



THE EVER-PRESENT SECOND SUDANESE CIVIL WAR ON THE MOVIE *HIS HOUSE* (2020)

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ABSTRACT: The Netflix horror movie *His House* (2020) was directed by Remi Weekes, produced by Aidan Elliott, and based directly on Felicity Evans as well as Toby Venables' homonymous screenplay. It displayed a South Sudanese couple, Bol and Rial, who fled their country's second civil war to England in pursuit of a new British life. For seriatim, the American Psychiatric Association (APA) have highlighted that post-traumatic stress disorder signs (PTSD) individuals could reveal 4 key symptomatic clusters: 1) Intrusions, 2) Avoidances, 3) Negations and 4) Hyper-arousal. The director, Weekes (2020), could apply a plethora of cinematographic techniques (BUCKLAND, 2015, DITTUS, 2013; GIANNETTI, 2001) to represent his protagonists' various PTSD signs. Among the many cinematographic techniques applied, Weekes (2020) explored masterfully the mise-en-shot, the lighting and the set design. The spectators were able to identify the clear PTSD cinematic representations such as Bol's recurrent dreaming intrusions to his psyche as well as Rial's subsequent avoidances toward her daughter. Moreover, Weekes (2020) unveil his main characters' flawed characterization through their own negations of their surroundings and high expectations of their new British lives. Through the meticulously chosen cinematographic techniques, the downtrodden couple Bol and Rial's narrative journey got even stonier, by far more complex and intensely less melodramatic.

KEYWORDS: His House (2020); The Second Sudanese Civil War; Cinematographic techniques.

1 INTRODUCTION

The Netflix horror movie *His House* (2020) was directed by Remi Weekes, produced by Aidan Elliott, and based on Felicity Evans as well as Toby Venables' homonymous screenplay. Among its many accolades, *His House* (2020) won the best director and the best performance by an actress in the British Independent Film Awards. This British movie portrayed the terrifying story of a South Sudanese couple who fled the Second Sudanese Civil War. After fleeing, they were able to be relocated to England and were granted with a house.

The downtrodden protagonists, Bol and Rial, faced a plethora of adversities to get to England such as the South Sudanese guerrillas, stormy waters, overcrowded boats, and the treacherous English Channel. Although both Bol and Rial survived the perilous crossing, their daughter, Nyagak, did not. After three months, the British government granted them with the probational asylum. Usually, the British probational asylum may take many years to be finalized. However, for war refugees, this process may be shortened, especially if the asylum seekers were unable to return their homelands due to fear of persecution or capital punishments.

The Second Sudanese Civil War was one of the worst civil wars in the world (BASSIL, 2013; JOHNSON, 2007; PLAUT, 2016; VUYLSTEKE, 2018). The director Weekes (2020) could apply masterfully many narrative framing devices to further his plot about the refugee couple, Bol and Rial. In fact, Weekes (2020) was able to combine the cinematographic narratives with the narrative devices to construct an amazing story of the immigrant experience as a horror thriller film. For these reasons, the objective of this article was to pinpoint Weekes (2020)'s narrative framing devices and investigate the cinematographic narrative combinations with the view to both scaring and raising his spectators' awareness about the Second Sudanese Civil War.

2 THE SECOND SUDANESE CIVIL WAR

The Sudanese people have consistently endured terrible situations such as extreme poverty and recurrent violence since its independence from The Great Britain in 1955 (SULEIMAN, 2012). Although the Sudan experienced some periods of democracy (1956-1957, 1965-1968 and 1986-1988), it had suffered from dictatorship governments from most of its modern existence. The British Empire might have deepened the various pre-existent conflicts in the Sudanese Africa. However, the Islamic fundamentalism widened exponentially the divisions between the north and the south (SULEIMAN, 2012). In fact, the Northern Sudan has persistently discriminated against non-Muslim Southerners with the view to indoctrinating their Islamic viewpoints. This has resulted in two civil wars.

