So, What is Terrorism? How Editorial Cartoons Framed the Nairobi Embassy Terror Attacks

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Abstract
Following the 9/11 terror attacks in the United States, terrorism has dominated international politics and media coverage globally. However, long before this attack, terrorism had invaded the social and political space and brought with it unique challenges to media practitioners. At the definitional level, terrorism is still a contested and ambiguous concept. This study examines how editorial cartoons in Kenya’s leading papers framed the 7 August embassy attacks in Nairobi, considered a prelude to the more devastating 9/11 attacks. Using the constructivist approach to framing, this study reveals that while these definitional issues continue to prevail, media frames reveal that a cultural and contextual understanding of terrorism exist both in alignment and opposition to the so-called official/international definitions.

Key Terms: Terrorism, media framing, culture, cartoons, constructivist approach.

Résumé
Le terrorisme a généralement dominé la politique internationale et les médias depuis les attaques terroristes du 11 septembre aux Etats Unis. Cependant, bien avant cette attaque, le terrorisme s’est emparé de l’espace social et politique, posant ainsi un défi unique aux professionnels des médias. Au niveau de la définition, le terrorisme est encore un concept contesté et ambiguë. Cet article analyse la façon dont les bandes dessinées des journaux les plus populaires au Kenya ont appréhendé les attaques sur l’ambassade américaine du 7 août à Nairobi considérées comme une prélude aux attaques dévastatrices du 11 septembre. Par le biais d’une approche constructiviste à la couverture médiatique, cette étude révèle que même si ces questions de définition demeurent, les contextuelles du terrorisme existe aussi bien en parallèle comme en opposition aux soi-disant définitions officielles ou internationales.

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Introduction

...what one calls things matters. There are few neutral terms in politics, because political language affects the perceptions of protagonists and audiences, and such effect acquires a greater urgency in the drama of terrorism. Similarly, the meanings of the terms change to fit a changing context (Crenshaw 1995:7).

Terrorist incidents have more than doubled in the past twenty years, with probably the most significant event being the 11 September 2001 attacks in New York and Washington. Indeed, terrorism remains one of the most pressing political problems the contemporary world faces. Although a consistent staple in the news media today, imprecision still characterises the attempt to define terrorism. As Whittaker (2001:1) argues, 'its many sidedness, inexpensive lethality and unpredictability', combined with its 'apparent mindlessness to firm faith and rational calculation' make formulating a precise definition elusive. In describing a terrorist, nouns offered reveal stark contradictions ranging from villain, hero, ruthless criminal, to admired trailblazer. A few even make the transition from hunted insurgent to state president. Following the taking of hostages by an Arab group in Munich in 1972, there was little doubt in the opinion of the Voice of the Arabs, broadcasting for the Egyptian government, who the terrorists were. Martin (1985) in his study of the media's role in terrorism quotes a news anchor as saying:

The Federal German Government rejects terrorism. We also reject it. The difference between us is that terrorism, in its view, is what the fedayeen carry out to draw the attention of the world to a cause that has not enjoyed any practical support so far. We, on the other hand, consider that the situation cannot be dealt with except at the source, that is, by putting an end to Israeli terrorism.

In her book, Packaging Terrorism, Moeller (2009) recounts how four days after the London underground and bus bombings on 7 July 2005 the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) re-edited its coverage of the attacks to avoid labelling the perpetrators as terrorists. Editors changed the word 'terrorists' in archived website stories to the more 'neutral' term 'bombers'. In addition, in further coverage of terrorists' activities across BBC's TV, radio and online news, reporters and presenters began to use the word 'bombers' to refer to the attackers. Naturally, BBC's attempt at maintaining political correctness was met with outrage across the globe, especially in Britain itself. Moeller (2009) argues that terrorism remains hard to define because 'terrorism' and 'terrorist', as individual words, rarely
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have any 'real meaning', saying they are instead more of political epithets than substantive concepts, often meant to construct and to delineate 'otherness'.

Today, mainstream international media is more cautious to label the acts of a group or individual as terrorist. For instance, the giant news agency, Reuters, had to alter its editorial policy with regard to the term terrorism, a move that spawned heated debate among media consumers. In response to hostile questions to the editor-in-chief's blog in the summer of 2007, Sean Maguire, acting editor for politics and general news, made public the guidelines in Reuters' Internal Handbook of Standards:

Terrorism – we may refer without attribution to terrorism and counter-terrorism in general but do not refer to specific events as terrorism. Nor do we use the word terrorist without attribution to qualify specific individuals, groups or events. Terrorism and terrorist must be retained when quoting someone in direct speech. When quoting someone in direct speech, care must be taken with sentence structure to ensure it is entirely clear that they are the source's words and not a Reuter's label…Reuters does not label or characterize the subjects of news stories. We aim to report objectively their actions, identity and background. We aim for a dispassionate use of language so that individuals, organizations and government can make their own judgment on the basis of facts. Seek to use more specific terms like 'bomber' or 'bombing', 'hijacker' or 'hijacking', 'attacker' or 'attacks'…etc. It is particularly important not to make unattributed use of the words terrorism and terrorist in national and territorial conflicts to avoid using those terms in such a context.

