

Problematizing a ‘fundamentalist’ ideology: A close analysis of Atef Hetata’s *The Closed Doors* and Phil Mullaly’s *The Martyrs of Uganda*

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Abstract

This paper discusses Atef Hetata’s The Closed Doors and Phil Mullaly’s The Martyrs of Uganda and the ways in which they problematize a “fundamentalist” vision. Through close reading and analysis of the language, cinematographic and mise en scène elements in these films, the paper examines the cineastes’ portrayal of the dilemmas and dangers posed when extremist religious dogma conflicts with the socio-economic and political realities and contradictions in society. The paper raises questions about the course of action human beings choose in pursuit of extremist agendas today in a world where tolerance for diversity and multiculturalism has become part and parcel of a new global culture.

Keywords

Islamic
 fundamentalism
 terrorism
 globalisation
 multiculturalism
 Uganda martyrs

Introduction

The evocation of extremist ideology – be it religious, political or ethnic – with the agenda of decimating the lives of others is something of an enigma that has haunted human history. Whether it was the Crusaders’ anti-Islamic wars (vividly captured in Françoise Levie’s 1991 documentary, *From Mesopotamia to Iraq*) that were sanctioned by Pope Urban II to liberate the Holy Land in the eleventh and twelfth centuries; the Inquisition against heresy in the Catholic Church from the Middle Ages to the more gruesome Spanish Inquisition in the fifteenth century; the anti-Semitic holocaust by Nazi Germany in the last century; the most recent Rwandan genocide of 1994 in which Hutu ethnic xenophobia was evoked to exterminate about half a million Tutsis; or even the current wave of global terrorism by extremist Islamist groups – in all these and other examples, radical ideologies have been recruited to the service of the most fundamentalist visions by human beings to exterminate others in many parts of the world.

While fundamentalism by extremist Islamic groups is a major problem in Egypt, Uganda is a predominantly Christian nation with Muslims accounting for some 10 per cent of the population. However, the country is perhaps well known for its history of radical Christianity that led to the brutal murder of Christian converts by Kabaka (king) Mwanga II of Buganda from 1885 to 1887. In particular, the burning alive of twenty-six new Christian converts on the orders of Kabaka Mwanga on 3 June

1. The day is now called 'Martyrs Day' in Uganda. It is an official holiday celebrated annually on 3 June at the Martyrs Shrine in Namugongo near the capital Kampala, and is attended by Christian pilgrims (mainly Catholic and Protestant) from all over the world.
2. In *Tableau Ferraille*, Moussa Sene Absa presents the Baye Fall Islamic brotherhood as the moral remedy for a society epitomized by the corrupt 'President' and his clique. Daam, a people's deputy and minister, is an honest but naive politician who fails in his mission to deliver his country from the chaos of corruption and underdevelopment. Absa seems to suggest that one morally upright individual cannot change a decadent society, short of a total religious renewal. Absa is himself a Baye Fall, a sub-branch of the Mouride Sufi, who put emphasis on the spiritual value of work and submission to a religious leader. He has also directed a documentary on the Mourides, *Jef Jel* (1998). See J. Gugler (2003: 141). '*Jef Jel*' means 'work and take' and sums up the philosophy of the Baye Fall (Anon., Productions de la Lanterne).

1886 marked the climax of these events, which are vividly captured in the film *The Martyrs of Uganda* (1996), one of the few films that has been recently shot in Uganda.¹

This paper discusses two African films – Atef Hetata's *The Closed Doors* (1999) and Phil Mullaly's *The Martyrs of Uganda* – that have hardly attracted any scholarly attention, and attempts to demonstrate the ways in which they both explore, and in many ways problematize, a 'fundamentalist' vision. In both movies, we have characters that envision high moral and spiritual ideals, and consequently find themselves entangled in manifold conflicts: conflict within their inner selves; conflict with others because of the high ideals they espouse; and conflict with the dominant traditions and practices of society. Consequently, they find themselves enmeshed in the clash between their radical ideals and the dictates of the reality around them. And because they cannot reconcile themselves to these realities, they commit murder in God's name (as we see in *The Closed Doors*) or they fall victim to their radical religious convictions (as in *The Martyrs of Uganda*). It is the classic clash of loyalties and value systems that we see in films such as Moussa Sene Absa's *Tableau Ferraille* (1997) (Lit. 'scrap metal painting', a former fishing village, now a suburb of Dakar). However, the movies also provoke manifold questions about the course of action the protagonists have chosen in pursuit of their high, fundamentalist ideals.

My approach in this paper is based on a close reading and interpretation of the language, cinematography and *mise-en-scène* elements in the two films in order to trace the way the cineastes develop the protagonists' attitudes and world-view as a result of their exposure to radical religious beliefs. My analysis will focus on specific shots in both films to demonstrate how the main characters' beliefs affect their relationship with society, culminating in Mohamed's murder of his mother and her lover in the name of purging evil from the world, and a group of young Christian converts being burned alive in defence of the faith.