The Second Sudanese Civil War (الحرب الأهلية السودانية الثانية, in Arabic) was one of the worst civil wars in the world. It lasted from 1983 to 2005 and it was waged between the central Sudanese government and the Sudan People's Liberation Army (BASSIL, 2013; JOHNSON, 2007; PLAUT, 2016; VUYLSTEKE, 2018). Approximately, two million people died in the various conflicts, one of the highest civilian death tolls since the World War II. Roughly, four million people sought for asylums, mainly in Europe. As a result, the country Sudan became Sudan and South Sudan. The military general Abdul al-Dahhab (عبد الذهب, in Arabic) organized a coup to revoke the 1983 constitution in 1985. His main intention was to declare Sudan an Islamic state (BASSIL, 2013).

With that, Abdul al-Dahhab could demobilize the Sudan Socialist Union and then disband the Islamic Sharia law. The Sudan Socialist Union was a Sudanese political party and the sole legal party until 1985 (BASSIL, 2013). Nevertheless, general Abdul al-Dahhab's coup attempts failed miserably, and the Islamic Sharia law (also known as the "September Laws") remained untouched (JOHNSON, 2007). The Islamic Sharia law (شريعة, in Arabic) was one of the most punitive laws related to Islamism. According to Plaut (2016), the Sharia was a set of religious tenets which should be followed by all its participants. The

term Sharia meant God's unbending power. In other words, every Islamic person must comply with God's wishes and follow blindly the old teachings.

The Sharia's most traditional followers advocated that any serious legal trespass must be punished by the hudud dictates. For Johnson (2007), the hudud corporal punishments could range from spanking, padding, flogging, stoning to mutilation. In the same vein, the abolition of the hudud dictates was one of the reasons to initiate the second war. The reasonable Peace Agreement happened in 2005. Consequently, the former country Sudan was divided into two separated countries: Sudan and South Sudan (VUYLSTEKE, 2018).

The process of the Southern Sudanese independence took place through 6 consecutive years. Firstly, the South Sudanese government could organize themselves. Secondly, these both new countries would share their military force equally. Thirdly, the various revenues from the former Sudan state should be shared as well as the job opportunities. One of the most important differences was related to the Sharia law. It would only be applied in the north, i.e., the Sudan. In contrast, the South Sudan would have free elections based on the European models. With the 2011 referendum, the South Sudan became completely independent. The consequences of the Second Sudanese Civil War have been present up to today. However, some cultural etiquettes (JOHNSON, 2007) remained such as eating on the floor with hands.

3 THE SECOND SUDANESE CIVIL WAR AND THE POST-TRAUMATIC STRESS DISORDER (PTSD)

The Second Sudanese Civil War has been present up to today. It could be perceived through the PTSD, i.e., the post-traumatic stress disorder. Based on the American Psychiatric Association (APA, henceforth, 2013), the PTSD was a person's resultant experiences from a plethora of traumatic situations, i.e., great reactions to stress. This person would display signs of different types of traumatic events. Conforming to Iribarren *et al.* (2005), traumatic events could be extremely painful, because they might result into psychological and physiopathological distresses. In turn, Chekroud *et al.* (2018) claimed that PTSD was as old as time. In fact, this author indicated that the first signs of PTSD had appeared in Ancient Greece. Since then, it has received many nomenclatures such as battle fatigue and shell shock.

Moreover, the PTSD individuals may intermittently reminisce their dreadful experiences through spontaneous daydreams, triggered memories and even night terrors. Some may represent them through arts such as ghosts and shabby places (BEIDLER, 2015). According to Iribarren *et al.* (2005), empirical research has shown that the PTSD individuals would also complain about problems connected with addiction, dementia, depression, incognizance, and sleeplessness. For seriatim, APA have highlighted that

PTSD individuals could reveal 4 key symptomatic clusters: 1) Intrusions, 2) Avoidances, 3) Negations and 4) Hyper-arousal. These key clustering symptoms may be clearer visualized in the following table:

