The September 11th Attacks and Editorial Cartoons from Africa: Examples from Kenya

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Synopsis

As artifacts of political culture, editorial cartoons reveal prevalent public opinion on a particular issue with direct or indirect effects to members of society. The central to this study question addressed in this paper is how editorial cartoons in Kenya's press framed the 9/11 event and the extent to which such framing accorded or denied terrorists, government agencies and other stakeholders leverage. Specifically, the section probes the extent to which the dominant frames careered, and whether framing tilted away or towards legitimizing or delegitimizing terrorism. From these, conclusions are drawn on the extent to which particular aspects of knowledge, opinion or ideologies were constructed within the Kenyan social space in relation to the 9/11 attacks.

Biography

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Essay

In covering terrorism and other conflictual situations of similar magnitude, commentaries and other prosaic portions of the paper have established a way of presenting information that attempts to walk the fine line between relaying meaning, meeting editorial demands, and being sensitive to political and cultural proclivities in argumentation and analysis of the particular situation. The end result is often ambiguity in meaning. However, unlike opinion writing and other news commentary, editorial cartoons have far more capacity for expression that is less prone to ambiguity. In this sense, far much more insights on the prevalent frames, ideologies and meaning are gained on the relationship between terrorism, editorial cartoons and the broader issues of representation. This study uses a framing theoretical approach and particular aspects of semiotics to examine the dominant frames that prevailed following the 9/11 attacks in Kenya. Framing is about selection and salience. According to Entman (1993), this involves selecting some aspects of a perceived reality and making them more salient in a communication text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation for the item described (52). Following Van Gorp (2007), this study extracts frames through a deep reading of the editorial cartoon by isolating framing and reasoning devices. According to Gorp (2007), upon exposure or interaction with a media text, the frame will manifest itself in the text through several framing devices. These devices will include, but not
limited to; word choice, metaphors, exemplars, descriptions, arguments (especially in a largely verbal media) visual imagery, visual metaphors, stereotypes, catch phrases, dramatic characters, graphics, (in a largely visual text like editorial cartoons) lexical choices etc. Gamson and Stuart (1992) consider these devices more like signature elements that “suggest the core frame in shorthand fashion” (60). Secondly, the core frame has “reasoning devices”, which scholars agree (Taylor, 2008, Van Gorp, 2007; Gamson & Lasch, 1983) are related to the four functions of framing as conceived by Entman (1993). In other words, reasoning devices are the product of the interaction between the reader and framing devices in the text that enable the reader to deduce justification, see the “causes and consequences in a temporal order” (Van Gorp, 64). This study focuses on editorial cartoons in the two leading newspapers in Kenya, Daily Nation and The Standard, framed 9/11. The two were chosen because of their dominance in terms of circulation and their longevity in Kenya’s print media space.

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While numerous studies on the September 11th terror attacks have been done, very few studies on 9/11 have focused on how this significant historical event was covered in the African media. Furthermore, there are even far much fewer studies that have probed the critical role played by the editorial cartoons in such framing. Taking the first few weeks after the attacks, this paper shows how editorial cartoons in both The Daily Nation and The Standard, framed this event. However, for most Kenyans, the events of 9/11 began four years earlier when the US embassy was attacked in an audacious 10.00 am attack that claimed well over 200 lives. Following a pattern that was to be the defining signature of al Qaida attacks, the simultaneous attacks in Nairobi and Dar es Salaam not only marked a significant point in the escalation of what is now known as ‘new terrorism’\(^2\), but it also marked the beginning of a moment in which terrorism and its key actors became a regular feature within Kenya’s media space. Way back then, the events of August the 7th 1998 were variously framed in the media as evil, a perversion of Islam and an illegal way of gaining political leverage.

