

NEW MEDIA IN KENYA: PUTTING ETHNICITY IN PERSPECTIVE

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1. Abstract

The way the media processes, frames and passes on information either to the government or to the people affects the function of the political system. This chapter discusses the interaction between new media and ethnicity in Kenya, Africa. The chapter investigates ways in which the new media reinforced issues relating to ethnicity prior to Kenya's 2007 presidential election. In demonstrating the nexus between new media and ethnicity, the chapter argues that the upsurge of ethnic animosity was chiefly instigated by new media's influence. Prior to the election, politicians had mobilized their supporters along ethnic lines, and created a tinderbox situation. Thus there is need for the new media in Kenya to help the citizens to redefine the status of ethnic relationships through the recognition of ethnic differences and the re-discovery of equitable ways to accommodate them; after all, there is more strength than weaknesses in these differences.

Key words: ethnicity, hate speech, ethnic conflict, ethnic discourse, new media.

2. Introduction

The recent shift from traditional media to new media may not, on its own account, cause instant ripples in the media industry. However, to ignore this as a normal takeover would be to misread what is in no doubt a move indicative of more fundamental shifts in media. Digital technology such as Mobile phones and the Internet have simply not been around long enough in Kenya, Africa. However, incidents like the 2007-2008 crises in Kenya provide a flash of insight into the emerging power of these tools. It also puts into sharp focus the power new media technologies give citizens of developing nations to report news and organize responses to crisis situations. While Kenyan journalists and community organizers have a great deal to be proud of in their response to an electoral crisis and the concomitant ethnic violence, new media was also used both by the government and civilians to amplify tensions and coordinate violent attacks (see Goldstein and Rotich, 2008). Significantly, the ease in communication and dissemination of information provided by these digitally networked technologies is vital as digital tools can help promote transparency. Research findings reveal that new media commands 48 percent of the audience share dwarfing the old media (Synovate, 2009 cited in Ogola, 2009).

The term 'new media' is used in this chapter to mean the emergence of digital, computerized or networked information and communication technologies in the latter part of the 20th century. New media often have the characteristic of being manipulatable, networkable, dense, compressible and interactive.

The chapter identifies the specific ways in which new media contributed to negative ethnicity and particular emphasis is given to the role of the social media such as the internet and mobile computing which enables what Bayne (2008) refers to as ‘different kinds of communication’ than their analog antecedents. Bayne (2008: 43) writes, ‘the first element is the shift from a hub-and-spoke architecture with unidirectional links to the end points in the mass media, to distributed architecture with multidirectional connections among all nodes in the networked information environment. The second is the practical elimination of communications costs as a barrier to speaking across associational boundaries.’ In other words, digital technologies are tools that, in addition to allowing communication in the traditional one-to-one fashion, also allow us to become our own broadcasters and reach large numbers of people in unprecedented ways at trivial cost. Viewed through this lens, actual activities of the new media and ethnicity prior, during and after the election violence witnessed in Kenya are alluded to. Among the questions investigated are: what was the impact of digital technology on ethnicity prior to, during and after the 2007/2008 post election violence in the Kenyan context? To what extent did the new media contribute to fanning ethnicity in Kenya? What was the impact of this digital technology on ethnicity? The chapter also gives a theoretical and conceptual treatment of new media and ethnicity. The chapter rests on the premise that while digital tools can help promote and strengthen ethnicity, they can also increase the ease of promoting hate speech and ethnic divisions. It is also the argument of this chapter that access to new media in Kenya is critical. As our analysis shows, social media can be an alternative medium for citizen communication or participatory journalism.

3. Rationale of the study

Recently in Kenya, there has been a massive expansion of Internet infrastructure and a mushrooming of digital technologies, all geared towards informing, entertaining and educating the citizenry. Mobile phones, the Internet and other digital avenues constitute an important outreach agent through which the public is sensitized on issues such as ethnicity, negative ethnicity and political ideologies. The numerous reports by national and international organizations that document the threatening atmosphere and ethnic violence before, during, and after the 2007 election all mention new media having fanned the flames of ethnic hatred, and the role of hate speech as a feature of the conflict (see Bayne 2008; European Union (EU) 2008; Kenya National Commission of Human Rights (KNCHR) 2007-2008). The distressing conclusion of many of the reports is that some instances of ethnic based violent behavior were likely motivated by encounters with hate speech in the form of text messages, e-mails and blogs (new media). Many people relied on such information that was transmitted by these digital devices and often acted according to their interpretation of the same (KNHCR, 2008: 18). It is, therefore, imperative that any information transmitted through this media should be accurate, moderate, adequate and comprehensible. It is thus of essence to examine claims made that blogs, e-mails, mobile telephony and text messages were used to inflame tension and incite ethnic hatred.