Table 1 – Key Symptoms of PTSD

SYMPTOMATIC CLUSTER	KEY CLUSTERING SYMPTOMS
Intrusions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • recurrent and intrusive memories, images, thoughts • distressing dreams • dissociative reactions such as flashbacks • strong emotional and physical reactions to cues that resemble or symbolize an aspect of the trauma
Avoidances	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • efforts to avoid thoughts, feelings, conversations or activities, places or people connected to trauma
Negations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • amnesia for important aspects of the trauma • a persistent and distorted sense of blame of self or others • persistent negative emotional state (e.g., fear, horror, guilt, shame) • inability to experience positive emotions • feelings of detachment or estrangement from others • markedly diminished interest in activities
Hyper-arousal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • increased anxiety • sleep difficulties • poor concentration • increased irritability • outbursts of anger • reckless or self-destructive behavior • hypervigilance • exaggerated startle response

Source: American Psychiatric Association (2013, p. 19)

The clustering symptoms of PTSD might be recurrently related to the war veterans. However, for Dervish *et al* (2019), this strict relatedness would be a fallacy as it would be based upon unsound arguments. This author has claimed that the PTSD characteristics were also identified in the refugees. In fact, Dervish *et al* (2019) believed that the PTSD stretched as far back as the existence of the human society. According to Dorrington *et al* (2019), the refugees would suffer from traumatic experiences which ranged from home life, car accidents to even sexual assaults. In turn, these types of trauma have become worse since the quantity of refugees has exponentially increased in today's world (COATS, 2019).

4 THE CINEMATOGRAPHIC NARRATIVE

The historical cinema has been a quite difficult genre to be defined. According to Stubbs (2012), the historicity of the cinematography lied upon the various iconographies, narrative styles, settings, plots and even character archetypes. The author highlighted that the “simple” presence of the past could not define the historical cinema. This might be explained since the past could be any period before the

present. In turn, Neale (2000) claimed that movies should not be comprehended as one-dimensional entity, but as ubiquitous and multifaceted phenomena. For Burgoyne (2008), the war films would epitomize the genre historical cinema.

The war movies would cinematographically circumvent warfare situations such as air and land battles. Topically speaking, Burgoyne (2008) pinpointed that war movies could entail camaraderie, combat, escapism, immorality, inhumanity, sacrifice, survival, and war sociocultural effects. These topics should be integrated organically with the cinematographic techniques to convey the several atrocities related to the wars the directors wanted to portray on the big screen. For Buckland (2015), this filmic organicity would be denominated film aesthetics. This author would indicate the importance of mise-en-shot.

The mise-en-shot was a word derived from mise-en-scène. In theater, mise-en-scène would be the proper arrangement of actors and props in the setting. In film, mise-en-shot would be the proper arrangement of actors and props in the setting through cinematic storyboarding (BUCKLAND, 2015). Consequently, mise-en-shot would encompass everything present before the cameras. According to Buckland (2015), the mise-en-shot has been a quite helpful tool for directors to establish senses of time and space as well as to set the character's moods and state-of-minds. In fact, the mise-en-shot would be a relatively old term in film studies. For Basin (1971), one of the first cinematographic theorists, mise-en-shot could be depicted as a choreographed movement within the scene. This author would pinpoint three important mise-en-shot features: 1) acting, 2) lighting and 3) set design.

The realistic acting should entail plotting references to factual elements. Therefore, for Dittus (2013), the actors who would apply this technique ought to provide their audience with illusionary referential approximations between the portrayed object and its spectators. In the same vein, the realistic acting seemed to have embraced an ethical commitment, i.e., the realistic actors should represent in consonance with the aesthetic genuineness which a certain screenplay had denoted. Still for Dittus (2013), this genuineness must also adopt factual elements and attempt to disband the superficiality of restrictive conventions. For instance, actors who tried to portray Holocaust survivors. They might incorporate factual elements such as mental distress and considerable thinness to convince partially their audience of their various characters' sufferings. The realistic acting could be enhanced by the proper lighting.