In the first few days after the 9/11 attacks, the editorial cartoons in Kenya’s two leading newspapers reveal a host of different frames ranging from sympathy, shock and disbelief, a sense of widespread fear and vulnerability and a nagging irony of the world’s super power being almost brought to its knees, perhaps for the first time in history, by barely armed non state actors. Moments after the attacks, the very first frames to appear sought to express sympathy with the US, and most ended up universalizing 9/11, constructing it as an experience in which all of humanity was affected. This was very different from the earlier embassy attacks in Kenya which were framed as a mostly local tragedy. On the 13th of September, a day after the terror attacks in New York, the global reality of the event began to sink in, The Standard published an editorial cartoon meant to express sympathy with the American citizens and at the same time vilify the perpetrators and what they represented. The editorial cartoon reveals the image of the globe on a black background, apparently pierced by what appears to be a sharp rod like gadget, and whose impact appears to be spreading outwards from the point of impact. Atop the rod is the near universal symbol of death, a human skull with intersecting bones behind it. The sign acts as signifier of death and the (senseless or potentially avoidable) loss of human life. The graphic presentation of the earth in outer space stands as a symbolic sign of humanity while at the same time an iconic sign of the planet itself. The lexical framing device “our deepest sympathy and condolences to the people of the United States of America following this cowardly and horrendous attack on
their country” serves to anchor the message of sympathy. However, it does much more than that, as a reasoning device, it not only reports on the attack but defines it as cowardly and horrendous, thus invoking a moral evaluation that denies the act legitimacy.

By using the symbol of the world, an implicit ‘we’ is constructed in which all humanity is subsumed. The effect is a secretion of difference, in which an oppositional binary that constructs the ‘terrorist other’ as operating on the margins of humanity occurs. The symbol of the globe creates an impression of a homogenous and unified ‘one’ world, essentially one body, gored by the ‘terrorist’s rod’, whereby injury on one part of the body affects the whole. The suffering and attacks in the US are interpreted not merely as an attack on a few but rather an attack on humankind itself.

This deliberate universalizing of the 9/11 experience was to be a crucial discourse moment in the preparation and mobilization of opinion and resources in the subsequent war against terror. Although this particular frame denies terrorists legitimacy, it grants them initial publicity of their acts and equally plays into their hands of suffusing fear and anxiety to as many people as possible. This frame was equally fortified by rhetoric from government officials in America and other parts of the world that the attacks were not merely on America, but on freedom (a universal virtue), implying that all countries were at risk of loosing their freedom as a result of these attacks. Several world leaders called the attacks not just on America but also an affront against humanity itself. For instance, Russian president Vladimir Putin called the strikes “a blatant challenge to humanity” while German chancellor Gerhard Schroeder declared that the events were “not only attacks on the people in the United States, but also against the entire civilized world, against our own freedom, against our own values, values which we share with the American people,” building on this universalizing frame he added, “We will not let these values be destroyed.” It was no different in the media, for instance the French newspaper Le Monde ran a front-page headline reading “Nous sommes tous Américains”, or “We are all Americans.” Still, the universality of the attacks could be entirely dismissed as mere discursive constructions because citizens of over 78 countries died in the attacks. This particular frame of globalizing the 9/11 attacks was to emerge even more forcefully the next day on the 14th of September. The cartoon shows a gigantic hand with the word ‘terrorism’ on its wrist, tightening its grip on earth, symbolizing humanity, as if to crush it. The phrase by the “Lilliputian” (a mouse, actually) “now, where is one safe (?)” captures the grim situation. The piercing rod in the previous cartoon and the constricting arm are semiotically drawn from the same paradigm in which one element seems to be a mere replacement of another. As evidenced in the
editorial cartoon below, 9/11 as a terror event is elevated to a potentially overwhelming and overpowering threat to humanity.