The speed with which Kenyans turned to digital technology prior to, during and in the aftermath of the 2007 elections is proof that new media (the Internet, mobile telephony and blogs) are increasingly shaping the ways in which crises play out in the developing world. However, the double-edged sword of technology extends beyond crisis situations. It is against this background that this chapter attempts to provide a rapid and succinct analysis of what

happened in Kenya prior to, during and after the 2007 elections using the lens of new media devices as discussed later in the chapter, (see section 13) the 2007 election fiasco exposed the deliberate stoking of ethnic tension and animosity by new media, power-hungry elites, feeble democratic traditions and institutions in Kenya. This state of affairs threatened to consume the citizenry. The chapter strives to place the new media in Kenya under scrutiny by analyzing its role in the 2007 post-election violence and eventually suggesting the way forward.

4. Statement of issue

Kenya, being a multi-ethnic country, has witnessed inter-ethnic conflicts experienced especially during the general elections carried out after every five years as witnessed in 1992, 1997, 2002 and the worst one being in 2007/2008 after the disputed presidential election. New media was mentioned in various post election commission reports as having contributed in instigating violence. For example, the Commission of Inquiry into Post-Election Violence (CIPEV) popularly known as the Waki Commission, Non-Governmental Organizations (NGO) such as Minority Rights Group International (MRG) and Kenya National Human Rights Commission (KNHRC) all report that the new media fanned tribal animosity and hatred. It is from this perspective that this chapter seeks to examine and analyze how the new media supposedly fuelled ethnic animosity leading to inter-ethnic wars. Using the lens of the 2007-2008 Kenyan presidential election crisis, this chapter illustrates how digitally networked technologies, specifically mobile phones and the Internet, were a catalyst to both 'predatory behavior', where behavior is driven by cynical, opportunistic and often violent norms such as ethnic-based mob violence and to 'civic behavior' where behavior is driven by the norms of toleration, accountability and equality such as citizen journalism. In particular, this chapter focuses on the significant ways that Kenyans used new media technology to coordinate action: Short Messaging Services (SMS) campaigns to promote and counter ethnic violence; blogs to challenge mainstream media narratives and online campaigns to promote awareness and transparency. It is argued that Kenyan politicians and new media resorted to the use of negative ethnicity to undermine the state through the exploitation of its most vulnerable fault-line ethnicity which exploded soon after the 2007 election leading to Kenyans butchering one another.

5. Kenya at a glimpse

Kenya's official name is 'The Republic of Kenya' which is a country in East Africa. The country is named after Mount Kenya, a significant landmark and the second highest mountain peak in Africa. The area covered by Kenya is 582,646 square kilometers. The population has grown rapidly in recent decades to nearly 40 million although a census conducted in 2009 has not been released for public use. However, sources indicate that it may portray a significant shift in the demographic shares of the different ethnic groups. Kenya achieved its independence in 1963 from Britain. It has now had three presidents. The capital city is Nairobi. According to the 1999 population census about 97% of Kenya's people are Africans. In 2006, the World Bank estimated Kenya's literacy at 73.6%, with male literacy at 77.7% and female literacy at 70.2%. On religious matters the Kenyan population consists of protestant 45%, Roman Catholic 33%, indigenous beliefs 10%, Muslim 10%, and other religions 2% (1999, Census Report).

Politically, the country is a presidential representative democratic republic, whereby the President is both the head of state and head of Government, and of a multi-party system of government. Although ethnic violence has been a recurring ingredient of Kenya's general elections' process since 1963, the cutthroat nature of the competition for the presidency in 2007 propelled Kenya towards inter-tribal violence. The mega-ethnicity that was witnessed in 2007 was of a larger scale than had been evident in the previous elections. Kibaki's Party of National Unity (PNU) went beyond the horizons of the Gikuyu, Embu and Meru Association (GEMA) to incorporate parties that represented a grand-mega ethnic constituency in Kenya. Thus PNU had in its ranks the following political parties: Democratic Party of Kenya (DP) (with a strong base around the Gikuyu, Embu, Meru Association [GEMA] communities), NARC-Kenya (NARC-K) (mainly constituting the support of GEMA communities and from Mijikenda communities from the Coast and a few other ethnic groups from other regions), FORD-Kenya (FORD-K) (that was mainly made up of Bukusu sub-group of the Luhya of Western Kenya). On the other hand, Raila Odinga's Orange Democratic Movement (ODM), which was the main opposition party, was mainly made up of the Luo, the Kalenjin, and a number of other sub-groups of the Luhya, apart from the Bukusu, and other ethnic groups from the rest of the country as those from the Coast and like-minded groups from North Eastern Province.

Prior to the 2007 elections opinion polls predicted a close contest between the two main parties namely: PNU and ODM (Steadman, 2007). The ODM party leader is from the Luo community, while the PNU party leader who has been in power for two terms is from the Kikuyu community. In Kenya executive power is exercised by the government and is vested on both the government and the national assembly. The judiciary is independent of the executive and the legislature. However, there was a growing concern especially during the last year of the first tenure of Mwai Kibaki that the executive was increasingly meddling in the affairs of the judiciary by appointing judges without consultation. Prior to the 2007 election, Kenya had maintained remarkable political stability despite changes in its political system and had not experienced political crises common in neighboring countries such as Somali and Sudan.