Speaking to the media after the Beslan attack, in September 2004, Russian President Putin called for an international definition of terrorism, which he hoped would help weed out what he called 'double standards' (Simons 2000):

We believe that there should be not only the same definition of terrorism for everybody but we should also mean the same things when we talk about it. Bin Laden has twice offered a truce to Europe in exchange for withdrawal of troops from Iraq, but nobody has entered into negotiations with him, because the methods and means he chooses make it impossible to maintain dialogue with him.¹

I wonder if Putin knew before making that statement that, for seventeen years, the United Nations tried to come up with a universally accepted definition of terrorism but failed. Schmid and Jongman recorded 109 different definitions in a survey in the mid-1980s, meaning that a more recent study would probably double the number. However, the difficulty in defining terrorism seems to arise from several factors, among which are:
the connotations of the label itself and the attendant ramifications, the contradictory understanding of the word in human history, and, finally, vagaries of internal and international forces with regard to the nation state. Whittaker (2001) argues that terrorism, as used today, is a pejorative term with intrinsic negative connotations and is generally applied to one's enemies and opponents, or to those with whom one disagrees and would otherwise prefer to ignore. Jenkins (2001) posits that what is now called terrorism seems to depend on one's point of view. Use of the term implies a moral judgment; and if one party can successfully attach the label terrorist to its opponent, then it has indirectly persuaded others to adopt its moral viewpoint.

Hence, the decision to label one a terrorist becomes almost unavoidably subjective, depending largely on whether one sympathizes with or opposes the person/group/cause concerned. If, for instance, one identifies with the victim, then the act is terrorism. If, however, one identifies with the perpetrator, the violent act is regarded in a more sympathetic if not positive (or at the worst an ambivalent) light; so, it is not terrorism. When asked what he thought of Osama Bin Laden just shortly after the 11 September simultaneous attacks, Sheikh Ali Shee, the then head of the Islamic preachers in Kenya did not mince words: 'He is a hero' (Seeseman 2005). Three years earlier, that is, in 1998 when Bin Laden was accused of the embassy bombings in Nairobi, a group led by Ali Shee himself was quick to condemn the attacks as the work of deluded criminals. In this case, the understanding of terrorism changed with the geographical shift of the terror attacks. Jenkins (2001) had said it well: the definition of terrorism seems to depend on one's point of view – it is what the bad guys do.

In addition, terrorism has partly become controversial because of how it is used to define and identify contemporary political conflicts. In this sense, the label acts not only descriptively but has an in-built prescriptive connotation. In other words, labels may also indicate a preferred solution. Labelling a person or group as terrorist implies engaging with them as one does with terrorists. As Whittaker (2001) notes, calling adversaries 'terrorists' is a way of depicting them as fanatic and irrational so as to foreclose the possibility of compromise. Just as beauty, terrorism and who is a terrorist is very much in the eye of the beholder. Also, most governments have had little interest in providing a non-polemical definition of terrorism; instead, they engage more in generalisations and imprecise definitions. As Moeller (2009) argues, their definitions leave out state actors because such definitions may subsume the state itself, especially when the state
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executes the moral equivalent of terrorism, for which extremely few states are without guilt. Many international analysts thus loath to lump 'state terrorism', which they believe is generally driven by foreign policy concerns, together with the terrorism conducted by 'non-state' groups that have entirely different motivations.

In Kenya, part of the difficulty in defining terrorism has to do with the revolutionary phase the country went through to attain independence. Kenya partly owes its 1963 independence from Britain to the 'terror' of the ethno-nationalist Mau Mau Movement. It is noteworthy that in February 2005, Kenyans who fought in the Mau Mau rebellion initiated legal proceedings against the British government for alleged human rights violations. As Hubschle (2006) observes, their application once again demonstrated the fluidity of the concept of terrorism. While the colonial government referred to them as terrorists, the Kenyan Mau Mau trust in response referred to the British colonialists as terrorists. Appropriately, the dossier carries the chilling title, 'Kenya: White Terror'.

As a result, the definition of who a terrorist is equally took to ambiguity when most of those accused of leading these so-called 'terror' groups ended up as heads of state and heroes of the newly independent states. In Kenya, Jomo Kenyatta became president after years of detention following charges of leading the Mau Mau. The most famous however is Nelson Mandela, a branded terrorist turned statesman and one of the most celebrated personalities in the world today, whose African National Congress (ANC) still rules South Africa despite being listed as a terrorist organisation until very recently.3

In most studies of terrorism, therefore, researchers have had to find a working definition for the term in order to arrive at meaningful conclusions. As earlier observed in the introduction, journalists reporting on terrorism today have to wrestle, not only with the conundrum of defining a 'terror' situation but also in reporting 'terrorism' accurately without appearing to label the actors as terrorists. In reporting and representing terror, journalists not only focus on the event or the actors but also appropriate the repertoire of frames within their culture in order to frame terrorism. In a sense, whether conscious or unconscious of the process, journalists engage not only in defining terrorism but also in representing how a particular society defines or understands terrorism and terrorists. This article uses the term 'understand' to indicate the possible ways in which people of a particular cultural group, in this case Kenyans, define terrorism. It goes without saying that whether scholars and experts reach agreement on the definition of terrorism or not, acts of terror exist and will still
continue to receive wide media coverage. In so doing, a definition based on the journalist’s socio-cultural experience is inevitably invoked. It is this cultural understanding of terror within Kenya that this article seeks to reformulate. To achieve this, the study undertakes a framing analysis to establish how terrorism is conceived and framed in editorial cartoons.