Figure 2

Clearly, an overwhelming sense of despair is created in the cartoon above, in which a connotative reading suggests that the problem of terrorism is a global problem where everyone is affected. The problem of terrorism is not only universalized, but there is also the exaggeration of the omnipresence of terror. A construction of a heightened yet unrealistic fear emerges in this editorial cartoon, which may unwittingly play into the terrorists' propagandist objective of creating uncertainty and fear to as many people as possible. While the attacks were unprecedented, the fear generated through the media was pretty unrealistic since it is not possible that the whole world was shaken and sent into panic following 9/11. Often times, such framing and construction of fear allow the possibility of drawing undue attention to the terrorists' cause. Similarly, just like the previous editorial cartoon, a binary reductionism is accentuated whereby the terrorist other is malevolently cast as singularly bent towards the total annihilation of human civilization. In so doing, an ideological mode of unification is at play here too, whereby social, political, economic and cultural differences are blurred in an attempt at galvanizing world opinion against terrorism. The possible ramifications at particular levels of discourse implied that dissenting opinion towards the mainstream construction of the globe versus the terrorist villain were suppressed. After an evidently good work at universalizing 9/11, it was only a matter of time that the enemy (or according to Entman, the causal factor) be exposed in the subsequent media coverage.

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Unlike other terror attacks in which a particular group claims responsibility immediately, 9/11 was unique in its execution and mind boggling in the fatalities reported that that no one publicly claimed responsibility for the attacks. However, it was not long before fingers and circumstantial evidence began pointing at Saudi dissident and billionaire Osama bin Laden and his Al Qaida network. In a speech shortly after the blast, US president George Bush termed the attacks as acts of war worthy of a strong response. According to him, the proposed war was to be launched not merely on terrorists but also those who harbour them. Predictably, a very strong and unequivocal frame of revenge was rife in both American and the world media. In Kenya, the pattern was the same, with opinion prevalent on the editorial pages of The Nation and The Standard favouring a forceful response from the United States. However, just like other media elsewhere in the world, there were calls that caution be taken in fighting such a nebulous group as terrorists. Unlike previous wars, this was a non state actor whose structures and form
were amorphous. Although the attacks were said to possess his signature, bin Laden denied responsibility but congratulated the attackers for what he termed as successful strikes at the enemy. However, this did not prevent speculation that bin Laden had just curtain raised the way for the beginning of another World War, or one of equal scale. This particular frame was to be clearly evident in the following editorial cartoon published in *The Nation* on 23rd September.

The editorial cartoon pictures what looks like a global clock of significant world wars in which 2001 is prophetically cast as the dawn yet another significant war, this time terrorism war. As the dominant framing device, the clock portrays what seems like intervals of peace punctuated by wars at specific times in the last a hundred years. Presented as a gun and a missile, the arms of the clock are ticking towards what seems to be an inevitable situation of war in which the US (symbolized by the stars and stripes flag) is to play a significant role. Indeed, while the reasoning devices of the clock and a contextual understanding do more than inform the reader of the 9/11 attacks, they also suggest that an all out war militarily remains the only inevitable recourse. Accordingly, these devices coalesce to prompt in the viewer the core frame that 9/11 was indeed a curtain raiser to another global war, and this time one with apocalyptic undertones. Worth noting, the ideological role of naturalization or what Thomson (1990) called reification, in which a scenario or retaliatory war is represented as the most natural consequence of 9/11 and other possible options of remedy marginalized and entirely swept aside. While this very frame served the crucial role of legitimizing the immediate reaction from the US and the subsequent war on terror, subsequent frames began imaging the terrorists as vermin, hence sanitizing the prospect of an outright war on terror.

**Good versus Evil: The Construction of 9/11 as a Cosmic Battle**

As the debris of what used to be the twin towers was slowly being carted away, and plumes of smoke still wafting lazily from the heap of metal, cement and dust, the newly elected President Bush, did not mince words, “today, our nation saw evil, the very worst of human nature” he mourned in a speech loaded with religious overtones. This marked the beginning of a series of statements from President Bush, a right wing Christian, which culminated in him terming the subsequent response from the US as a wider ‘crusade’ against the enemies of freedom. Moreover, the framing of the attacks as the work of evil ushered in a torrent of similar discourse from most of the world’s leaders. It was not long before the media took up this religious frame in the construction of news and the analysis of news. Soon after, the framing of 9/11 as an act that is evil found expression in the editorial pages of Kenya’s print media. For instance, in the cartoon
below the frame of 9/11 as a battle between Good and evil is fortified by drawing from a veritable cultural phenomenon; religion. The corporate meaning secreted by the fusion of the framing and reasoning devices in the cartoon suggest a conflict in which the supernatural is invoked. Worth noting, in a country with approximately 80% Christians, the metaphors probably resonated well with an interpretative community conversant with the connotative meanings evoked.