The lighting was a fundamental condition for the existence of any cinematic production. Conforming to Giannetti (2001), the lighting technique would encompass color, direction, quality, and source. The lighting color might have semantic and syntactical functions. The semantic colors might set the scenic meaning whilst the syntactical colors might organize the filmic sequences. The color direction might be the path the director's illumination could take from its source to its target. The color quality might be used to minimize or maximize an actor's performance or a setting organization. The lighting

source might be the objective of the director's illumination. For instance, Perkins and Thorns (2003) understood the illumination of houses on the screen as places where people would imbue their feelings accordingly. A dark and shabby house may reflect the characters' fears or worries whilst a light and fancy house may reflect their successes or well-beings.

The set design was the spectators' first impression upon the movie. It was their entrance to the cinematographic world and to the suspension of their fictional incredulities. According to D'Arcy (2019), the set design would be a movie industry inside a broader movie industry which it would only exist in its production, not in its experience. By and large, the movie spectators could immerse themselves in the plot without needing to know how a story was construed. For Shorter (2012), the set design could convey five features: 1) setting, 2) period, 3) theme, 4) interaction and 5) style. The setting might be where the action took place, cities, or forests. The period might be when the action took place, ancient or modern. The theme might be the communication of abstract concepts, love or hate. The interaction might be the various relationships between the filmic content and its structure. The style might be the props applied to the narrative, so that this narrative would be, for instance, more naturalistic or more minimalistic.

5 THE EVER-PRESENT SECOND SUDANESE CIVIL WAR ON THE MOVIE *HIS HOUSE* (2020)

The Netflix horror movie *His House* (2020) was directed by Remi Weekes, produced by Aidan Elliott, and based on Felicity Evans as well as Toby Venables' homonymous screenplay. It told us the story of a Sudanese family who sought asylum in the Great Britain, escaping from the Second Sudanese Civil War. The protagonist couple, Bol (Sope Dirisu) and Rial (Wunmi Mosaku), risked everything on a boat to get to London. Tragically, this cross took their daughter's life and only the couple reached the British shores. Appallingly, Bol and Rial's nightmarish journey had just begun. This because they may have left the war, but the war did not leave them.

The director, Weekes (2020), initiated its narrative through Bol and Rial's arrival at their "new" house. Their first house was the immigration detention center in the capital city of England, London. Interestingly to notice, the concept of house here transmogrified through this movie. These protagonists felt happy and safe in their room until they had to face the detention officers. According to Perkins and Thorns (2003), houses might be glooming and hostile places. These characteristics could be identified on the first mise-en-shot below:

Figure 1 – Mise-en-shot 1

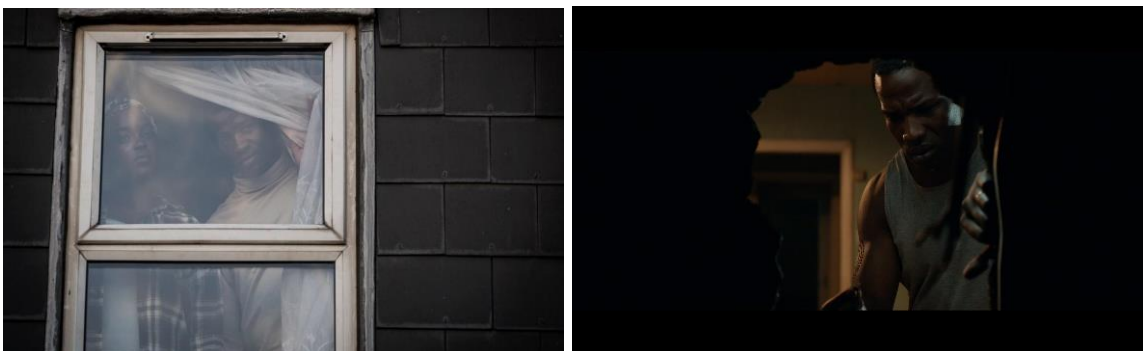


Source: www.netflix.com

The first mise-en-shot displayed the immigration officers' standoffish attitudes toward the persecuted protagonists, Bol and Rial. As a result, the couple felt shocked and stupefied with the officers' reactions, mainly because the immigration detention was their first house. For Perkins and Thorns (2003), this house would be glooming for being depressed and despondent as well as hostile for being aggressive and confrontational. The immigration officers did not welcome Bol and Rial. On the contrary, they threatened these protagonists by laying out all the British rules for asylum seekers. If they broke them, Bol and Rial would be sent back to the Sudanese Civil War immediately.