6. Ethnicity and ethnic groupings in Kenya - A bane or a blessing?

Our knowledge on the various Kenyan ethnic communities in the pre-colonial and post-colonial period has been enriched by a multiplicity of sources, including oral traditions, archaeology, historical linguistic and cultural anthropology. Pioneer scholars, including Ogot (1967), Were (1967), Muriuki (1977), Ochieng (1974), Mwanzi (1977), Aseka (1989) among many others (cited in Onyango, 2008) have enriched our historical knowledge on individual ethnic communities that occupy present Kenya.

Their studies have emphasized the fact that the present day Kenya was already an ethnically complex region characterized by varied communal interactions by 1500 AD (Mwanzi, 1977). These interactions were constantly altering the social, economic and political entities of the communities in the region. Through the historical process of encounter and interaction, there were evolving ethnic communities that were neither definitive nor pure but hybridized in nature (Ochieng', 1974:44). This process of interaction was underway with the arrival of colonialists. What perhaps needs to be emphasized from the contributions of the pioneer historical studies is that, first, the evolutionary process in Kenya pre-dates the histories of the present day inhabitants. Secondly, that the ethnic composition of the present country Kenya is

as a result of a crystallization of many centuries of interaction between the various peoples and ethnic groups.

According to the 1999 population census, the country has about 43 ethnic groups and each group has its own language and culture that defines it. The country is divided into three major linguistic groups. The largest being the Bantu, followed by Nilotes and the smallest group comprise the Cushites. The ethnic languages of Kenya feature prominently at the national level and each is important to the individual or community at the interpersonal and intrapersonal levels of communication and more so as a marker of ethnic identity. Ethnic languages symbolize an in-group identity for the users. This ethnic distinctiveness has sometimes led to clashes among ethnic groups.

The major ethnic groups in Kenya include: Kikuyu (Agĩkũyũ) 20.78 %; Luhya (Bakhayo, Banyala, Banyore, Bukusu, Idakho, Isukha, Kabras, Kisa, Marachi, Maragoli, Marama, Samia, Tachoni, Tiriki, Wanga) 14.38 %; Luo 12.38 %; Kalenjin (Kipsigis, Marakwet, Nandi, Pokot, Sabaots, Sengwer, Terek, Turgen) 13.46 %; Kamba 11.42 %; Kisii 6.15 %; Ameru (Achuka, Aigembe, Aimenti, Amuthambi, Amwimbi, Atharaka, Atigania) 5.07 %; Maasai 1.76 %; Turkana 1.52 %; Embu 1.20 %; Taita 0.95 %; Swahili 0.60 %; Samburu 0.50 %; Somali 2.29 % (1999, Census report). The percentage indicates the ethnic group's proportion of the population of Kenya. The country also has minority ethnic groups which include: the Aweer, Bajuni, Kore, Kuria, Miji Kenda, Ogiek, Orma, Pokomo, Rendille, Sengwer, Suba, Taveta, Watha, Yiaku, Dorobo, Elmolo, Malakote and Sanye. Ethnic minorities here are distinguished by the small size of their populations. Other non-Kenyan ethnic groups resident in Kenya for many generations are: Gujaratis, Baluchs, Punjabis and Goans from India, Britons, Hadhrami and Omani Arabs and Italians, plus a number of Africans who have become citizens of Kenya (see Makoloo and Ghai, 2008).

In the latest national population and housing census of 2009 though (not officially released), the government put forth a policy of not providing information on the ethnic breakdown of the peoples of Kenya. Instead it opts to provide information disaggregated by age, districts and gender. This action of the government, according to a Senior Demographic Officer with the Ministry of Planning and National Development, was due to the experience of the 1989 census. He stated that:

It was discovered that the ethnic figures were hijacked, abused and used for the wrong purposes mainly for political propaganda. This is why you found that in some cases senior politicians claimed that the figures of their communities had been doctored. This raised unnecessary tensions. The result of this, which is the other reason for the new decision, is that the debate having been taken over by politicians the main issues for which a census is done [sic] were not addressed in the national debate.¹

According to this officer, the figures on ethnicity were collected but not processed for the reasons stated. The same might be the reason why the 2009 population and housing census results have not been officially released.

Ethnicity is, therefore, as old as humankind. People in every part of our modern world, just as in ancient times, belong to some kind of ethnic or tribal grouping that reinforces their sense of belonging, nationalism, patriotism, social values, political progress, and development. The languages we speak, the customs and traditions we cherish, the food we crave for, and the

clothing we adorn all have some linkages to our ethnicities, whether as Blacks, Europeans, Asians, Icelanders, (Kukubor, 2006) or even as Kenyans. In this way, ethnicity reinforces our very beings as persons and nations in charting our destinies in this world in regard to national unity and progress. This is the good news.

