recurrent cycle of violence in the making of the nation. Drawing from Fanon's (2004) concept of violence and Foucault's (1980) analysis of power as both coercive and emancipative, we therefore argue that Ng'weno's work presents the paradox of violence as both a means of dismantling and constructing the fabric of a nation.

Keywords: deep Structure; formalism; phenomenal violence; realism; social myth; violence of everyday life

Document Type: Research Article

Affiliations: 1: Moi University 2: Maasai Mara University

Publication date: October 1, 2014