The downtrodden protagonists, Bol and Rial, felt happy at first, believing they were safe. However, their safety was rapidly destroyed because they perceived to be in somebody else's company. Skillfully, Weekes (2020) portrayed his protagonists' dramatic journey into the abyss through their PTSD signs and the clever application of the cinematographic features. As soon as these characters entered their second house was located far from London. Its setting was dark, neglected, and shabby.

Figure 2 – Mise-en-shot 2



Source: www.netflix.com

The second mise-en-shot portrayed Bol and Rial's disquietness about their "new" second house. In the first scene, Weekes (2020) shot Bol and Rial as if they were in prison. Through a medium closed-up, the spectators could see their disbelief and sadness. According to Iribarren *et al.* (2005), Bol and Rial's primarily reactions to their second house might indicate strong emotional aspects of their trauma. They

had just escaped the Second Sudanese Civil War. In the second scene, Weekes (2020) shot only Bol looking through a crack in the wall. For Dorrington *et al* (2019), a refugee house might symbolize his mindset. Bol began feeling disorientation and distress. The director's chosen illumination was dim, so that he could intensify this character's emotional trauma.

Figure 3 – Mise-en-shot 3



Source: www.netflix.com

The third mise-en-shot displayed the subjugated protagonists' primary conflicts in relation to their Sudanese heritage. While Rial wanted to eat on the floor with her own hands, Bol wished they anglicized and then ate at the table with cutlery. According to Iribarren *et al.* (2005), the second symptom of the PTSD was avoidances. Bol made many efforts to avoid thoughts, feelings, conversations, or activities which were connected to his trauma such as eating on the floor with his hands. For Johnson (2007), the Sudanese people considered food to be sacred and medicinal, therefore, it should forge a bond between the eaters. To break this soulful bond, Bol preferred to eat as the English did. However, his Sudanese heritage and the civil war remnants kept haunting Bol's daily life.

Figure 4 – Mise-en-shot 4



Source: www.netflix.com

The fourth mise-en-shot showed Bol's intense acts of despair. Throughout the movie, Bol believed he was being haunted by ghosts. Not any ghosts, but those from the Second Sudanese Civil War. Conforming to Beidler (2015), the representation of ghosts in artistic works might mean strong emotions

toward the past. To make matters worse, these emotions would generally be negative and connected with remorseful feelings such as fear, terror, and violence. Bol's acts may be the results of his negations about his past, i.e., the third symptom of the PTSD (IRIBARREN *et al.*, 2005). The negations of Bol may represent his persistence in blaming others for his attitudes during the Sudanese War, especially because he used a girl as his daughter, Nyagak, to escape from it. However, Bol's daughter was not the only ghost who tormented him.

Figure 5 – Mise-en-shot 5



Source: www.netflix.com

The fifth mise-en-shot revealed Bol's unsettled state of mind. His unsettledness was also a result from the Apeth's relentless persecutions. The Apeth was a Night Witch from the Dinka culture (JOHNSON, 2007). His wife, Rial, explained to Bol that a village man desperately wanted to build a house and for this reason, he started stealing from people. One day, this man stole from an Apeth. When this man built his house, the Apeth began living there, casting spells, and haunting him. The torments stopped when the man finally paid his debts to the Apeth. The first scene of the fifth mise-en-shot displayed Bol's attempts to run away from all his ghosts.

The Apeth story was a folktale which alerted the Dinka people to avoid stealing. Illustratively, this first scene could be a metaphor of the various padding punishments from the Sharia (PLAUT, 2016), because Bol was being attacked by many otherworldly hands. The color quality (GIANNETTI, 2001) of this scene helped the actor maximize his character's terrified reactions. The climax was the appearance of the Apeth who looked directly at Bol's eyes as if he were trying to collect his debts. In contrast, Bol's despairs would start diminishing as soon as he faced his bad deeds and asked for forgiveness. The director Weekes (2020) used a set of flashbacks to show his spectators about Bol's inexcusable actions during the Second Sudanese Civil War.