Danjoux (2005) argues that the satirical nature of cartoons makes them effective conveyers of group paranoia and revealers of deep-seated suspicion and public mood that underpin conflict. It is, therefore, not surprising that the fears, aspirations and prejudices of a people are clearly revealed in the content of their editorial cartoons. In this sense, it represents a significant portion of the cultural perspective of a given issue in the public domain. Also, cartoons portray a rare ability to sum up the public’s impression and opinion of a conflictual situation by a simple reductionism of ‘good’ or ‘evil’. Not only is the visual metaphor and caricature effective in explaining complicated political situations, it is also effective in conveying messages too sensitive (politically or socially) to be voiced in conventional discourse or printed in prose. Furthermore, its strength appears to surpass that of the written editorial for the simple reason that it is a picture. It communicates more surely with the emotions of the reader, in a sense, because it speaks visually in a tongue that knows no barrier of language or education. In Kenya, editorial cartoons have always played a pivotal role in conveying both current and topical events. Sadly, on the backdrop of an expanding media growth, Kenya has been on the receiving end of some of the most vicious terror attacks on the African continent.

**Terrorism in Kenya**

Terrorism made an inglorious entry into Kenya, on 7 August 1998 when two men, allegedly acting on behalf of terror mastermind Osama bin Laden, packed a 2000-pound bomb behind a truck, following an all-night assembling of the bomb at a posh Nairobi estate. The consignment was to be driven to the basement of the United States embassy that was then located in the centre of Nairobi and then detonate it. The men, of Arabic descent and ‘purporting to be acting on God’s behalf’ were Muslims. After driving through the difficult Nairobi traffic, they were forced to stop at the embassy’s gate for routine security checks. Claiming they had an important appointment with embassy officials, the two somehow got into a fierce altercation with the security officials at the gates. Panicking, and their patience wearing thin, one of the terrorist who had already disembarked from the truck pulled out a pistol, shouting: ‘Allahu akbar’ (God is great).
He fired shots at the security man before hurling a hand grenade inside the basement. His equally agitated compatriot hurriedly stepped on the gas, ramming through the gates and detonating the massive bomb just several meters from the intended spot – the US embassy basement. Still, the damage was incredible. The attack claimed over 250 lives and over 3,000 sustained serious injuries. The neighbouring Ufundi Cooperative, an eight-storied building was reduced to a pile of rubble. The US embassy itself was badly damaged and was later brought down. One of the terrorists survived the supposedly suicide mission and was later arrested when he sought treatment at a local hospital. This event marked a turning point for Kenyans because, for most, it was the first time they would be coming face-to-face with what has become known as 'international terrorism'.

Although not the first terror attack to happen in Kenya and also not the last, the 7 August attacks were the most horrific in the country's history. Much earlier in the late 1970s, Palestinian hostage takers demanding the release of Palestinian prisoners hijacked a jetliner full of Israelis. Having already found favour with the then Ugandan dictator Idi Amin Dada, the hostage takers landed the plane in Entebbe, Uganda. Shortly after, with the logistical help of the Kenyan government, Israeli commandos staged a covert raid and rescued virtually all the hostages. This act of perceived complicity by the Kenyan government inspired a terror attack in the heart of Nairobi, this time targeting the Israeli-owned Norfolk hotel. About sixteen people lost their lives in arguably the first ever 'international terror' attack on Kenyan soil.

In 2002, international 'terrorism' yet again asserted its presence in the region. In coordinated attacks, two men drove a truck laden with explosives on to the reception area of Paradise Hotel; a popular Israeli-owned hotel, while a second pair with shoulder guided missiles attempted to pull down an Israeli jetliner carrying over 250 passengers taking off from Mombasa International Airport. While the latter attack missed the intended target by a whisker, the former claimed about 14 lives and injured several more. Once again, terrorists espousing politico-religious ideologies claimed responsibility.6 Needless to say, when terrorists attacked New York and those suspected to have masterminded the attacks were linked to the Nairobi attacks, Kenya stepped up its own local efforts in the ‘war against terror’, a government policy that included measures ranging from legislative, logistical and political support for the fight against international terrorism.

One of the key issues that re-emerged from these events in Kenya and the United States shortly after 9/11 was the role and effects of mass media coverage on terrorism (Moellar 2009; Norris et al. 2003). Most of
the media debate on terrorism has focused on the perceived symbiotic relationship between the act and the actor(s), where the media consciously or unconsciously convey terror acts as naturally newsworthy whereas terrorists covet this media attention as a means to legitimise their actions, (Norris et al. 2003; Altheide 2006). Media coverage in Kenya came under attack from sections of the public for the way in which they framed the suspected masterminds of the attack, a framing which some said largely emphasised prejudice and stoked unwarranted tensions (Ngunjiri 1998). However, the most scathing attack was directed at a series of editorial cartoons appearing in the press, which ‘framed’ the perpetrators as adherents and espousers of Islam (Ngunjiri 1998; Daily Nation 1998; Achieng 1998). But how does framing work in the media? This article argues that journalists, including cartoonists, appropriated cultural elements that resonated with their audiences in reporting and analysing the 7 August attacks. In so doing, framing was activated.