Ethnicity should not be a hindrance to national unity and progress, or the source of the continuing ethnic violence and political instability in Kenya unless Kenyans, out of misguided individual egos used ethnicity for mischief, bordering on corruption, mismanagement, and greed for power. We do not categorically state that ethnicity was the cause of the 2007 post election violence. However, the bad news is that ethnicity was a resource in the hands of frivolous 'political entrepreneurs' who, because of corruption, mismanagement, and greed for power, manipulated ethnicity and used it to achieve their personal political agenda (Onyango, 2008). In the real world, as we know from either personal experience or through the media, cultural misunderstanding, ethnic conflict, prejudice, xenophobia, ethnocentrism, anti-Semitism and racism frequently characterize relations between groups that are somewhat different from each other (Bayne, 2008). This is especially the case when one group holds more power, has more privileges or more resources than the others and uses the difference (language or ethnicity) as a legitimation to dominate or marginalize others. Bayne (Ibid) indicates that many African nations have ignored the ethnic nature of their societies and chosen to pretend that the ethnic groups do not exist and have stubbornly refused to build their houses on the strong rudiments of ethnicity. This may sound rather perverse because it has always been argued that our strength lies in unity and that ethnicity is the bane of our nation.

This brings us immediately to the difference between ethnicity and ethnocentrism. Ethnicity is a noun from a Greek word 'ethnikos' meaning 'heathen', implicitly meaning the origin of a person. Ethnicity is the fact of the ethnic group. It poses no danger to the nation. Ethnocentrism on the other hand, is the danger; it is the misuse of the ethnic group, of ethnic sentiments against other ethnic groups (Cheeseman 2008; Yieke 2008). Ethnocentrism may refer to any action or attitude, conscious or unconscious, which subordinates an individual or a group based on origin (language, ethnic origin and culture). This action can be enacted individually or institutionally. This attitude or behavior is based on one's extreme viewpoint or loyalty to a tribe/ethnic or social group, ignorance, excessive pride in one's ethnicity, and/or intent to suppress and dominate others. Ethnocentrism is what Kenyans have been referring to as negative ethnicity (Wa Wamwere 2008). The way we see it then is that, ethnocentrism can be combated, whereas ethnicity is permanent. Wa Wamwere further notes that one can be ethnocentric, regardless of one's religion, intelligence, social status and benevolence.

The concept of 'Tribe' was a derogatory term developed in the 19th century by racist western scholars, and journalists to designate alien 'non-white' people as inferior or less civilized, and as having not yet evolved from a primal state. A lot of times, tribalism and ethnocentrism have been used interchangeably to convey the same thoughts and opinions (Yieke, 2008).

Tribal and ethnic issues are so fundamental in Kenyan society that they seem almost an integral component. These issues seem to have come up even more clearly in the run-up to the 2007 general election. And even though we know that tribalism has always been there, the level to which the Kenyan community had fallen prey to tribalism was and is still amazing. It is becoming a common phenomenon for some myopic thinking Kenyans to

behave as if ethnic differences produce inherent superiority in people of some specific ethnic groups. In fact, such individuals respond to other Kenyans differently merely because of ethnic backgrounds. Individual tribalism occurs in our day-to-day activities at informal levels. This tendency is exhibited in daily conversations, jokes, and how we routinely relate to one another. At this level, the tribal behavior may be conscious or unconscious. The idea however, is to demean or lower one ethnic group in order to raise the profile of the one to which the ethnocentric belongs. An ethnocentric tendency at this level is implicit in behavior and can be identified by certain behavioral signs. This often is done in very subtle ways. For example, the belief that some ethnic groups are more adept in particular jobs or tasks, and the belief in differences in intelligence among certain ethnic groups (what we call stereotypes).

Furthermore, the ethnocentric have no insight into their own prejudice. They believe that their prejudice is based upon objective grounds that cannot be compromised. By this strong fixation, an ethnocentric is capable of fanning violence and other forms of crime towards members of what he or she views as the 'inferior' ethnic group. He or she could easily support the use of force to dogmatically maintain their 'superior' belief. Kenya as a Nation, witnessed this in the run-up to the general elections and even after these elections.

In Kenya, ethnicity has taken the form of the 'ethnification of political and economic processes', which means that people are made to treat ethnicity as increasingly relevant to their personal and collective choices in terms of choice of candidates during elections, investment, residence, and even social interactions such as marriages (Wodak 2001). According to Onyango (2008) political leaders and the people they lead are stimulated to consolidate, form or stabilize an ethnic identity; thus the political opportunity afforded by ethnic networks is easily exploited for political support.