Figure 6 – Mise-en-shot 6



Source: www.netflix.com

The sixth mise-en-shot disclosed the real ghosts of *His House* (2020): the main protagonists. They stole Nyagak from her real family to escape the Second Sudanese Civil War by bus. The flawless set design established the mood of Bol and Rial's attitudes. The setting showed the characters' despairs which was intensified by the bellicose period (D'ARCY, 2019) in which they were living. Bol and Rial's interactions were worsened by their Nyagak's kidnapping. In turn, the director Weekes (2020) diminished Bol's various hauntings by placing him together with all the people who suffered from the Sudanese War, including his wife, Rial. In the end, she killed the Apeth as a symbol of their freedom. Nevertheless, Bol and Rial's freedom did not free them from the remnants of the Second Sudanese Civil War. They would forever be the headsmen and the victims of their own war.

6 FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

The Netflix horror movie *His House* (2020) displayed a plethora of PTSD, i.e., the post-traumatic stress disorder signs. Its director, Remi Weekes, was able to portray the dubious protagonists, Bol and Rial, with their different vicissitudes. In fact, Weekes (2020) did not shy away from any controversial problems. The spectators could apprehend both Bol and Rial as humanely flawed as possible. They got to England escaping from the Second Sudanese Civil War. Nevertheless, both Bol and Rial were not only victims of the war, but they were also headsmen to their kidnapped daughter.

The director Weekes (2020) applied a significant set of cinematographic techniques to construct a movie quite intriguing, suspenseful, and terrifying: *His House* (2020). This movie contained various mise-en-shots which were craftly construed to convey such dense screenplay, actualized in clever mise-en-shots. Through these mise-en-shots, Weekes (2020) could enhance Sope Dirisb (who played Bol) and Wunmi Mosaku (who played Rial)'s acting. In the same vein, their acting was improved by Weekes (2020) masterfully applications of the lighting and the organization of impressive set designs.

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Título

A presença constante da Segunda Guerra Sudanesa no filme *O que ficou para trás* (2020)

Resumo

O filme de terror da Netflix, *O que ficou para trás* (2020), foi dirigido por Remi Weekes, produzido por Aidan Elliott e baseado na obra de Felicity Evans e no roteiro homônimo de Toby Venables. Esse filme narra a jornada de um casal de refugiados do Sudão do Sul, Bol e Rial, desde sua fuga da Segunda Guerra Civil até a sua chegada à Inglaterra em busca de uma nova vida. Em consonância, a Associação de Psiquiatria Americana (APA) vem destacando que os indivíduos com sinais de transtorno de estresse pós-traumático (TSPT) podem revelar 4 tipos de grupos sintomáticos: 1) Intrusões, 2) Evitações, 3) Negações e 4) Hiperexcitação. Por sua vez, o diretor, Weekes, conseguiu utilizar uma infinidade de técnicas cinematográficas (BUCKLAND, 2015, DITTUS, 2013; GIANNETTI, 2001) para representar os mais variados sinais de TSPT de seus protagonistas. Entre as muitas técnicas cinematográficas aplicadas, Weekes (2020) explorou com maestria a *mise-en-shot*, a iluminação e o cenografia. Como resultado, os espectadores foram capazes de identificar criativamente uma panóplia de representações cinematográficas de TSPT como, por exemplo, as recorrentes invasões nos sonhos de Bol e as intermináveis fugas mentais de Rial em relação à filha. Além disso, Weekes (2020) conseguiu humanizar seus protagonistas por meio de suas incessantes negações acerca da Segunda Guerra Sudanesa e de suas fracassadas tentativas em conduzir uma nova vida na Inglaterra. Através das técnicas cinematográficas meticulosamente escolhidas, a jornada narrativa do casal refugiado, Bol e Rial, ficou ainda mais tortuosa, muito mais complexa e intensamente mais realista.

Keywords

O que ficou para trás (2020); A Segunda Guerra Civil Sudanesa; Narrativa cinematográfica.

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