The Framing Paradigm

The sociologist Erving Goffman (1974) was among the first scholars to theorise on frames and framing. He argued that 'definitions of a situation are built up in accordance with principles of organisations which govern events – at least social ones – and our subjective involvement in them' (Goffman 1974:10). This, he called a frame. It is this frame, he argued, 'which allows its user to locate, perceive, identify and label a seemingly infinite number of concrete occurrences' (21). For Goffman, this was mostly an unconscious process of organising experience. Later, Tuchman (1978) and Gitlin (1980) introduced framing into communication research. Gamson and Mogdigliani (1989:3) consider frames to be 'interpretive packages' that give meaning to an issue. At the core of this package is a central organising idea, or frame, for making sense of relevant events, suggesting what is at issue'. Framing, therefore, emerges as salient in communication: in other words, where some elements of a topic are emphasised above others so as to provide a way to understand an event or issue. In addition, Cappela and Jamieson (1997:47) add that ‘frames activate knowledge, stimulate “stocks” of cultural morals and values, and contexts’. In so doing, Entman (1993) argues that frames in a communication text function to define, diagnose, moralise and prescribe. Frustrated by the omnipresence of framing as a concept across the social sciences, and yet an absence of a general statement of framing theory that reveals exactly how frames manifest or become embedded
within a text, and how framing influences users of communicative texts, Entman (1993) provided one of the most universally accepted definition of framing in media studies. He began by suggesting that framing involves selection and salience. Unlike Goffman, Entman views framing as a deliberate and conscious process in communication. ‘To frame’, argues Entman: is to select some aspects of a perceived reality and make 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’ (1993:52).

Specifically, Entman (1993) expounds, framing functions to define a problem by determining what a causal agent is doing with what costs and benefits, usually measured in terms common to cultural values. Secondly, frames diagnose causes – by identifying the forces creating the problem; they also make moral judgments through evaluating causal agents and their effects; and suggest remedies; which manifest by offering and justifying specific or general treatments for the problems and predict their likely effects. In one of his most recent published articles on the subject, Entman (2007) defines the framing process in a way that privileges the communicator with broad influence:

We can define framing as the process of culling a few elements of perceived reality and assembling a narrative that highlights connections among them to promote a particular interpretation. Fully developed frames typically perform four functions: problem definition, causal analysis, moral judgment and remedy promotion (Entman 2007:164).

In his article 'News Framing as Multiparadigmatic', Temple University scholar Paul D'Angelo (2002) provides a coherent argument of what can be conceived as a triadic approach to the study of frames. While the three approaches are not exclusive of each other and, more often than not, appropriate perspectives from each other, ultimately one particular paradigm does seem to dominate any particular study. The result of his analysis summarises the whole body of framing research literature into a simple and intelligible study. The first paradigm, Cognition, draws from the work of psychologists working on how individuals interpret information from the media sources and how they impact an individual’s ‘train of thoughts’. The second is the critical paradigm. Here, scholars within this paradigm draw influence from thinkers such as Hegel, Marx and Freud, and later the Frankfurt School fraternity. The core argument of the critical paradigm is that frames are a consequence of newsgathering routines by which journalists convey information about issues and events from the perspectives
of values held by the political and economic elite (D’Angelo 2002:876).
The constructionist paradigm comprises scholars who argue that journalists
are information processors who create 'interpretative packages' of the
positions of politically invested 'sponsors' (e.g. sources) in order to both
reflect and add to the 'issue culture' of the topic (D’Angelo 2002:877).

Accordingly, within the first three possible areas of the communication
process (communicator, text and receiver) culture is implied (Entman 1993).
In fact, a linear reading of this process is deceptive, since culture perme-
ates and exists in one way or another in the three locations of the framing
process. This study looks at the text (editorial cartoons) and the culture
(which includes the context, in this case Kenya, but within a particular
time and a specific socio-political context). The intent is to get to the core
frame, and from this reconstruct a context and time-bound understanding
of terrorism. In the light of this, a constructivist approach was considered
more appropriate in this endeavour.

Culture, Hall (1997) argues, is the primary base, from which knowl-
edge is constituted, and meaning and comprehension of the outside world
made. Culture refers to an organised set of beliefs, codes, myths, stere-
otypes, values, norms, frames, and so forth, that are shared in the collec-
that since the individual is not able to change these persistent cultural
phenomena, then it follows that this so-called repertoire of frames is con-
ceptually situated outside of the individual. Editorial cartoons, on the other
hand, are one way in which culture is expressed. In other words, they are
an essential component of discerning the culture of a people, especially
because they draw upon easily identifiable and shared symbols, myth stere-
otypes and metaphors that resonate within a given 'cultural' group.

Following the ideas of Gamson and Lasch (1983), each frame appear-
ing in a particular text can be thought to be representing a 'frame pack-
age'. This frame package itself is a cluster of coherent and complemen-
tary devices that serve as an identity kit for a frame. As Gamson and
Stuart (1992) argue, the package offers a number of different condensing
symbols that suggest the core frame. In other words, it is the package
that contains all indicators or framing devices by which the frame can be
identified. The work of the frame analyst in this case is to extract and
identify the contents of the frame package and to map out their relation-
ships. As a cluster, the frame package is composed of three parts: the
manifest framing devices, the manifest or latent reasoning devices, and an
implicit cultural phenomenon that displays the package as a whole (van
Gorp 2007). At the core of the package, holding the cluster together, lies
the frame, defined by Gamson and Modigliani as 'the central organizing idea…for making sense of relevant events and suggesting what is at issue' (Gamson and Modigliani 1989:3). These devices will include 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' (1992:60). Secondly, the package 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), namely, to define a problem, assign responsibility, pass a moral judgment and suggest possible solutions. 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 2007:64). Simply put, when the interaction between the reader and the framing devices in the text enable him to define the problem in the text, or to apportion blame (responsibility), or to situate a moral binarism, or to consider a preferred solution, then a reasoning device is active. The following diagram uses a hypothetical cultural phenomenon within an editorial cartoon to illustrate how framing within the constructivist paradigm may function in Kenya's social space:
Method