Onyango (2008) further notes that most ethnic groups in Kenya associate the relative economic prosperity of some Kalenjins and Kikuyus to the real/imagined favors derived from the political advantages that accrued to them during the Moi - Kalenjin (1978-2002) and Kenyatta - Kikuyu (1963-1978) presidencies respectively. The same was and is now being said of the Kibaki presidency (2002-2012). Thus, there is common talk of those who have 'eaten'. In terms of political mobilization, therefore, political leaders call upon their ethnic communities to group together and fight for political office either as a way of ensuring their continued stay in power, so as to continue 'eating', or to gain political power as a way of finding an 'eating place'.

Mute (2008) argues that the ground was fertile for what ensued after the 2007 elections. Campaigning, particularly through new media, took an ugly bent, with ethnically prejudiced and stereotyped coverage. The Kenyan blogs and online sites, populated primarily by a youthful generation of Kenyans, many of whom lived abroad, did the same. Text messages circulated around the country, playing on angers and resentments arising from the material reality of historical and contemporary inequalities and injustices, but once again articulated and promoted as being ethnically-based, and experienced as such too. Given the ethnicities of the two presidential contenders - Kikuyu, in the case of Mwai Kibaki and Luo, in the case of Raila Odinga - perhaps insufficient attention was paid to similar angers and resentments in other ethnic communities, particularly among the Kalenjin, whose leading politicians had cast their lot in with Odinga's Orange Democratic Movement (ODM).

Recent political problems that threaten to tear Kenya apart require analysis that goes beyond ethnicity as portrayed in new media and current analyses that attempt to explain the situation.

More correctly, emphasis and focus should be placed on the interpenetration of historical and current political developments whose origins can be traced in the early stages of state formation in Kenya. During this time, White settlers got 20% of Kenya's high-potential farmlands. As these settlers failed to provide enough state revenue and blocked African opportunity, the British increasingly encouraged African farming on the other 80%. So the second economic centre became Kikuyu-land: home to 20% of the population; located close to the capital, Nairobi; cool and attractive to missionaries, with more schools than the rest of the country. By geographical accident, then, the Kikuyu had a head start in making money (essential to advance political ambitions) and in acquiring modern managerial skill. Not surprisingly, the Kikuyu also bore the brunt of colonial capitalist dispossession and socialization, and were in the vanguard of the nationalist struggles that led to decolonization and they came to dominate the postcolonial state and economy. Capitalist development and centralization of power reinforced domination of the Kenyan economy by the Central Province and the Kikuyu, a process that withstood the twenty-four year reign of President Moi, a Kalenjin from the Rift Valley, and was reinvigorated under President Kibaki's administration. (See Mwolongo, 2008 and Hirsch, 2008)

In the new circumstances, other not-so-well-placed ethnic groups made the most of what they had. They were often driven by a local patriotism inspired by vernacular, mission-translated, Bibles that told of an enslaved people who became an ethnic nation. They embarked, in combinations of hope and desperation, on chain-migrations out of pauper peripheries (not unlike the Scots or Irish in comparable circumstances) to colonize particular niches of employment: on the railway; on white farms and plantations; in domestic service; or in the police and army. Yet others came to dominate the livestock trade.

Officials and employers exploited these various tendencies and stereotyped the supposed ethnic qualities of the group concerned. The British helped to harden ethnic divisions made greater by differing potentials for social mobility. The emergence of ethnic consciousness also arose from local debates about how the genders, generations, rich and poor should relate, as older inequalities were transformed into new differentiations less sensitive to existing moral audits of honor.

Central Province and Kikuyu dominance of Kenya's political economy bred resentment from other regions and ethnic groups. It fed into constitutional debates about presidential and political centralization of power, and the regional redistribution of resources that dominated Kenyan politics until 2005 when the draft constitution supported by the President and Parliament was rejected in a referendum. The ODM was born in the highly politicized maelstrom of the run up to the 2005 referendum.

This narrative tends to ignore an important qualifying fact, that not all Kikuyus are dominant and not all Luos are disempowered. Colonial, neo-colonial and neo-liberal capitalisms have bred class differentiations within communities as much as they have led to uneven development among regions. In other words, Kenyan elites have much more in common with each other than they do with their co-ethnics among peasants and workers who also have more in common with each other across ethnic boundaries than with their respective elites. This is a reality that both the elites and the masses strategically ignore during competitive national elections, because the former need to mobilize and manipulate their ethnic constituencies in intra-elite struggles for power, and the latter because elections offer one of the few moments to shake the elites for the crumbs of development for themselves and their areas.

In order to investigate the relationship between language and ethnic identity, or ethnicity, one has to first understand how the concept of ethnicity is indeed planted among an ethnic group. According to Wa Wamwere (2008), the study of ethnicity diverges into two different opinions, namely the “primordialism” and “instrumentalism” perspectives. In the primordial’s view, ethnicity is regarded as ‘constituting’ a fundamental feature of society and that ethnic identity is natural and unalienable. In other words, the ethnicity of a group is defined by its cultural and biological heritage, and is territorially rooted. It is thus grounded by the group’s primordial ties and bound by the ancestors’ values, myths, languages, among other values.