Symmetrically balanced on the top right corner of the pictorial frame, the two dominant framing devices in the cartoon are the feuding birds and the planets cast in outer space. Planet earth is foregrounded perhaps signifying its interlocked fate with the outcome of this cosmic war. The reasoning devices suggest a transcendental interpretation as the stretched heavens witness the fight of good versus evil. While the 9/11 terrorists claimed to be fighting on god’s behalf, likewise the fight against terror appears to tap on the inspiration of a transcendental force, which also taps on the platform of a just war. The casting of this war in outer space also adds an apocalyptic dimension to it. The cartoon draws on a Judeo Christian interpretation, where the dove symbolizes the essence of godliness and God’s presence—the very gentleness of the Holy Spirit. The olive branch on its beak is a conventional symbol of peace and comeliness. The vulture, one of the birds the forbidden under Biblical Old Testament Law as human food, is a common cultural symbol of evil in most of Africa. To a vast majority of Kenyans, the symbolism resonates well as the vulture is feared as an indexical sign of death and bad omen while the dove was appreciated and domesticated as a ‘friend of man’. The horned head of the vulture is an obvious exaggeration meant to accentuate the visual monstrosity. The thorny twig, deliberately hurled at the dove’s neck, apportions the blame on the vulture, which is seen as the unprovoked aggressor. It is not lost to the keen observer that black, often a sign symbolizing evil is contrasted to white, a sign embodied by the ‘good’ dove. The resulting syntagm reveals a binarism paired along oppositional structural categories of both evil and good (a mostly religious interpretation), the villain and the protagonist and the aggressor and peacemaker (a political-military interpretation).

In addition, an ideological meaning is suggested that sustains power relations of domination through legitimizing the option of an all out war against the identified enemy. Moreover, by invoking the divine, a moral legitimacy to execute broad and undefined action against the enemy is being appropriated since the villain is cast as equally fighting ‘good’, hence fighting God too. Mahmood Mamdani (2004) argues that the binarism of good and evil, which was extensively used after 9/11, contains ideological language which justifies the use of power and impunity. He argues that “if the struggle against (political) enemies is defined as a struggle against evil, it will turn into a holy
war. And in holy war, there can be no compromise” (Mamdani 257). Mamdani’s arguments reflect the initial uncompromising attitude that was framed in the media on how to engage with the alleged terrorists. However, while the pairing of good versus evil in the media is common in virtually all political, social and human interest stories, such binarism at the onset served to legitimize the war against terror as it cast the war against terrorism as a God sanctioned operation.

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Following Gramsci, a dominant ideology is effective when it is sufficiently absorptive and able to domesticate and incorporate other definitions of reality that also ensure its own legitimacy (Gitlin 2003). In other words, at a given time there is the possibility of a particular political, social or economic group to succeed in having its own version of reality become hegemonic. This hegemonic process is also visible in the mass media and more specifically editorial cartoons and the framing of terrorism. The frames revealed in the analysis of previous data indicate a more or less state centric ideology towards terrorism which largely coincided with similar discursive operations from the government, government officials like heads of states and much of the media. For instance, the frames that emerged from the analysis in the previous section indicate that 9/11 was framed as not just a local catastrophe, but a global calamity in which humanity, and not merely the United States, was affected. Secondly, soon after the attacks 9/11 was framed as an act of war that sought to rally a similar reaction. Thirdly, drawing upon a pool of religious values, the act was framed as a clash between good and evil. However, there were also frames that sought to challenge these commonly held assumptions that terrorism, (symbolized here by Osama and those thought to be behind 9/11) is simply the work of unprovoked aggressors, or the outcome of irrational minds meting out violence just for kicks. Equally contested are frames that illegitimized terror as an act that is inherently evil and devoid of sympathy and popular support. These frames emerged following a detailed focus on the biography of Osama and the mujahedeen and critical historical studies of the possible underlying motivations of the attacks. These discussions were complemented with a more contextual probe of the attacks that attempted to link the cold war history and earlier liberation struggles elsewhere, with the events of 9/11.