Fundamentalist commitment and its ensuing confusion

In *The Closed Doors* we clearly see the emergence of fundamentalist commitment and the resultant confusion that it creates in a young boy's mind. The adolescent boy, Mohamed Hussein (alias Hamada), becomes the epicentre of extremist Islamic ideology when he envisions himself as the defender of his faith and the moral policeman for his society. He is reminiscent of the Baye Fall brotherhood in *Tableau Ferraille* who view themselves as the only moral alternative to the decadence and corruption prevalent in society.²

Mohamed's fundamentalist religious beliefs, openly fanned by Sheikh Khaled's radical Islamic teachings, do not allow him to view the world rationally. His hard-line ideology is problematic right from the beginning, and he is clearly set on a collision course with the rest of society. His radical convictions have no place in the urban environment where he lives with his mother Fatouma: a poor, run down neighbourhood. It is a setting where, as Mohamed puts it, 'Morality no longer exists. Sin and corruption are rife.' At the same time, the gap between the rich, like Monsieur and Madame Lobna, and the poor, like Fatouma, their maidservant, is very

big. Rampant unemployment, coupled with the pressures of urban life, have driven many a young woman like Zeinab into prostitution. Hers is a pragmatic approach to life. Her family has to survive and she has lied to her husband – who has been out of work for four years – and told him that she is a nurse. She represents many in the city who have adopted liberal, albeit heretic, ideas about their Islamic faith. We get a hint of this in the sequence where she confides in Fatouma the truth about her life as a prostitute:

'At first, I kept track of them all. Tall ones, short ones, fat ones, skinny ones, clean ones, dirty ones ... Now they're all the same.'
 'Your husband suspects nothing?'
 'He's been out of work for 4 years ... Who needs tailors? Everyone buys ready-to-wear, but you. He just wants his food and cigarettes ...'
 'Aren't you scared of God?'
 'God understands me fine.'³

3. This and subsequent quotations of Hetata's *The Closed Doors* are taken from the English subtitles of the film (Arab Film Distribution, 1999).

Clearly, matters of spirituality are not on Zeinab's priority list. For her, the end justifies the means, and she has adopted a philosophy for justifying her moral frailties. There is also an apparent breakdown of social order with children like Awadine hawking the streets to support their families. Awadine confides in Mohamed that he has been kicked out by his mother because she was 'scared for my sisters'. 'Scared? Scared of what?' Mohamed asks. 'There were seven of us in the same room. Late in the night, the devil



Figure 1: Atef Hetata, director of *Les portes fermées/Closed Doors*. Courtesy Olivier Barlet.

4. All quotations from the film are based on *The Martyrs of Uganda*. Unless otherwise indicated, the words of the characters are transcribed verbatim from the film. The characters speak English, the lingua franca in Uganda, except in the scene at the Kabaka's court where his royal guards speak in Luganda to the missionaries through an interpreter. For this scene, I have provided my translation because I was not satisfied with the version provided by the interpreter, as he tends to paraphrase some statements.

does his thing,' he says with a hearty laugh. A pious Mohamed is visibly shocked by this confession and mutters, 'God have mercy.'

The breakdown of society's moral fibre is indeed alarming, and, in a sense, Hetata's film is a critique of Egyptian society. Hetata is questioning the very existence of these conditions that debase human beings, and the extreme fanatical solutions that people like Sheikh Khaled prescribe. Mohamed epitomizes this kind of fundamentalist commitment. But then we ask: how can young Mohamed transform such a state of affairs? It's a Herculean task. We can see from the beginning that Hetata has deliberately chosen a protagonist who is not equal to the moral task he allots to himself; a protagonist whose vision of liberating his society from immorality and heresy can only be seen as an illusion.

While in *The Closed Doors* the fundamentalist vision of liberating society is borne by one young boy, in *The Martyrs of Uganda* it is a group of twenty-five young people who become radical converts to the Christian faith – a faith into which they have been recently proselytized by European missionaries who have landed on the shores of Lake Nalubale (renamed Lake Victoria by the British) in the pre-colonial Uganda of 1879. Earlier in 1877, Kabaka Mutesa I of Buganda had invited Protestant missionaries of the Church Missionary Society (CMS), through his contact with British explorers James A. Grant and John H. Speke. These two men had a major role in the establishment of the CMS Nyanza mission in Uganda after Henry Morton Stanley's famous letter to the *Daily Telegraph* in 1875 appealing for the introduction of Christianity in the inter-lacustrine region of Africa (Casada 1983: 508). The Catholic White Fathers (Father Lourdell and Brother Amans) we see in the film came two years later following the establishment of the CMS.

The arrival of the two missionaries from the East African coast triggers suspicion in the king's court, foreshadowing the tragedy that later befalls them and their converts:

Soldier: Who are you? Where do you come from? Do you have permission from the King to travel through our land? And what brings you here?