This study focuses on the media coverage following the 7 August 1998 embassy attacks in Nairobi. The primary objective of the study is to find out how terrorism as a phenomenon is understood in Kenya by investigating the frames in the editorial cartoons appearing in the two leading dailies in the country in the month of August. Thereafter, the study attempts to reconstitute a context-specific definition of terrorism based on the reformulation of the uncovered frames. While a definition of terrorism remains elusive, this study does not envisage settling the debate on the definition, but sees itself as exposing the bones from which subsequent debate on terror is fleshed out, not only locally but even on a broader, international scale. Also, this study is alive to the fact that in being context-specific and time-bound, it is possible that the framing and understanding of terrorism and terrorist has changed slightly with the passage of time. However, this does not imply that the average perception of terrorism today is several times removed from the frames uncovered here. Observed longitudinally, frames by their nature actually change very little, even when covering a single issue (van Gorp 2005).

Specifically, a total of five cartoons were analysed that appeared in the two leading papers in the country, The Daily Nation, also called The Nation, and The Standard. The two were chosen because of their dominance in terms of circulation and their longevity in Kenya's media space. The specific contents were studied by reconstituting the frame packages on the basis of the framing devices in the texts with a cultural phenomenon as a central idea, and the manifest reasoning devices (van Gorp 2007; Gamson and Stuart 1992). Considering the complex nature of frames, an interpretive, qualitative method is commonly used. Also, both the inductive and deductive approaches are used at different stages of the research. In the first stage, two coders familiar with the Kenyan social cultural space analysed the cartoons and randomly wrote down at least three adjectives or nouns that came to mind upon exposure to the cartoons. The nouns were later interrelated by the researcher to extract the extent to which a correlation exists (the equivalent of inter coder reliability). The coder reliability was more than 80 per cent when correlated. The emergent words were assumed to be suggestive of the 'core frame' and, as such, were considered to be mostly reasoning devices, but could also be framing devices. Secondly, the deductive phase involved classifying these devices into the emergent frames suggested by the reasoning and framing devices. While it was expected that the coders would mostly provide framing devices, in a few instances the core frame was suggested. Thereafter,
the researcher used the core frames to make deductions on the nature and character of terrorism as understood within a specific time (August 1998) and cultural space (Kenya). Afterwards, a framing matrix was constructed that summarised the findings of the study (see Appendix).

**Editorial Cartoons and Framing of the 1998 Terror Attacks**

After the attack in August 1998, the next dailies were saturated with stories and gory pictures of grievous loss and widespread destruction. As expected, the newspapers were eager to meet the public's desire to find out what happened and contain the anxiety surrounding the attack. Afterwards, as expected, frames emphasising responsibility emerged to answer the 'who' and the 'why' questions (McQuail 2004). Editorial cartoons were more scathing, eschewing the political correctness widespread in editorials and other textual materials, and emerged as vehicles through which the dominant cultural tropes were transmuted. On 11 August 1998, only three days after the embassy bombing, the cartoon below appeared on the editorial page of *The Standard*.

![Cartoon Image](image-url)

The cartoon attempts to show the forces and people behind the August attacks in Nairobi, as the artist gives prominence to the 'enemy'. From the outset, the bold inscription 'in the name of god...indeed!' gives us hints of a religious motivation to the attacks. Dressed in a deathly black flowing gown with the word terrorism inscribed on it, the hooded (most probably skeletal) figure stands erect gazing at the smouldering buildings and armed with a fearsome blade. The hooded figure is a common metaphor in the
Kenyan media and can be considered a veritable cultural icon commonly used as a symbol of death. In the past, it has been used to symbolise the dreaded AIDS disease or any other pandemic that threatens human life. The dominant framing devices manifesting are the two lexical phrases, the 'terrorist' hiding behind the hooded silhouette and the burning structures on the margins of the text. The latent and manifest reasoning devices suggest a problem; the terrorist attack (the burning structure) caused by people espousing religious motivations, which are moralised as evil and inspired by malevolent forces. The lexical elements 'in the name of god indeed' and 'makes me wonder if it is the same god I know' by the 'Lilliputian' seem to question the nature and rectitude of the faith espoused. Indeed, this cartoon marks the beginning, although in subtlety, of the TERROR IS ISLAMIC frame. Even today, the social and cultural profile in Kenya may make such framing possible if other factors of religious sensitivity are kept constant. The population of Kenya is mostly Christian, represented by about 80 per cent of the population and a Muslim minority of 10 per cent (GOK Census Report 2009); while the two have coexisted peacefully save for occasional differences, a lot of tension and mutual suspicion has grown following the embassy attacks. The next day, on 12 August 1998, perhaps disturbed by the inability to explicitly identify the kind of deity he was talking about, the editorial cartoonist at The Standard was more cutting and blunt. The piece provided evidence that the cartoonist has the profound latitude to communicate in a way that few, if any, journalistic writing can achieve.
The cartoon contains three dominant framing devices: it shows a camel laden with explosives standing nonchalantly in the scorching sun next to a man of 'Arabic extraction' who appears deeply engrossed in petitioning 'god' for help to kill and maim (the innocent). The epithet of terror etched in the words 'terrorist camp' and a bemused lilliputian completes the picture. In Kenya, the camel is used mostly by residents of the Northern Province, the vast majority of whom are Muslims. The man, kneeling on a Persian mat is suggestive of Islamic form of prayer and the epithet 'terrorist' confirms the relationship between terror and Islam. Consequently, these devices secrete predictable reasoning devices that suggest that the problem is terrorism, and the cause is Islam, whose morality is illegitimate as it targets 'innocent women and children.' The core frame ‘Terror is Islamic’ is quite obvious here. Needless to say, the cartoon elicited sharp reactions from Muslims in Kenya. Sheikh Ali Shee, the then head of Islamic preachers in Kenya had this to say about the cartoon; 'The media have already tried and found Islam as the cause of the car bomb blast… without taking into consideration the implications of such insinuations', Ngunjiri (1998). SUPKEM (Supreme Council of Kenyan Muslims) added that:

even before the identities of the terrorist and their motives have been determined by local and international investigators now working on the case, there have been concerted efforts by some sections of the mass media to make it look as if Islam was to blame for the unfortunate event (Ngunjiri 1998).