9/11 as Cold War’s Unfinished Business

As a critical examination of 9/11 continued, the framing of the attacks as the unfinished business of the cold war found space in the editorial cartoons at the time. The first such cartoon was published on 29th September, slightly over two weeks after the attacks. The editorial cartoon contains two key framing devices, the well known symbol and metonymy of the US political and State machinery, Uncle Sam. In the cartoon below, there are a few modifications to his dress because of the role he is playing. Cast as a graveside worker Uncle Sam is dressed in an apron and had apparently been raking the grave of what is described as “Cold War,” the other dominant framing device. The third significant framing device is a fearsome black arm ripping through the previously cemented grave inscribed with the lexical item ‘terrorism’ on its only visible part, the arm. This sudden vice grip on Uncle Sam’s left foot has stunned him to shock, sending his rake and his top hat midair. Although the binarism in the cartoon is unmistakable, the casting of terrorism as a variant of cold war paired opposite the US is clearly counter to the more hegemonic frames discussed in the previous pages.
At the denotative level there is deceptive neutrality to this binarism but on closer scrutiny, with another eye on other discursive environments, the reasoning devices frame the problem of terrorism stems from the lack of a proper closure to the cold war. In this sense, 9/11 is seen as the consequence of a poorly handled cold war past whose mutating vestiges has come to haunt the present in form of international terrorism. Specifically, the reasoning devices subtly attempt to situate the blame of 9/11 partly on the US by implying that a relationship exists between the attacks and the Cold war. Simply put, the reasoning devices suggest that since the US played a steering role in the cold war, they played a hand in creating the monster of terrorism.

This frame of 9/11 as the unfinished business of the cold war is equally the product of an ideological contest in which different social, political and economic groups seek to impress their worldview on the public. As a counter hegemonic frame, the meaning secreted equally appropriates the very same modes that hegemonic frames deploy. Moreover, while it is possible that an underlying relationship exists between the Cold war and the 9/11 attacks, the masterminds of the attacks did not consider it as one of their motivations for the attacks. Shortly before and after the attacks, Bin Laden cited the presence of US troops in Saudi Arabia, the unwavering support of the US for Israel, and sanctions against Iraq as motivations for the attacks. Furthermore, the roots of terrorism are complex and include such factors as increased poverty, a feeling of being rootless and alienated among hordes immigrant communities, increased radicalization, corruption and oppression, inequality among others. In this sense, one sees the ideological appropriation of a selected historical fact to justify a complex entity such as terrorism. An ideological mode of generalization is at work here where a singular fact is taken in isolation and generalized to understand a complex whole with an intention of undermining the other and empowering a particular interpretation. In this sense, based on the elaborated account, the 9/11 attacks are provide a rational platform in which responsibility is blurredly shared out between the terrorists and the US government with the result being that legitimacy for the attacks is granted, albeit in subtlety.

9/11 as Heroism
The construction of 9/11 as heroic began in the previous counter hegemonic frames that began to locate the cold war as the progenitor of current terrorism. Newspaper stories in Kenya began a biographical dig on Bin Laden. According to these reports, Osama’s support and eventual participation in the frontlines against the Russian forces in the late 70s and early 80s made him an instant hero upon his return to his native Saudi Arabia. This newly acquired status prompted him to become a leading opposition voice in the
vastly conservative and closed Saudi Kingdom. He was soon expelled following repeated calls for radical reform; expulsion of foreign troops in the Arabian Peninsula begins writing treatises against the Saudi regime. Shortly after, he declared a Holy War that spawned a series of deadly terror attacks that have claimed thousands of lives from Kenya, to Yemen, Madrid, New York, London and several more other places.