Lourdell [through an interpreter]: I am a White Father. I have come here to learn from you and to tell you about Jesus, who teaches us to call God our Father.

Soldier: Proceed to the King's palace. I will give you a guide to lead you. When you get there you must wait for me to come and introduce you (my translation).⁴

In the next sequence, we see the missionary work already getting established, after they win a few converts who are now helping build the first church. Their followers are evidently still puzzled about the new religion and its teachings, and their questions are reminiscent of Akunna and Reverend Brown in *Things Fall Apart* (Achebe 1994: 178–182). However, the Christian converts soon embrace a doctrinaire version of the new faith, perhaps even more radical than that of their missionary teachers. They are in many ways a clear case of what Patrick Hogan might call 'alienating hybridity', a hybrid of western and African tradition – with their negative ramifications – that leaves the individual culturally

disjointed from both indigenous and metropolitan traditions (Hogan 2000: 320). They epitomize the subaltern who embraces metropolitan culture and becomes an apologist of his or her own identity. Their new-found beliefs clearly pit them against tradition: they have to do away with polygamy and stick to one wife; they have to burn their fetishes and traditional gods; and, above all, they have to give supreme loyalty to God above their earthly king – an obviously serious threat to the Kabaka's absolute powers.⁵

The young men here – just like Mohamed in *The Closed Doors* – are portrayed in some senses as highly impressionable, and are soon swallowed up by the precepts of religious doctrine they do not seem to fully understand and be able to process within their cultural framework. When Mulumba (later baptized Mathias) summons his four wives to divorce them in accordance with his new faith, retaining only the youngest, his action becomes problematic even to a viewer who has no sympathies for polygamy as a marital practice:

Mulumba: I have decided to become a Christian. And by doing so, I must have only one wife. You ... you'll stay here with me and the three of you will have to go. I don't want to hurt anyone, but in my conscience I cannot do otherwise. [...] I have decided for Jesus.

Mulumba's decision raises more questions than the film answers, and some of these questions are asked by his wives themselves: 'What has happened?' one wife asks. 'What have we done to deserve all this?' another wonders. 'You woman, what charm have you given to our husband?' Mulumba's own confusion is evident, even as he takes this course of action, and it is certainly a hard decision he has had to make.

Adolescent turmoil and dogma

In *The Closed Doors*, Mohamed's dogmatic confusion is more pronounced, and clearly brings out his psychological and ideological disorientation. He has not yet come to terms with, on the one hand, the confusion of adolescence and the sexual awakening that comes with it, or, on the other, Sheikh Khaled's radical Islamic teachings in terms of dealing with this internal conflict. The radical ideas he is exposed to under Khaled's tutorship, coupled with the adolescent infatuation for his mother due to an unresolved Oedipal crisis, only serve to worsen his mental confusion. He is clearly a victim of a clash between his id and superego, which Freud saw as the prime agents of 'every moral restriction' (Shultz 1981: 330). Mohamed has grown up alone with his mother, after his father abandoned them and vanished with a young girl of Mohamed's age.

His only brother fled to Iraq and was drafted into the Iran–Iraq war. He thus comes to occupy a dual role to his mother: both son and 'husband', as it were. His mother, apparently, also seems to project a lover figure onto her son with whom she imagines herself 'a couple.' This only serves to accentuate Mohamed's internal conflict – between his assumed 'prophetic' role of waging war to wipe away evil from society and purify Islam, and the incestuous desire for his mother. To this discussion I shall return later.

5. In the Baganda tradition (of the kingdom of Buganda), it is believed that all women in the kingdom belong to the Kabaka. Prior to the influence of Christianity, the king would ask any of his subjects to surrender his wife to him if he admired her. The subject would take this as a great honour. Hence, this new missionary teaching about monogamy was radical and bound to arouse considerable hostility in kingdom circles.



Figure 2: Mohamed (Hamada) struggling to eke out a living on the street. Courtesy Olivier Barlet.

One central question that the film raises is indeed one that Awadine, the street child who later becomes Mohamed's close friend, puts to him during one of their street hawking errands: 'Are you a Romeo or a fundamentalist?' Mohamed's surging adolescent libidinal desire and his idealistic vision of a world free from sin, juxtaposed with the stark reality of the struggle for survival in Egypt, are never quite reconciled in his mind. He fails to balance his normal sexual feelings for women and the radical Islamic teachings of the imam. When Mohamed confesses these moral dilemmas to Sheikh Khaled, the latter engages him – and other young boys under his tutorship – in complex theological ideas that are clearly out of reach for these young minds:

'Are they frequent?' [Sheikh Khaled asks Mohamed.] 'What do you see?'
 'Images that are indecent, obscene.'
 'What do you do, then?'
 'Nothing.'
 'Are you sure?' [Mohamed nods.]