In the same article cited above, Muslims were reportedly enraged following the then President Daniel arap Moi’s televised remark shortly after the bombing that Christians would not do such a thing. The editorial cartoon, it appears, merely captured in symbolic form the dominant discourses at the time and the unuttered thoughts among sections of Kenyans. Parallel to the uproar from Muslims, there were a series of articles written by both Muslims and non-Muslims that the attacks were isolated events and should be understood as crime, not dogma. However, such notions of relating Islam with terror are not baseless either. Virtually all experiences that Kenyans have had with terrorism, as shown earlier in this article, involved a Muslim, or someone espousing Islamic motivations playing a central role in the planning and execution of terrorism. Still, the media, and especially the editorial cartoons, began mellowing their content with regard to this frame and resorted to more abstract metaphors and little lexicon elements for the frame ‘Terror is Islamic’. The immediate result was the use of a more non-controversial frame, but one with a silent, subtle and less overt pairing. The ‘Terrorism is Evil’ frame emerged as a much more politically
and ideologically sensitive frame; one that scarcely stoked religious passions in the country. While the frame may be thought to have emerged as a result of near agreement by most stakeholders (sponsors, media owners, gatekeepers, religious groups, state and non-state actors) that terrorism is evil, it is equally possible that the frame is a watered down version of the Terrorism is Islamic frame. This is a possibility, considering that the two leading cartoonists are themselves Christians.

Apart from its political correctness, the ‘Terrorism is Evil’ frame was stable and has not changed in spite of the vicissitudes of terror and the ongoing war against terror. Borrowing the familiar cultural symbol of death (as earlier indicated, the hooded skeleton apparition armed with a pick axe was extensively used in Kenya in the HIV&AIDS campaigns to communicate the horrors and stigma of the dreaded disease, and by all indications, it was successful). The Standard published the cartoon below on its editorial page, showing two adversaries running after each other in what is described as a ‘vicious cycle’. The United States government is leading efforts to confront global terror and has been on the receiving end of some of the worst attacks in recent times and the cartoon below seems to suggest this. The cartoon contains four key framing devices: the deathly apparition (itself a cultural symbol) is juxtaposed with Uncle Sam, a symbol of the United States carrying connotations of US global power and its ‘big brother’ role in international politics and affairs. While the lexical framing device ‘the vicious cycle continues’ ridicules the unconventionality of the war against terrorism, the second lexical devices, ‘where is this devil’ constructs the pairing of good and evil. Here, the oppositional pairing suggests a black and white scenario in which terrorism is an inherently evil phenomenon and the US, the protagonist, leading the forces of good.

Corporately, all these devices prompt and direct attention to the core frame of ‘Terrorism is Evil’. To reach this frame, the manifest and latent reasoning devices in the frame package moralises terror as cunningly evil (attacking surreptitiously from the backside) and suggests a more versatile US response as the solution to this evil. Indeed, the US war on terror efforts in Kenya and the Horn of Africa at large gained significant impetus after the 7 August bombings. For instance, US–Kenyan counter-terrorism took centre stage and, from this cooperation, the following were realised: establishment of the National Security Intelligence Service with support from the US Anti-Terrorism Assistance (ATA) Program; creation of the Anti-Terrorism Police Unit (ATPU) in1998, a Joint Terrorism Task Force (JTTF) and the National Counter-Terrorism Center (NCTC) in 2003 (Omanga 2010).
All the three cartoons analysed are from *The Standard*, a largely Christian-owned, left-wing private newspaper. *The Nation*, equally privately owned, is mostly right-wing. Although owned by the Aga Khan, a Muslim, it is run mostly by Christians. Strictly speaking, newspapers in Kenya are rarely looked at in terms of their religious ownership because people believe the religious orientations of the owners have limited influence on newspaper content. However, it is unlikely that the cartoon of a man kneeling in prayer asking God for help in executing a terror attack would appear in the *Daily Nation*. Indeed, *The Nation* partly went along with the ‘Terrorism is Evil’ frame, and shortly after appropriated a new frame, ‘Terrorism is Unlawful to emphasise the illegitimacy of terror. A day after the 7 August bombing, the following cartoon was published in *The Nation*. 
Worth noting, the text had only few (and latent) reasoning devices, suggesting a shyness in attributing responsibility or proffering a solution. On the other hand, as has been suggested by some scholars (Graber 1980; Xigen 2007), the dominant frame shortly after a newsworthy event as a terror attack tends to be simply descriptive; much more in line with the media’s surveillance role. The framing devices are the lexical item ‘Black Friday’, the silhouetted hooded apparition, and the mangled bodies in its wake. The ‘Black Friday’ suggested here is not the merry making season associated with the start of the Christmas season in the global north, but is more context specific to the Kenyan social and cultural space. The attacks were carried out on a Friday morning in August, a month that is widely believed to be Kenya’s ‘foredoomed’ season.13 The reasoning devices activated seem to emphasise the problem in a descriptive way; that a terror attack has claimed tens of lives in the city, but the hooded figure, now becoming almost ubiquitous, suggests malevolent forces to be the cause of this senseless killings. The overall frame package sediments to build up the ‘Terrorism is Evil’ as the core frame. Unlike the previous cartoon in The Standard, this one did not have an explicit ‘good’ but suggested an implicit good, ‘we’.