On the other hand, instrumentalists argue that the primordial approach emphasizes too much on the objective nature of ethnicity, which stresses that ethnicity is a ‘given’ and one is born with it (Wa Wamwere, 2008: 52). They criticize the fact that the primordial approach cannot explain the evolution of ethnic groups over time. Instead of admitting solely to primordial ties, instrumentalists emphasize that ethnicity of a group should be understood in terms of its relationship to other groups. This simply means that the members of an ethnic group identify themselves subjectively in relation to other groups in order to maximize their social interest. Worsley (2007) argues that cultural traits are not absolute or simply intellectual categories, but are invoked to provide (ethnic) identities, which legitimize claims to rights. They are strategies or weapons in competitions over scarce social goods. Adopting the instrumental approach to ethnicity, the relationship between language and ethnic identity in new media will be much more transparent to us.

The instrumental view holds that ethnicity is a subjective way of interpreting a group’s identity, often in the hope of maximizing the members’ interest. However, in order to identify a group’s separate and unique ethnicity, the members often have to in some way find themselves certain features which can distinguish them from the other ethnic groups. For instance, biological heritage, religious divergence and language difference are commonly cited as proofs of ethnicity.

It is, however, safe to argue that the very majority of our social life depends on the use of language: the use of different languages naturally separates people into different groups, each not being able to understand the others. Lacking channels of communication, we typically identify others as being ‘different’ from us. This is what makes language such a prominent objective factor in defining ethnicity. To say language is to say society (Yieke, 2007). Thus if one speaks a particular language, then one belongs to that particular society. The idea of language itself is, however, sometimes not an objective fact, but a matter of subjective interpretation and is often employed purposefully as an ethnic distinction. Linguistically, every regional dialect is more or less different from the neighboring dialects. Even though we may normally regard these dialects as dialects of the same language, it is so easy to take this difference as the evidence of independent ethnicity once the speakers find this parallel to their interest. Consequently, this flexibility (or otherwise ambiguity) in defining ‘language’ creates its link to ethnic identity in Kenya.

7. Digital Media in Kenya

In Kenya, the traditional media (electronic and print media) has played significant roles in the mobilization of voters’ as well as for political campaigns. The independent Kenyan government inherited the authoritarian colonial government’s dominant perception of the media as a necessary evil that deserved close supervision and control. The colonial

government feared a free and thriving nationalist media that acted as the mouthpiece for political independence. It enacted the Penal Code in 1930, to control alleged seditious nationalist publications such as Sauti ya Mwafrika (African voice), Uhuru wa Mwafrika (African freedom), African Leader, Inooro ria Agikuyu (The voice of the Gikuyu) among others. Similarly, the Kenyatta Government was averse to an independent and foreign owned media playing a watchdog role that could cause disaffection towards the young government. As a result similar patterns of media ownership and development continued as they were under the colonial rule. Consequently the Independent African government entered the shoes of the colonial rulers.

The traditional media on the other hand is not immune from governmental controls which take the form of political representations to the owners and threats to sue through courts of law, state raids as it happened with the Standard media Group in 2006 and the ban on live media reports as it happened on December 30th 2007.

During the 2007 Kenyan elections the new media technologies used by citizen journalists and community organizers were the same ones used by forces in the government who sought to rig the election, and agitators who attempted to expand ethnic violence. One lesson from the use of information technology in the Kenyan crisis is that the new media technology itself is neutral. It can be used powerfully to give citizens a voice in crisis situations, or used to aggravate those same crises and thus does not take sides. We therefore argue for both sides of the coin by putting into sharp focus the power of the new media technologies in the Kenyan context.

Understanding the role of new media in the elections crisis requires a brief history of Kenyan digital media as well. With an estimated 3 million Internet users, Kenya has one of the highest levels of Internet penetration in sub-Saharan Africa, at 7.9% (of major sub-Saharan African countries – discounting those with populations under a million – only South Africa has higher net penetration.) <http://www.internetworldstats.com/stats1.htm>

More than 12 million Kenyans – roughly 30% of the population – have mobile phones, as compared to a continent-wide penetration of 20%. Kenyan companies have been early adopters of mobile money transfer systems like M-PESAⁱⁱ and complex SMS-based systems like Kazi560ⁱⁱⁱ which matches jobseekers and employers via their phones. <http://www.boston.com/news/world/africa/articles/2008/06/09/kenya-mobile-phone-companys-ipo-get-warm-debut>

New technologies have done much to advance both the country's democracy and its economy. During the recent crisis, these technologies played a very different role, however. Text messages spread hateful ethnic views rapidly and may have helped leaders to enact plans for ethnic violence on a large scale. The public was bombarded not just with hateful and derogatory depictions of politicians and of ethnic groups but also with the idea that it was acceptable to express hatred electronically and to share that expression much more widely than would be possible for an ordinary individual prior to the advent of this new medium. Some of the messages went beyond identifying groups and their interests to denigrating particular ethnicities by using familiar stereotypes of their qualities or behaviors, such as laziness, acquisitiveness, and callousness.