'It is very important to control oneself. We live in a sinful society. Women walk around half-naked. Female anatomy stimulates the sexual cells in a man's brain. He becomes terribly tense. He behaves in a way that endangers his life and the lives of others. He may be driven to adultery. Don't lose hope. Pray, fast and read the Koran. Use your faith to expunge these thoughts. He who has faith will be rewarded in Paradise. Every man of faith shall have four thousand virgins, eight thousand concubines, and one hundred slaves. Every seven days they will gather together and speak in voices so beautiful as have never been heard: "We are the immortal women, those who comply and never rebel, those who blossom and never

wither, whose skin will remain forever soft. Blissful is he who is ours and to whom we belong.”

The close-up shots of the young men's blank faces as they listen to these inspiring words by Sheikh Khaled reveal two issues here. First, the boys are evidently mesmerized by the promise of such generous rewards for virtue. Second, the language used seems to be too philosophical for the young boys to conceptualize the message, and as a result his highly symbolic spiritual teachings are bound to be taken literally.

This moment of piety is immediately contrasted with a sequence in which we see, through a flashback, Mohamed's mental struggle with the desires of the flesh at Zeinab's home. In spite of Mohamed's view of her as an evil woman, she is his ever-present sexual tempter, who always invites him to 'keep me company until my husband comes back'. A closer look at this sequence is important because it is perhaps one of the most central in the film. A cut from the previous shot at Sheikh Khaled's Koran class takes us to Zeinab's living room, where the adolescent is sitting on a couch. As Zeinab enters the camera frame from the left, a close-up shot of her body focuses on her breasts showing through her dress. Then we get another close-up, of her buttocks as she walks across the room with two glasses of drink in her hands, and she sits close to Mohamed. As she does this, she lifts her dress, exposing her thigh that immediately attracts his gaze. 'Come to see me more often,' she says, gently patting the leg of a visibly absent-minded Mohamed, 'I get bored when I'm all alone.' The camera for the most part dwells on the boy's eyes, which are still focused on Zeinab's exposed thigh. We get a shot from behind, showing his view of her leg, and a reverse, low-angle shot below Zeinab's thigh now shows us his face, still staring blankly as before. Suddenly, he grabs her thigh and throws himself over her, as though he is making love to her. Embarrassed, he disengages himself and runs out of the room as Zeinab calls after him, 'Hamada! Hamada! It's no big deal!'

A cut from this flashback then takes us back to Sheikh Khaled's class, where boys are busy reciting the Koran. We get a close-up of Mohamed praying. Then, in the next sequence, he returns home to find Zeinab applying make-up to his mother. As Mohamed opens the door and enters the camera frame, a look of disgust is evident on his face. He walks through the centre of the shot and, in protest, opens the door to another room and shuts himself off from the women. In the next shot we see him playing a cassette-tape recording of a fiery preacher's message for Zeinab to hear:

Can you hear me? You who lead people to sin, can you hear me? You who call yourselves Muslims the word of God is not to be contested. No one can save you from the fires of hell ...

As the message bellows through the player, we get a shot-reverse-shot of Zeinab's stern look, as she moves to turn up the volume on the television set. The camera frame is then filled with the face of a (presumably Egyptian) pop star whose secular music engulfs the cassette message. We are left guessing as to whether this subduing of the radical Islamic teaching is supposed to foreshadow the irony of Mohamed's lone battle to purify the faith, to rid society of the immorality that Zeinab represents.

6. The *gwanga-mujje* drumbeat is used to signal danger, for example when war is declared or when a calamity strikes. In Baganda tradition, as in many parts of Africa, the sounding of drums was (and still is) one way of communicating urgent messages, which are decoded from the different rhythms of the drum at any given time. For a detailed discussion on this subject, see Mushengyezi 2003: 107–117.

In *The Martyrs of Uganda*, similar hard-line religious dogma is exhibited through characters such as Kaggwa, who leads the king's royal band, Balikuddembe, who is in charge of the royal pages, and Mulumba, one of the king's trusted chiefs. Their faith is tested when the priests and priestesses convince the king that the missionaries are a threat to the kingdom and his spiritual powers, and the young men are expelled. When Mutesa I, the more liberal king who welcomes the missionaries, dies, he is succeeded by his autocratic son Mwanga. At the same time, Bishop Hannington, an Anglican missionary, arrives from the east in fulfilment of an old prophecy, for it had been foretold that a white man would come from the east and take over the land. Bishop Hannington is, therefore, perceived as a threat, at a time when those of the king's servants who had converted to Christianity are increasingly becoming disloyal to him. It is also an ominous time, as King Mwanga loses battles in Bunyoro, Buganda's erstwhile enemy, a plague afflicts the land, and lightning strikes the house of the Katikiro (prime minister). When King Mwanga calls a meeting of his councillors, therefore, the prime minister's anti-Christian rhetoric only serves to spell more trouble for the converts:

Prime Minister: Your Majesty, the missionaries are in league with the foreigners. That man is in league with the foreigners and the foreigners are here to grab our land. Your Majesty, they are here to fulfil the prophecy that said that he who will overthrow the kingdom will come from the east. But we need not fear much, Your Majesty, because we know the prophecy and we know the man is here. So let us end the prophecy. Let us end the man. Let us end everything. Let us save our kingdom, Your Majesty!