Like the definition provided by the United Nations, the US Federal Bureau of Investigations (FBI) and the Kenyan government,14 the idea of terrorism as an unlawful act is emphasised in the cartoon below. Drawn from The Daily Nation, it represents a more neutral position to terror. This construction leads to an equally less passionate way of defining terror in Kenya as it emphasises the criminality perspective of the act, and not the political or ideological perspectives, which inevitably become controversial.
Among its manifest framing devices, the cartoon contains a blacked out man holding a smoking gun, and an equally smoking head, presented metaphorically as a bomb. A gigantic hand, inscribed with the words 'the law' grabs the man by the waist as if to hoist him. The image of an imminent arrest is projected. In Kenya, like in many other societies, grabbing somebody from the back of the waist, so as to prompt in the culprit an almost mid-air toe walk suggests an arrest by a law enforcement officer. While the text lacks reasoning devices suggesting causal and moral attributes, the legal institutions are framed as a treatment option for terrorism. The core theme generated in this package yields the ‘Terrorism is Unlawful’ interpretative frame, and contrary to suggestions that media offer terrorists legitimacy through coverage (Moeller 2009; Norris et al. 2003; Nacos 2007), this editorial cartoon emphasises the illegitimacy of terrorism. The ‘Terrorism is Unlawful’ frame can also be thought to be more sympathetic to the official position of terror, mostly from state organs. Such framing is relatively non-controversial (in the Kenyan context) as it deftly creates cooperation between state and non-state actors; in which the state (and its form of terror is implicitly legitimate) and that of non-state actors is illegitimate. Thus, the core frames defining terrorism in Kenya, based on the analysis of editorial cartoons on the 7 August terror attacks are largely three: it being Islamic, Evil and Unlawful. As shown, the framing and cultural devices flesh out the details (see Appendix for details).

Conclusion

In the light of an ongoing war on terror and massive diplomatic, legal and financial resources deployed to the effort, misunderstanding and doublespeak still characterise the definition and understanding of terror. As this study indicates, scholars and experts on security have failed to reach a common consensus on what terrorism really is. Indeed, a study by Schmid and Jongman (1988) recorded 109 different definitions in a survey in the mid-1980s, meaning that a post 9/11 survey would lead to literally hundreds of more definitions. While such differences are bound to occur, and are even healthy in a democratic society, they pose great challenges to media practitioners and journalists. In the recent past, writing and communicating to a mostly non-expert and non-academic public, journalists were not constrained by the requirements for precision and specificity in regard to terrorism. Oftentimes, the journalists and media practitioners
would take the official position in reporting on terrorism and terrorists. However, this practice is becoming increasingly difficult to sustain as the term terrorism becomes more polemical, controversial and biased, depending on the context. This has posed additional challenges for ethics in journalism practice in the context of growing conflicts patterned along the traditional understanding of terrorism. As shown in this study, numerous media outfits have taken to political correctness and prefer to describe actions such as 'bombers' or attackers rather than use the term 'terrorist' or 'terrorism', now considered pejorative and value laden labels. Part of the dilemma has risen from the historical fact of a few past terrorists becoming latter-day 'freedom' heroes.

While this debate rages, the reality and fact of terrorism as a phenomenon and political strategy cannot be ignored by the media. Terrorism still thrives in spite of a lack of proper conceptual agreement on terminology and the gradual move towards political correctness. Meanwhile, journalists still write and cover terror, and in so doing, engage in a kind of construction or strengthening of the already existing understanding and conceptualisation of terrorism. In other words, 'some definition of terrorism' exists on a societal level; and whether it is the accurate one or not, is not so important at this point.

The purpose of this article, therefore, was to get to the building blocks of this definition. To achieve this, the study assumed the building blocks of terror to be synonymous to the frames. The study argues along a constructivist framing paradigm (Gamson & Lasch 1992; van Gorp 2005) that journalists, as members of a society, appropriate from their social and cultural context frames to construct their story. Since no individual frames exist in the strictest sense, the emergent frames can be thought to be representative of a corporate understanding of a particular event.

Taking the embassy terror attacks as a case, this study examined the extent to which editorial cartoons framed the attacks in the month of August. From these frames, a cultural and context-specific understanding of terrorism is derived. Cartoons were effective as units of analysis, since they are least affected by adherence to political correctness. Also, apart from their metaphoric form, their condensed nature permits the communication and purveyance of informative culturally laden devices in such a small space. The emergent core frames were the controversial ‘Terror is Islamic’, the ideologically sensitive ‘Terror is Evil’ frame and, lastly, the more officially sensitive ‘Terrorism is Unlawful frame’. These three frames have within themselves framing devices and corresponding reasoning devices that point to the core frame. In all these, cultural devices, both im-
plicit and explicit, tether the meaning of the core frame. Accordingly, within the Kenyan cultural context, and specific to the four weeks following the 7 August 1998 terror attacks in Nairobi, the analysed frames reveal that terrorism is understood to be fundamentally Islamic in ideology, inherently evil and an unlawful means of 'political' conduct.