Charles Onyango-Obbo, the Nation Media Group's managing editor for convergence and new products, reported on Mashada blog on December 21st that "There were SMSs landing in

his cell phone's inbox literally every 15 minutes in the last two weeks of the campaign, emanating from all sorts of support groups for the candidates... after the dispute over the outcome, the texts were arriving every five minutes, and they were meaner, nastier and more propaganda-filled." Pervasive texting of negative ethnic speech also allowed for the participation of Kenyans living in the Diaspora, who might have had less involvement in, and impact on, all aspects of the election.

Against this backdrop, it makes sense that Kenyans would emerge as early adopters of new media. Prominent Kenyan blogs, including Daudi Were's "Mental Acrobatics" have been online since early 2003. Starting in 2004, Kenya "Unlimited" has aggregated posts from individual blogs on a central site and provided a "web ring", a navigation mechanism that links related weblogs together. In 2006, a nationwide blogging contest – the Kenya Blog Awards or "Kay bees" – helped bring together individual Kenyan bloggers into a community. Afrigator, an African blog aggregator based in South Africa, cites two Kenyan blogs in its list of top twenty blogs, giving the country the second best representation on that list (after South Africa, which dominates).

Several Kenyan Bloggers took pains to document the 2007 election, but there was little indication from their posts that any anticipated the unusual events that would follow the election. Describing his voting experience, and the precautions taken by the Electoral Commission of Kenya (ECK) to prevent election fraud, Daudi Were observes:

One thing I noticed was that no one was wearing any political party merchandise and the conversations in the queue were distinctly non political and non ethnic. Rather than being divided, by queuing together to exercise our civic duty and responsibility, we were bound together in a sort of patriotic camaraderie. We all felt it was worthwhile to take part in the vote and that ultimately was what mattered.

<http://www.mentalacrobatics.com/think/archives/2007/12/voting-experience-kenya-election-2007-php>.

The tone – and focus – of coverage changed sharply on December 30th, as it became clear that the disputed election would be declared in Kibaki's favor. The ban on live media reports particularly incensed Okolloh, who had been monitoring television, radio, the Internet, SMS and local gossip to produce several election updates per day. When the live coverage ban was announced, she declared: "All live broadcasts have been suspended by the government. The order was released as ODM was addressing their press conference. This is now officially a police state. So we have no idea what ODM is saying, and what the security situation is around the country." <http://www.kenyanpundit.com/2007/12/30/media-blackout-announced/>

Onyango-Obbo, writing in the East African newspaper, argues that there were around 600 blogs around the elections: "Some of them spewing shocking ethnic vitriol... many African nations are already on the verge of being failed states, so we should be very afraid that at highly emotional moments like the recent Kenyan election, it's the subversive forces and hate-peddlers who are winning the SMS and blog wars." (<http://www.kenyanpundit.com/2007/12/30/media-blackout-announced/>) It is thus imperative that much of the Blogosphere in the country, as diverse as it is, can also be characterized as highly factionalized and often virulent in their content.

In the wake of a ban on live media, some Kenyan bloggers responded by redoubling their efforts as citizen journalists. Reeling from the violence in her native Eldoret residence, Juliana Rotich began posting brief bulletins on refugee movements, fuel shortages, road and airport closures. Some were posted via SMS using Twitter to disseminate messages to a wider audience; other bloggers featured photos and these were uploaded to Flickr using a GPRS modem. Were took to the streets on January 3rd 2008, following ODM activists as they attempted to march to Uhuru Park to attend a banned rally. His photos document the empty streets of the usually-bustling capital and the tense standoffs between activists and security forces, and provided insights on the confrontation hard to find in international media covering the confrontations. <http://www.flickr.com/photos/afropicmusing/sets/72157603595279896>.

As Kenyans and the international community try to come to terms with what happened after the 2007 elections, it would be useful to systematically think about the role played by new media which has been a key force for democratization in Kenya during the recent political upheavals like the 2002 elections. But as things unraveled after the 2007 elections, one could not help but wonder whether the new media could have done better or whether new media could have helped forestall the fallout. The new media in Kenya has played a central role in shaping Kenya's democracy. It had gained a reputation for acting as vigorous fora for public debate and it was seen as a guardian of the public interest against overweening state power. The recent record of the new media, according to many within it (see Rotich and Goldstein, 2008), is that new media has undermined as well as invigorated that democracy. As a result, development actors should be better engaged and more supportive of new media in the future. The argument being fore-grounded here then is that the problem facing Kenya's new media (citizen media) is not how technically sophisticated and globally connected it is but rather how neutral the technology itself was and how the new media was utilized positively or negatively in Kenya during the 2007 general elections.

8. Theoretical framework

The chapter has adopted an eclectic approach in its theoretical framework, De Fleur and Ball Rokeach's (1989) Functionalist Theory of Media, and Tan's (1984) Social Responsibility Theory and Ethnicity as a Colonial Formation conceptual framework guided the study.