While it is clear even before the coming of Bishop Hannington that the converts are bound to face the king's wrath for their radical beliefs, the arrival of the missionary fits into the prophecy and spells imminent doom for the kingdom. Because of that, Hannington is murdered in Busoga. Balikuddembe becomes the next victim because, as the king's best friend, he is regarded as a traitor, although the prime minister's obvious hatred for him is also a major factor in his fate. Balikuddembe becomes the first to be beheaded in Kampala.

As we see in *The Closed Doors*, the characters in *The Martyrs of Uganda* are ready to do anything, including dying, for what they believe. The king's *gwanga-mujje*⁶ drumbeat is sounded to signal danger in the kingdom. Tension is created through the interplay of *mise-en-scène* and cinematographic effects. The mood is enhanced by clattering sound effects playing in the background. The awesome power of the king is well illustrated through contrasting low and high angle shots, with his subjects seated down below, prostrate before him, as is still the Baganda custom today. They do not turn their backs against him as they walk away from his presence either: they have to walk backwards. In spite of his awe-inspiring figure, when the king gives his order: 'Let those who practise the Christian religion go there; if any of you hides he'll be beheaded immediately!', we can almost guess that the defiant young men will stand up to be counted, and they do.

However, it is also apparent that some of the converts clearly exhibit some degree of impudence in their defiant attitude towards the king and his officials: 'I am a Christian,' the son of one of the king's royal guards declares when his father tries to stop him, 'and my father whom I obey is in heaven! Leave me alone!' Muwafu, the prime minister's son, is another example. 'No, Muwafu, don't pretend you are one of them,' his father attempts to stop him from joining the rebellious Christians. 'Of course I am, father!' Muwafu replies in a haughty tone, 'I owe everything to Lwanga. Should I remain behind when he is going to give his life to Jesus?'

As the king orders that they be tied up and taken to Namugongo to be burned, here, again, the film captures an interesting problematic (albeit a tragic one) where a clash between two loyalties is powerfully played out. The Christian converts have a right to practise their new religion, but, in doing so, they rebel against the king and are, therefore, guilty of treason. Sebugwawo, one of the king's pages, for instance, continues teaching people about the new religion even after the king has forbidden it. In this particularly scary sequence, we see close-up shots of the king's angry face as he roars at Sebugwawo, before grabbing a spear from his guard and goring his victim through the belly. Sebugwawo groans in pain before the soldiers whisk him away to 'finish him off'.

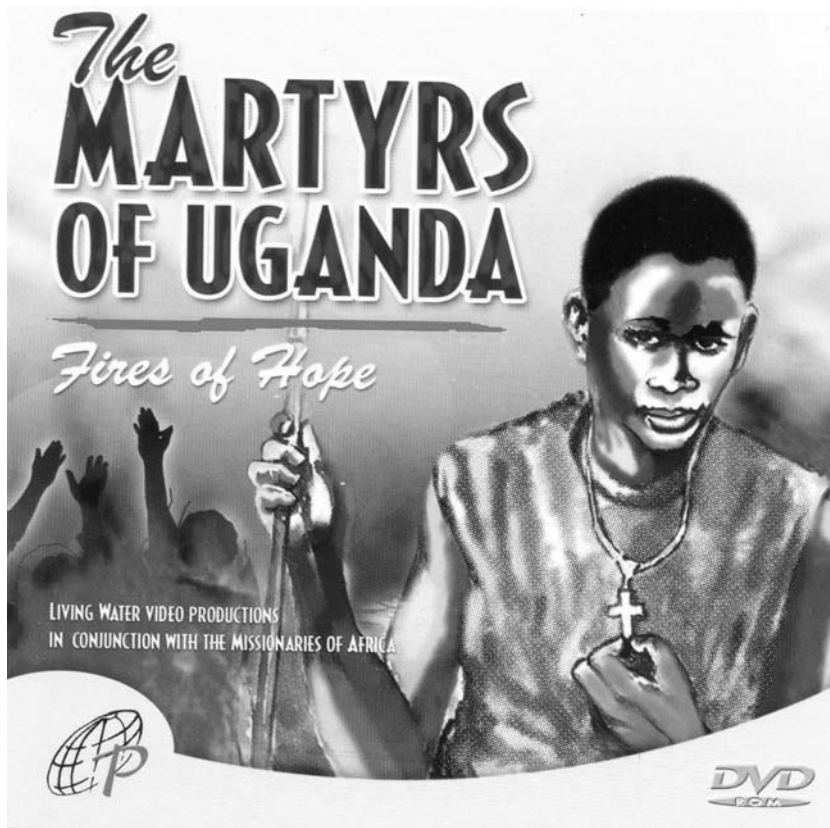


Figure 3: Living Water Production in conjunction with the Missionaries of Africa. DVD cover: Paulines Editions in Kenya.