Notes
1. The ‘terrorist group’ that carried out the Beslan school attack is the Chechen rebels group. Drawn from the mostly Muslim Chechnya region’, the group has employed terror tactics in a struggle seeking autonomy from the Kremlin. Putin’s rage at international duplicity with regard to terrorism is representative of Russia’s displeasure with the US and the wider international community who do not consider the Chechen rebels as terrorists.
2. More details can be found in the works of Rudiger Seeseman who has investigated the Kenyan social space in the aftermath of the 7 August bombings in Nairobi and the 9/11 bombings in New York. His focus sheds more light on the shifts and tensions within the Islamic social space in the wake of a war on terror for which the Kenyan government plays a critical regional role.
3. US President George W Bush signed a Bill on 1 July 2008 removing Nelson Mandela and other South African leaders from the US terror watch list. Had this not happened, Mr. Mandela and ANC party members could not visit the US without a waiver from the Secretary of State. The African National Congress (ANC) was designated as a terrorist organization by South Africa’s old apartheid regime, BBC July 2008.
4. As will be shown later, this was not the first terror incident, but perhaps the most conspicuous. Also, this study defines ‘terrorism’ with reference to Islamic ‘extremism,’ mostly targeting western interests on Kenyan soil.
5. Author Samuel Katz, 2002, records how guard Benson Okuku Bwaku engaged in an altercation with the truck driver, Azzam and his colleague Mohamed Daoud Al-Owhali shortly before the blast. Al Owhali survived what was supposed to be a suicide mission. He was arrested when he sought treatment for injuries sustained from falling debris. Okuku survived too, and still works as a security guard. His version of the events that day is recorded at the bomb blast Mausoleum in Nairobi.
6. This attack was allegedly carried out by al Qaeda operatives who had recruited local Kenyan men for the mission. However, the little known Army of Palestine, based in Lebanon claimed responsibility saying the attack was to accentuate ‘the voice of the refugee’. The attack was meant to coincide with the November 1947, 55th Anniversary of the partitioning of Palestine into Arab and Jewish states, BBC 2002.
7. Goffman represents the sociological foundations of framing as a theory which held that individuals are not capable of comprehending the world in a satisfactorily comprehensive way and hence live in a continuous struggle to interpret
experience and the world around them. And so, in order to process new information efficiently, individuals inevitably rely on interpretative schemas, or ‘primary frameworks’ to classify information and interpret it meaningfully.

8. The Frankfurt School was comprised of eminent scholars such as Thodor Adorno (1903-1969), Max Hoekheimer (1895-1973), Walter Benjamin (1892-1940) and Herbert Marcuse (1898-1979). Their thesis is that the mass media selectively present reality, including aspects of culture in service of bourgeois interest, and thus maintain status quo at the expense of the masses.

9. The editorial cartoon subsumed in this context is already a condensed metaphoric communication text.

10. Terror, a major anxiety-inducing event, naturally prompts people to want to talk about it as much as it affects them. This is true both in the private and the public communicating spheres (in this case the media) (Altheide 2006). The discourses focus mainly on what happened. Why it happened? Who did it? An evaluative or closure-seeking communication would naturally seek to end the process.

11. Apart from concerted public awareness and increased health communication through various media, the decrease in HIV&AIDS prevalence coincided with the rapid expansion of preventive interventions since 2000, which resulted in a change in sexual behaviour and increasing use of condoms (http://www.avert.org/hiv-aids-kenya.htm)

12. The characterisation of Kenyan papers as either rightist or leftist is also context-specific and time-bound. The Nation was much more leftist during the one-party era of retired President Moi while The Standard was more right leaning. However, after 2002 when President Kibaki ascended to power The Nation seemed cozy with the status quo, while The Standard became radically leftist (Omanga Mainye 2010b).

13. In Kenya, August is considered a historically jinxed season. Kenya’s founding president died on 22 August 1978; a host of other political leaders over the years have passed on in the month of August too. Kenya’s only failed coup attempt was executed in August 1982, and, of course, Kenya’s biggest terror attack on 7 August 1998. The media is partly to blame for the construction of fear in the month by recounting the August tragedies every year.

14. In defining terror, The United Nations gives premium to the particular act being criminal, while the FBI gives weight to the unlawful aspect of the use of force (Hoffman 2006). Defining the act as unlawful or criminal is more in line with the ‘official position’ in any country, because it rarely includes the actions of states, which are often times considered lawful.
**Appendix: Framing Matrix**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>THE CORE FRAME</th>
<th>FRAMING DEVICES</th>
<th>REASONING DEVICES</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>symbol</td>
<td>metaphor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Terrorism is Islamic (1)</td>
<td>Hooded skeleton</td>
<td>terrorism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Terrorism is Islamic (2)</td>
<td>Camel with explosives</td>
<td>Terrorist camp</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Terrorism is Evil (1)</td>
<td>Uncle Sam</td>
<td>USA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Terrorism is Evil (2)</td>
<td>Hooded skeleton</td>
<td>terrorism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Terrorism is Unlawful</td>
<td>Long arm of the law</td>
<td>The law</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Problem definition**

- **Moral evaluation**
- **Treatment options**

**Causal attribution**

- **Symbol**
- **Metaphor**
- **Epithets**
- **Lexical devices**

**Reasoning devices**

- **Problem definition**
- **Causal attribution**
- **Moral evaluation**
- **Treatment options**

**Appendix**

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