

A PHENOMENOLOGICAL ENQUIRY ON JOURNALISTIC EXPERIENCES  
AND STRUCTURAL INFLUENCES IN THE COVERAGE OF TERRORISM IN  
KENYA

Benjamin Muindi Mutie

A dissertation presented to the School of Communication

of

Daystar University  
Nairobi, Kenya

In partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY  
in Communication

October 2021

APPROVAL

A PHENOMENOLOGICAL ENQUIRY ON JOURNALISTIC EXPERIENCES  
AND STRUCTURAL INFLUENCES IN THE COVERAGE OF TERRORISM IN  
KENYA

Benjamin Muindi Mutie  
16-1671

In accordance with the Daystar University policies, this dissertation is accepted in partial fulfilment of requirements for the Doctor of Philosophy degree.

Date:

\_\_\_\_\_  
Kioko Ileri, PhD,  
1st Supervisor

\_\_\_\_\_  
Levi Obonyo, PhD,  
2nd Supervisor

\_\_\_\_\_  
Levi Obonyo, PhD,  
Coordinator, PhD Communication

\_\_\_\_\_  
Levi Obonyo, PhD,  
Dean, School of Communication

DAYSTAR UNIVERSITY

Copyright©2021 Benjamin Muindi Mutie

## DECLARATION

A PHENOMENOLOGICAL ENQUIRY ON JOURNALISTIC EXPERIENCES AND  
STRUCTURAL INFLUENCES IN THE COVERAGE OF TERRORISM IN KENYA

I declare that this dissertation is my original work and has not been submitted to any other college or university for academic credit.

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_

Benjamin Muindi Mutie  
16-1671

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to acknowledge several good people who have been very supportive, kind-hearted and genuinely concerned about my progress in the PhD journey that started in August 2016. First, is the Dean of the School of Communication and my co-supervisor, Professor Levi Obonyo. Prof Obonyo has held my hand all through the coursework, the writing of comprehensive exams on to the most difficult, yet a very fulfilling part of the journey: writing this dissertation to completion. Allow me to thank you for the kindness and care that you demonstrated all along. You have been very patient with me, and I am grateful for the coffee sessions, lunch meetings and birthday gifts. Indeed, this is truly a very memorable phase of my life, and I am most delighted to have spent it in your tutelage.

Special thanks go to Professor Rhonda Breit, who helped me conceptualise this project. While I had a broad sense of what I wanted to write the dissertation on, it is Professor Breit who helped me narrow down and sharpen the focus of the research. I am truly grateful for your dedication to this course, and your insightful guidance. Professor Breit opened the doors to the library at the Aga Khan University Graduate School of Media and Communications for me. I am deeply grateful for challenging me to grow intellectually and professionally.

Professor Kioko Ileri, the lead supervisor has been very instrumental throughout this journey and indeed planted the seed of empirical research in my mind at the formative stages of the PhD, during the coursework in RES850, Advanced Research Methodology, as well as Seminar on Advanced Communication Theory, COM810. Sections of this project were developed during these seminars – both formally and informally. Thank you for carrying on with me to the completion of this project.

All the professors who taught and graded my papers are deeply appreciated. They include Professor Murej Mak'Ochieng, who introduced me to the work of Anthony Giddens, and specifically, the ideas on structure and agency, and the interplay of both in what Giddens terms as Structuration. I am grateful to Dr. Erneo Nyamboga and Dr. Jesica Kinya Mwithia, from whom I learned a lot about qualitative research protocols, including the philosophy foundation of research and approaches in collecting, analysing, interpreting and presenting qualitative data, as well as the language of the interpretivist paradigm, that guided this research project. I am grateful to Professor Faith Nguru, Professor Rebecca Oladipo, Professor Abraham Waithima, Dr. Paul Mbutu, Dr. Fred Olwendo, Dr. Jane Awiti and Dr. Rahab Nyagah, for the commitment you demonstrated during the coursework, laying a good foundation for research in the various classes where we interacted.

I am grateful to the members of my dissertation committee for their insightful guidance in shaping this work to what it is today. Many thanks go to the Daystar University Vice Chancellor, Professor Laban Ayiro, who often called me to his office to discuss this work, and specifically, the help in carving out the research objectives well. Professor George Nyabuga has been instrumental, providing constant feedback that improved both the depth and breadth of this work. Thank you Dr. Rosemary K'Owuo, Dr. Wilson Ugangu, Dr. Beatrice Mbogoh, Dr. Lydia Radoli and Prof. Nancy Booker for your thoughtful feedback during the final defence of this work. It is your collective intellectual contribution that has guided this work to become what it is today.