The problematics of a fundamentalist vision

In both *The Closed Doors* and *The Martyrs of Uganda*, we are clearly confronted with the problematic of endorsing a fundamentalist vision directed at young, immature people. Sheikh Khaled's sermons to young men such as Mohamed are presented as unrealistic, and offer values that go against human needs and values. We see this in the kind of demands made by Mohamed on his mother. In both films, the adolescents' mental confusion is thus fanned by radical ideals, and endangers the young people's lives. In Mohamed's case, the confusion leads to his collision with the whole world: he is running into 'closed doors' so to speak. In *The Martyrs of Uganda*, young people die for what they consider a higher ideal – Christian martyrdom – simply because they do not regard a synthesis of Christianity and African culture as possible.

In order to better understand the denouement of this fundamentalist vision, it is important that we briefly revisit Mohamed's relationship with his mother in *The Closed Doors*, for it is both his fundamentalist beliefs – as I have pointed out above – and this mother–son relationship that drive the plot towards the inevitable tragedy. Not only does Mohamed see Zeinab as the stumbling block in the pursuit of his radical vision, but he also sees his mother, in the end, as an accomplice in the devil's scheme. Hence, the only way to save her soul is to recruit her into his moralist crusade, which he sees as the right way in the faith. Although she is already struggling as a maidservant to support the family and pay his school fees so that he can become a pilot one day, Mohamed wants her to stay at home because he thinks Madame and Monsieur Lobna, her employers, are 'not pious':

'Stop working for them!'

'Why? What have they done to us?'

'They are not pious. Why should we bear their sins?'

'Their sins? Who are we to judge them? Let God do that.'



Figure 4: Mohamed (Hamada) disapproves of his mother's job.

This exchange between mother and son reveals their different levels of maturity (one pragmatic about life and survival in the harsh city, the other evidently young and idealistic) as well as the mother's growing anxiety over the radical ideology her son is being drafted into. This becomes more apparent to her when he tells her to start wearing the veil, so that she does not burn 'in hell, hanging by her hair' – a punishment, he has been taught, which awaits women who do not wear the veil:

'May God show you the way, as he did for me.'
 'The way?'
 'Unveiled women shall burn in hell, hanging on their hair. I want you to glow. You need the veil.'
 'All I need is a new job and my old Mohamed.'
 'What new job? "Woman, thou shalt remain in thy home."' [*Mohamed shouts at his mother, quoting from scripture.*]
 'What is this crap?'
 'Crap? God's word? How dare you!'
 'You just want to loiter [in] the streets. I am no idiot. You'll do as I say!'
 'I only obey the word of God!'

The contrast in their ideological world-views here is demonstrated through both characters' visions of life. Mohamed's focus is on the hereafter, the promise of eternal life in paradise. His mother sees the urgency of her family's survival and Mohamed's future, which can only be attained through education. It is this binary opposition between the worldly and the spiritual that Hetata uses to create a paradox that drives the plot towards its climax.

However, it is not only Mohamed's radical beliefs (as is evident here) that drive his relationship with his mother towards the inevitable impasse: it is also his aforementioned unresolved emotional crisis, which is exacerbated by teacher Mansour's relationship with his mother. Their love affair turns his incestuous desire into an explosive rage for vengeance. Besides, Mansour sent him out of school for staring at girls through a hole in the class wall, and Mohamed has not quite forgiven him for that.

The sexualized relationship between Mohamed and his mother is evident in a sequence when his mother is in bed, sick with flu. She invites him to sleep beside her like he used to when he was young:

'My, how you've grown! Last year you were sleeping beside me. Sleep next to me tonight. So I don't feel all alone ... but you'll catch my flu.'
 'Don't worry, Mom. I won't.' [*Mohamed replies as he lies in bed close to his mother's chest.*]
 'All this was in my belly! At times like these, I wish I could take you back inside me.'

The mother's words, 'I wish I could take you back inside me', are, in my view, sexualized. The words carry her repressed sexual craving for him, as she imagines her son as a lover figure, a kind of stand-in for his father.

7. See also Shultz 1981: 327–328.
8. Tamara Albertini similarly discusses Islamic fundamentalist teaching and practice, observing that it is an ‘assault on the intellectual culture of Islam’ (2003: 455–470). Another incisive analysis of Islamic fundamentalism is offered by Bassam Tibi in *The Challenge of Fundamentalism: Political Islam and the New World Disorder* (1998).