In the cartoon below published on November 26th 2001 in The Nation, a series of framing devices parade statesmen whose political trajectories have at different points subsumed the two seemingly incompatible labels of terrorist and hero. The bold lexical ‘Terrorist yesterday, Hero today’ in the context of 9/11 seems to invite us to critically examine previously held conceptions of the attackers. In spite of the dismissive comment of Osama being ‘Hero yesterday and Terrorist Today’ he still manages to acquire unprecedented recognition by being mentioned alongside these former ‘terrorists’ who are now considered heroes among their people. Nelson Mandela, one of the most celebrated political leaders, was in the US list of terror until July 2008. Sam Nujoma led a bloody campaign against the occupying South African forces in the then South West Africa to lead Namibia to independence. Similarly, Yasser Arafat, who later became Palestine president formed the PLO (Palestine Liberation Organization), left an equally controversial legacy. Most Arabs thought of him as hero who symbolized their national aspirations. However he was reviled by many Israelis who viewed him as a terrorist. Xanana Gusmao, the incumbent Prime minister of East Timor led a successful violent resistance against Indonesian occupation.

Most importantly, for Bin Laden to be named alongside such statesmen marks an important stride towards legitimacy as it reveals a clear attempt at extolling him, and by extension the 9/11 terror attacks. Whatever the final conclusion, he (Osama and the metonymic connotations) scores three fundamental points in as far as legitimacy is concerned. First, he is linked with heroism allowing the possible interpretations of 9/11 as a heroic act, and secondly he is mentioned alongside legitimate and democratically elected state presidents thus giving him almost if not equal stature. Finally, the actions of 9/11 are given a wider context of interpretation that allow the possibility of interpreting it as a worthy cause similar to those carried out by the likes of Mandela and Nujoma. Looked at corporately, the framing and reasoning devices coalesce and attempt to crystallize, albeit in a subtle and tentative manner, to an interpretation of 9/11 as potentially heroic act.

Figure 8

Reprinted by permission, 26th, November, 2001

This marks the beginning of bold attempts at contesting the previous hegemonic frames on 9/11. Indeed, the question broached by the ‘Lilliputian’ ‘hey, what of Osama’ and the
response ‘oh, him is…hero yesterday, terrorist today,’ is an initial ideological attempt at challenging a hegemonic and largely more dominant frame of Osama as villain. The reasoning devices prompt a moral evaluation that allows the reader to reevaluate the earlier frames of Bin Laden and the 9/11 events. Also, the structural connotational pairing of the hero and villain opposites shortly after 9/11 reveals that not all discursive clusters were in agreement of the previous hegemonic frames purveyed by the media about the event. Although Bin Laden was initially framed as evil and the unprovoked aggressor, and the 9/11 event framed as a senseless provocative act of war, the viewer is invited to flirt with alternative frames of Bin Laden as a hero, and the 9/11 as an event motivated by rational choices and well founded reasons. That said, the totality of the 4 signifiers (the terrorists turned heroes) inform us that there are two sides to the interpretation of 9/11, and that terrorism, just like beauty, may just be in the eyes of the beholder. Indeed, this frame of 9/11 as heroic was to gain full currency with the publication of the following editorial cartoon on the 8th of November. Osama bin Laden had now become a cult figure. The editorial cartoon was published following media reports that youth in sections of the country were donning shirts and clothing emblazoned with bin Laden’s portrait, meanwhile pictures of him were also being sold as posters and bumper stickers. In reflecting these developments, the cartoon below utilizes the caricaturists’ armoury to exaggerate the extent to which bin Laden’s name was commodified and incorporated into the popular culture; for instance Osama books, in hotel menus, portraits, T-shirts, Business names and even on matatus.  

Figure 9

These framing devices direct signification towards a radical reorganizing of perception of Osama and 9/11. Worth noting, these signifiers were the products of a rapidly changing discourse that began from a wider probe of the social and political context surrounding the 9/11 events a few weeks after the attacks in New York. As already explained, much had to do with the legacy of the cold war history and an increased scrutiny on US-Mujahedeen partnerships in the past, coupled with a fervent debate on celebrated personalities who had made a successful transition from most wanted terrorists to latter day exemplars of heroism and chivalry. In addition, there was a nascent but fast growing a sense of victimhood felt by Muslims globally shortly after the events. In Kenya, these sentiments had begun much earlier following the embassy bombings and the subsequent widespread feeling among the Muslim communities in the country that they were unfairly targeted for harassment, detentions and deportations. These factors may have prompted some pockets of admiration and sympathy to the perpetrators of 9/11. The connotational reading of the signified
message circulated by the signifiers (tactfully shown as being a cross sectional sentiment) extolling Osama through cultural artifacts is revealing, and marks the high noon of a sympathetic framing of bin Laden and his Al Qaida fraternity.