This project would not be complete without the help from the local and foreign journalists, who supplied the data and insights for answering the four research questions. Many thanks to my research assistants: Mr. James Nyoike and Moses Kilolo, both of USIU-Africa, Ms. Sheila Sayianka Memusi of Daystar University, Mr. Charles Kevin Mudavadi, formerly of USIU-Africa: this work would not be complete without his selfless dedication during the data collection, analysis

and the presentation. I wish to acknowledge the dedication of Ms. Dorcas Adamba and Ms. Jeniffer Mutie of Daystar University for helping in many ways during my Ph.D. studentship. Many thanks to these two scholars from the diaspora, who have supported me heartily during this process: Dr. David Cheruiyot (University of Groningen, The Netherlands) and Ms. Joy Kibarabara (Stockholm University, Sweden). Your generosity in sharing literature and ideas is praiseworthy.

To the following colleagues in the Ph.D programme at Daystar University, I would like you to know that you are a family to me. Thank you Ms. Josephine Mule, Mr. Eric Kadenge, Mr. John-Bell Okoye, Ms. Betty Nguitu, Mr. Hesbon Ochieng, Ms. Anyasi Ashley, Ms. Sarah Ndonye, Mr. Daniel Mule, Mr. Harry Bett, Mr. Bora Innocent, Ms. Josephine Mikui, Dr. Britto John, Mr. Antoinette Bonita, Ms. Evonne Mwangale, Ms. Angela Kitonga, Ms. Ruth Owino, Dr. Yves Ndayikunda, Mr. Don Bosco Ochieng, Ms. Redemptor Atieno, Ms. Anne David, Ms. Christine Wandolo, Mr. Patrick Mulinge, Mr. John Obunga, Dr. Njoki Chege, Ms. Winnie Mbatha, Mr. Oby Obyerodhyambo, Ms. Ruth Musembi, Dr. Robert Aswani, Ms. Mercy Omoke, Dr. Daniel Mwaringa, Mr. Jacob Muia, Ms. Susan Mwangi, Ms. Ukaiko Ojiambo and Mr. Daniel Omondi.

I would like to thank all scholars whose work I have cited in this dissertation. Finally, I am most grateful to the entire Daystar University family for enabling me to pursue doctoral studies, and especially the post-graduate board led by Sister Professor Agnes Lando, for stirring the research pot in the university. God bless you all richly!

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<u>APPROVAL .....</u>	<u>ii</u>
<u>DECLARATION .....</u>	<u>iv</u>
<u>ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS .....</u>	<u>v</u>
<u>TABLE OF CONTENTS .....</u>	<u>viii</u>
<u>LIST OF TABLES .....</u>	<u>x</u>
<u>LIST OF FIGURES .....</u>	<u>xi</u>
<u>LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS .....</u>	<u>xii</u>
<u>ABSTRACT .....</u>	<u>xiv</u>
<u>DEDICATION .....</u>	<u>xv</u>
<u>CHAPTER ONE .....</u>	<u>1</u>
<u>INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY .....</u>	<u>1</u>
<u>1.1 Introduction .....</u>	<u>1</u>
<u>1.2 Background to the Study .....</u>	<u>4</u>
<u>1.3 Statement of the Problem .....</u>	<u>13</u>
<u>1.4 Purpose of the Study .....</u>	<u>15</u>
<u>1.5 Objectives of the Study .....</u>	<u>16</u>
<u>1.6 Research Questions .....</u>	<u>16</u>
<u>1.7 Justification for the Study .....</u>	<u>17</u>
<u>1.8 Significance of the Study .....</u>	<u>18</u>
<u>1.9 Scope of the Study .....</u>	<u>22</u>
<u>1.10 Limitations and Delimitations of the Study .....</u>	<u>23</u>
<u>1.11 Definition of Terms .....</u>	<u>23</u>
<u>1.12 Summary .....</u>	<u>25</u>
<u>CHAPTER TWO .....</u>	<u>26</u>
<u>LITERATURE REVIEW .....</u>	<u>26</u>
<u>2.1 Introduction .....</u>	<u>26</u>
<u>2.2 Theoretical Framework .....</u>	<u>27</u>
<u>2.3 General Literature Review .....</u>	<u>47</u>
<u>2.4 Empirical Literature Review .....</u>	<u>68</u>
<u>2.5 Conceptual Framework .....</u>	<u>94</u>
<u>2.6 Summary .....</u>	<u>96</u>
<u>CHAPTER THREE .....</u>	<u>97</u>
<u>RESEARCH METHODOLOGY .....</u>	<u>97</u>
<u>3.1 Introduction .....</u>	<u>97</u>
<u>3.2 Philosophical Foundations Underpinning Current Research .....</u>	<u>98</u>
<u>3.3 The Phenomenological Approach .....</u>	<u>100</u>
<u>3.4 Sampling Framework .....</u>	<u>101</u>
<u>3.5 Data Collection Instruments .....</u>	<u>103</u>
<u>3.6 Research Procedures .....</u>	<u>109</u>
<u>3.7 Pilot Study .....</u>	<u>112</u>
<u>3.8 Data Analysis Plan .....</u>	<u>112</u>
<u>3.9 Tests of Validity and Reliability .....</u>	<u>116</u>
<u>3.10 Ethical Considerations .....</u>	<u>122</u>
<u>3.11 Summary .....</u>	<u>123</u>