The camera close-up of her pacific face as she cuddles her son clearly brings out this moment of wish fulfilment. In this mother–son relationship, the bed scene thus becomes one manifestation of ‘the most hidden recesses of the mind’ (Freud 1953: 78).⁷

The relationship between Fatouma and her son also creates a looming sense of danger. In the next sequence we begin to see the danger of this tension caused by incestuous desire when Mohamed is flashing a knife in a monologue. His words seem to allude to the developing romantic relationship between his mother and Mansour. He thrusts out his knife threateningly and wipes it against his pillow: ‘You chose him over me. You chose to love him. Now, you want him dead, right?’ He then lies back on his bed, as though in a dream. This becomes a clear foreshadowing of the murder scene in which Mohamed uses the same knife to stab his mother and her lover.

The question we are faced with at the end, then, is: why does Mohamed kill his mother and his teacher, Mansour, if he wanted to save her soul from eternal damnation? To answer this question, we have to consider two issues. As we have seen, his act of murder is a consequence of his mental confusion resulting from the onset of puberty. He cannot reconcile his normal sexual feelings for a woman with his religious concept of sin. He sees libidinal desire as the work of the devil incarnate in women, who, for him, epitomize moral decadence in his society. And when his mother falls in love with the teacher, as far as he is concerned, she joins that morally decadent group, especially since she has not yet officially divorced his father. In addition, he must satiate his jealousy, for she has betrayed him by bringing ‘another man’ into their relationship.

His crime can also be viewed as a culmination of Sheikh Khaled’s fundamentalist teachings, which instruct young men to purge sin wherever they see it in order to cleanse the faith and walk the way of righteousness: ‘He who sees wrongs must set them right,’ he tells the young people. ‘The Holy War is necessary to wipe out corruption and pave the way for Islam.’ It is this kind of teaching that Hetata presents as part of the problem that is fanning the fires of violence in society.⁸ For instance, after one of Khaled’s sermons in his home village, one young man declares: ‘I have no country. My homeland is Islam.’ In a monologue when Mohamed wakes up in bed, it is also clear that he has envisioned his mission as that of ridding the world of heretics who ‘take no heed of God’s word’.

Hetata problematizes the counsel of imams, such as Khaled, who do not guide young people to deal practically with the realities of life around them. Instead, they set them on a collision course with society. Mohamed’s new philosophy only serves to alienate him further from his mother; he even dares assault her after Zeinab tells him that she is in love with Mansour. It is in this particular sequence that Fatouma realizes her son’s behaviour is completely out of control:

‘Are you sane?’ [*She stares at him with alarm in her eyes.*]

‘I’m perfectly sane!’

‘They’re messing with your head!’

‘You have no morals. Sin! Adultery! Filth!’ [*He hisses back.*]

'How dare you?' [*She slaps him, hard.*] 'I'll show you!' [*She removes her sandal and hits him over and over, screaming with rage.*]
 'You hit me? How dare you hit me? Get your hands off me!' [*He shouts as he pushes her in a violent scuffle.*]
 'Get out of here! I never want to see you again! Sleep with the street scum! Never come back! I won't have any more to do with you!' [*Hysterical screams as she hits him over and over, until she overpowers him and throws him out of the house.*]

The violence exhibited by Mohamed in this sequence alarms not only his mother but also the viewer. The cineaste achieves dramatic effect through a combination of audio-visual elements. The setting creates a sense of doom: the room is cast in semi-darkness, which enhances a gloomy mood. The action is fast-paced, and the high-pitched screaming by Fatouma creates tension. The camera work is disorienting, as we watch fast-moving shots and close-ups of the mother and son's bodies interlocked in a violent tussle. Although mother and son reconcile after this fight, Mohamed increasingly exhibits neurotic tendencies, and his behaviour becomes more and more unpredictable.

At this point in his ideological transformation, Mohamed seems prepared to do anything – even to sacrifice his mother for his extremist beliefs. And murder her he does, in the final scene in teacher Mansour's house. The murder sequence is highly charged and moving. We have a shot in which a restless Mohamed is stalking his mother, pacing up and down the street. Then a cut takes us to Mansour's house, where Fatouma is thanking him for helping her find a new job. They begin kissing passionately in the living room. We get a cut back to the street, where a restless Mohamed suddenly dashes across the street into the centre of the frame and disappears into a building. A cut suddenly fills the screen with a close-up of Mansour and Fatouma in bed making love. The camera rests briefly on her left hand caressing Mansour's body. Meanwhile, we get another cut away from the bedroom shot, and see Mohamed running up and down the stairs, knocking at every door like a mad man, asking for directions to the teacher's flat. Once he finds it, he bangs on the door violently, and finally decides to break in through the window. A cut reveals the two lovers dressing, before we hear the sound of smashed glass as Mohamed enters through the window. 'Lying bitch!' he yells at his mother. 'Is this why you got out?' 'Calm down. Mohamed, calm down,' teacher Mansour says, patronizing him. It is too late. 'Bitch!', the boy curses as he draws a knife and stabs him, and Mansour collapses on the floor. When the alarmed mother runs to him crying, 'What have you done?', he stabs her several times in the belly, cursing, 'Bitch! Slut! Bitch!', as she tumbles onto the floor, dead, blood oozing out of her body. As Mohamed wakes up from his dream world to the gruesome reality of his action, right there between two corpses, we get a cut to a blank shot, with violent banging resounding against the door to give an eerie close to the tragedy.