Conclusion

While sympathy towards bin Laden and the 9/11 attacks may have been present and even traceable, Seesemann (2005), who has done extensive work on 9/11 and its social implications in Kenya, points out that one should not be too quick to think of bin Laden as one whom Kenyan (especially Kenyan Muslims) would want to follow. According to him, bin Laden simply won the admiration of East African Muslims but not their sympathy. He simply symbolizes for East African Muslims resistance against the global political and economic hegemony of the United States. He argues that some may “admire his courage but do not condone his actions...they admire him as a pop icon but not as a holy Warrior” (Seesemann 3). While this is probably true, and equally a matter of extended debate outside the scope of this study, the media framing of the issue is significant. In elevating bin Laden to a pop icon, one to be admired in portraits and to be identified with, the distinctions between admiration and sympathy becomes exceedingly tenuous.

In summing up, the editorial cartoons in both The Standard and The Daily Nation three months after 9/11 reveal tensions and ambiguity in how they defined the event. In addition, it is evident that ideological contests manifest themselves even within editorial cartoons as several strands of interpretation seek to outdo each other in establishing or challenging a hegemonic interpretation of 9/11 in Kenya. Finally, in the binarism that is pervasive in virtually all the editorial cartoons shown, some differences emerge which require extended mention. In the first few days after the attacks, when the emotions and the horrors of 9/11 were very fresh, the event was framed as evil, and the perpetrators (alleged terrorists) were out rightly denied legitimacy and recognition worthy of combatants. However, after the dust had settled, allowing for wider latitude of perspective and interpretation, the 9/11 attacks were variously seen as the aftermath of proxy wars in the cold war era, thus lifting off a sizeable chunk of blame from the perpetrators. Meanwhile, legitimacy to the attack began to emerge, as further media framing questioned US foreign policy in a wider frame which appeared to cast the ‘terrorists’ as possible heroes and emancipators. In short, the seemingly unending search for an agreed and stable definition of terrorism was certainly not settled in the editorial pages in Kenya’s newspapers.

NOTES

1 I do not argue that editorial cartoons have a special or unique impact on public opinion; rather my argument is that editorial cartoons reflect the dominant views prevalent among members of the public at a particular time on a given issue. Also, it is possible that editorial cartoons represent issues incongruent with perceptions of sections of the public just as it is possible for them (unlike commentaries), especially when viewed longitudinally, to represent potentially contradictory positions, but which also represent the varied interests or different opinions held by members of the public. This attribute makes them to be especially prone to ideological contests meant to empower or disempower the position of particular groups, class, or interest in the construction of meaning.

2 According Laqueur (2003), new terrorism is mostly religious, motivated by abstract goals and uses violence indiscriminately. Old terrorism on the other hand has clear goals, uses violence less discriminately and is rarely ideologically driven by religion. Examples are the struggles by ‘terror’ groups for independence in colonial Africa.

3 For details see http://www.history.com/topics/international-reaction-to-9-11

4 http://www.americanrhetoric.com/speeches/gwbush911addressatthenation.htm

5 This is according to the latest census results released in the year 2010. For details see http://www.knbs.or.ke/, the Kenya Bureau of statistics website.
Matatu is the name given to Kenya’s notorious urban public transport. The matatu are more than simply means of transport but are also a source of entertainment (sometimes called disco on wheels). Further, they act as a near accurate picture of the prevailing trends in popular culture such as music, fashion, sports and even politics. As such, there is competition among the matatu to have the most recognizable yet popular epithets or label and a corresponding portrait of a popular actor, musician or any other cult figure.

**Works Cited**