CHAPTER FOUR.....	124
DATA PRESENTATION, ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION .....	124
4.1 Introduction .....	124
4.2 Analysis and Interpretation .....	125
4.3 Summary of Key findings .....	183
4.4 Summary .....	185
CHAPTER FIVE .....	186
DISCUSSIONS, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS .....	186
5.1 Introduction.....	186
5.2 Discussions of Key Findings.....	186
5.3 Conclusion .....	232
5.4: Limitations of the Study.....	232
5.5 Recommendations .....	234
5.6 Recommendations for Further Research.....	238
REFERENCES .....	240
APPENDICES .....	264
Appendix A: Interview guide.....	264
Appendix B: Consent Form for Interviewees .....	266
Appendix C: Document Analysis Guide.....	269
Appendix E: Ethical Clearance .....	270
Appendix F: Research Permit .....	271
Appendix G: Researcher’s Curriculum Vitae.....	272
Appendix H: Plagiarism Report.....	279

DAYSTAR UNIVERSITY

LIST OF TABLES

*Table 5.1: Explanatory Powers of Hierarchy of Influences ..... 231*

DAYSTAR UNIVERSITY

## LIST OF FIGURES

<i>Figure 1.1: A Timeline of Some of the Notable Terror Attacks in Kenya</i> .....	2
<i>Figure 2.1: The “Hierarchy-of-Influences” Model</i> .....	47
<i>Figure 2.2: Conceptual Framework</i> .....	95
<i>Figure 4.1: People Who Died during the Westgate Mall Attack in September 2013</i>	141
<i>Figure 4.2: Some Kenyan Journalists Embedded with KDF in Somalia</i> .....	142

DAYSTAR UNIVERSITY

## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

AP	Administration Police
AP	Associated Press
ATPU	Anti-Terrorism Police Unit
BAKE	Bloggers Association of Kenya
BBC	British Broadcasting Corporation
CAK	Communications Authority of Kenya
CID	Criminal Investigations Department
DCI	Directorate of Criminal Investigations
KDF	Kenya Defence Forces
DMI	Directorate of Military Intelligence
GSU	General Service Unit
IPOA	Independent Policing Oversight Authority
NCIC	National Cohesion and Integration Commission
NIS	National Intelligence Service
NSIS	National Security Intelligence Service
NPS	National Police Service
NPSC	National Police Service Commission
PDF	Portable Document Format
PTSD	Post Traumatic Stress Disorder
RECCE	Reconnaissance Company of GSU
ISIS	Islamic State of Iraq and Syria
ISIL	Islamic State of Iraq and Libya (a reformation of ISIS)

NMG	Nation Media Group
RMS	Royal Media Services
SG	Standard Group

DAYSTAR UNIVERSITY

## ABSTRACT

Since 2011, the impact and frequency of terrorism in Kenya have soared consistently. Consequently, terrorism reporting is today a major recurring news item in various media outlets. This research employed a phenomenological inquiry based on 28 in-depth interviews with journalists who have covered terrorism in Kenya between 2011 and 2019. Specifically, it first explored the lived experiences of journalists involved in this coverage and, secondly, examined the structures that influence their work when reporting on this beat. Third, it investigated ways in which structures influence the freedoms of journalists who have reported on terrorism. Last, the study explored the implications that the structural influences have on the journalistic freedoms of those covering the news topic. Within the context of lived experiences, findings indicate three major themes: fear of surveillance, the safety of journalists at risk, and nationalistic reportage. The fear of surveillance is characterized by worries about surveillance by state security agents and terrorists, while the safety of journalists at risk comprises psychological and physical safety. Nationalistic coverage is highly associated with Kenya-born reporters – an outright biased in favor of their nation. Legal and policy and organization structures influence those covering terrorism. The ways in which the structures influence journalistic freedoms comprise two themes: constraints in accessing information, resulting in journalists exploring alternative avenues for news; and the violation of tenets of professional journalism, such as impartiality, objectivity, and journalistic ethics. Under the fourth line of investigation, journalistic autonomy is the single major implication related to the coverage of terrorism, featuring low journalistic independence, self-censorship, and biased reporting.

DEDICATION

I dedicate this work to all the journalists across the world that risk it all when reporting about terrorism and related events.

DAYSTAR UNIVERSITY