In *The Martyrs of Uganda*, the brutal murder of the twenty-five young men at Namugongo shocks us with terror and pity. Terror, because of the gruesome way the action is vividly captured on the screen, and pity because we think they do not deserve to die such a brutal death. A combination of

the cinematographic qualities and sound effects of this sequence produces disturbing scenes. As soon as Kabaka Mwanga pronounces a death sentence on the young men, a cut shows them chained to each other by their necks as they are led to the place where they will be burned alive. Mulumba, the king declares, will serve a harsher sentence: having his limbs cut off, one by one, until he dies. We then get another cut in the sequence, and briefly see a White Father bestowing a blessing on the converts before he is quickly shoved away by the king's royal guard. In the next shot, we get a close-up of Mulumba who, unable to take the torture anymore, courageously tells the soldiers: 'I am not ... I am not going to walk all the way to Namugongo! ... Kill me now! Here!' There is effective play with sound and camera angles in the next shot when he is whisked off to the nearby bushes to be killed. We see him and his executioners disappear out of the camera frame and into the bushes. All we see are vague silhouettes of body movements through the undergrowth as Mulumba is being tortured, but it is his sudden shrill cries of pain that announce his fate. The power of this sequence lies in the way it plays on our sense of imagination: all we can hear are incessant blows, as the soldiers presumably cut him with machetes, and it is only from his moans that we can imagine the immensity of his pain before his voice fades in the background, signalling his death.

This incident prepares us for even more gruesome images when a cut leads us to the next sequence, where we see human beings tied up with dry reeds, about to be incinerated alive. As the inert bodies are lined up, the play with camera angle has an amazing sense of realism about it, making the whole action convincing. For instance, we see high-angle shots of the scene enveloped in fire and smoke, and then a low-angle shot of one of the martyrs' feet showing out of the burning wood, and his half-burnt face, as he utters the words Jesus spoke on the cross: 'Father forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.' As the sequence ends, the violence exerted on the Christian converts is unequivocally condemned, and the young people are clearly to be admired and pitied.

Conclusion

It would seem, therefore, that both *The Closed Doors* and *The Martyrs of Uganda* attempt, in many ways, to evoke our sympathies for young people who forfeit everything in pursuit of some 'fundamentalist' ideology they have not fully digested. While *The Closed Doors* may appear, on the surface, to be faithful to the teachings of Islam, Hetata uses this as a trope to satirize and question the use of religious fundamentalist dogma to manipulate young people like Mohamed. Obviously, Hetata was aware of the provisions of the Egyptian censorship law of 1976 that regulates cinema production in the country. The law provides for the punishment rather than justification of 'immoral actions and vices' and it outlaws any criticism of 'heavenly religions' (Shafik 1998: 34). Nevertheless, the film is not about advocating for jihad to purge Islam. It is an indictment of radical Islamic teaching as it is depicted through the preacher's responsibility in the boy's crime; and, to a lesser extent, the mother's own lack of maturity in the face of her son's adolescent crisis.

The Martyrs of Uganda, while capturing the colonial and cultural onslaught on Uganda's traditions, unequivocally condemns the violence exerted on the converts. The film, just like *The Closed Doors*, also provokes debate about whether a hard-line approach to matters of faith is not a problem in itself, especially today, in a world where tolerance, diversity and multiculturalism have become part and parcel of globalization.

The Martyrs of Uganda is also about hope. It is a story about the heroic deeds of young men, narrated by Wamala to give strength to the hopeless Alex who has contracted HIV-AIDS. He is following the events of the Martyrs Day celebrations on the radio because he sees no point in going to the martyrs shrine in Namugongo – a place where the faithful from all over the world gather every year on 3 June to pay tribute to the martyrs who died for their faith. Alex's story of hope, however, is not developed, it is only mentioned briefly at the beginning and end of the film. We do not even see how the story of the martyrs changes his life, except when we see a light smile on his face as he reflects on the story at the end of the film. In *The Closed Doors*, the ending leaves us with nothing to hold on to. Our hope is shattered by Mohamed's act of homicide. With the violent banging of the door still resounding in our ears as we stare at the empty closing shot, we can only wonder what happens next: is it the neighbours who are banging on the door in response to the screaming in teacher Mansour's apartment? Is it the police storming the scene of murder? We do not even know whether Mohamed will be apprehended by the law before he commits more crimes or – even worse – before he is recruited into acts of terrorism.

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