The Functionalist theory posits that the more the audience is dependent on the media for information and the more a society is in a state of crisis or instability, then the more power the media are likely to have (or be credited with). The theory proposes an integral relationship among audiences, media and the larger social system. This theory predicts that we depend on media information to meet certain needs and achieve certain goals, like uses-and-gratifications. But we do not depend on all media equally. Two factors influence the degree of media dependence. First, one will become more dependent on media that meet a number of one's needs than on media that provide just a few. The second source of dependency is social stability. When social change and conflict are high, established institutions, beliefs, and practices are challenged, forcing one to re-evaluate and make new choices. At such times our reliance on the media for information will increase. At other, more stable times our dependency on media may go way down. One's needs are not always strictly personal but may be shaped by the culture or by various social conditions. In other words, individuals' needs, motives, and uses of media are contingent on outside factors that may not be in the individuals' control. These outside factors act as constraints on what and how media can be used and on the availability of other non-media alternatives. Furthermore, the more

alternatives an individual has for gratifying needs, the less dependent he or she will become on any single medium. The number of functional alternatives, however, is not just a matter of individual choice or even of psychological traits but is limited also by factors such as availability of certain media. In 1989, Ball-Rokeach and DeFleur stated that as technology increases the way in which media can be delivered, its influence becomes even more powerful, and this assertion could not have been truer.

This functionalist theory is nearly only useful for considering questions of social integration. In a complex society, there will be a number of different ways for societies to achieve a required degree of control and consensus and new media are only one institution among several with overlapping tasks in this respect. The tenets of this theory are invoked in the analysis of the emergent patterns of whether the ethnic crisis in Kenya was as a result of the power credited to new media in Kenya. The theory also guided the researchers' conclusion that new media fell short of negative ethnicity control and consensus in Kenya.

Social responsibility theory proposed by Tan (1984) states that the media has a social responsibility that it is called upon to accept; in recognition of their essential role in political and social life. The media, according to this theory, has to provide a "full, truthful, comprehensive and intelligent account of the day's events in a context which gives them meaning. Secondly, the media should serve as a forum for the exchange of comment and criticism and be common carriers of the public expression. Thirdly, the media should give a representative picture of constituent groups in society and also present and clarify the goals and values of society. However, the social responsibility theory emphasizes responsibility of the media to the society it serves as opposed to freedom per se. The social responsibility theorists take the position that the new media need of necessity to assume both moral and legal responsibilities for all that they publish for the general good of the society. The researchers analyzed their data against these tenets to establish whether the data adhered to the tenets or deviated from them.

Ethnicity as a colonial formation conceptual framework is used to explain the division of Kenya into groups otherwise referred to as ethnic groups. The British divided the Kenyan territory along ethnic lines into eight provinces, creating a different majority in each; each province was subdivided into districts, often according to ethnic groups and subgroups. For example, the Luo are based mainly in Nyanza (though it is also the home to the Kisii, who have their own district); the Luhya, in Western Province; the Kikuyu, in Central Province; the Somali, in North-Eastern Province; and the Mijikenda, in the Coastal Province. The Rift Valley is dominated by the Kalenjin, but also contains Maasai, Turkana and Samburu districts. The Kamba share Eastern Province with Embu and Meru, among others. Nairobi is the most cosmopolitan province, with the Kikuyu forming a plurality. It has also often been noted that the structure of colonial administration crystallized the population into tribes creating them where they did not previously have meaning. This framework guided the researchers in data collection and analysis as the emerging patterns were analyzed, described and correlated with ethnicity. The colonial ethnic crystallization in turn created extremely new forms of ethnic competition. Today ethnicity in Kenya means politicized kinship more than it does anything else, a kind of overpowering identity informed by grievances of sense of people wronged of being under siege.

9. Methodology

The research employed purposeful sampling in collecting the data, drawn from the 2007 post election reports and new media. Excerpts of electronic mails and text messages circulated during the 2007 post election violence and those forwarded to the Waki commission of inquiry and major blogs updates prior to, during and after the 2007 elections were also analyzed through content analysis. The study used qualitative research methods where by the data were analyzed descriptively for meaning. The findings are derived from the facts collected and analyzed from oral and documentary evidence that was gathered by the researchers.

10. E-mails, text messages, mobile telephony and blogs

We collected e-mail messages and text messages that were circulated before, during and after the 2007 Kenyan elections for our analysis. The researchers made a public request through their Facebook, Twitter and My Space updates which forms part of new media for people to forward e-mails and text messages that were circulated prior, during and after the elections. Due to the sensitive nature of the content of information being circulated majority of the people declined to forward the e-mails and text messages. Some claimed that it might land them into trouble, as it was illegal to circulate confrontational information with a law on hate speech now in place. One update that captures this read “which sane and God fearing person will keep them.” Other participants did not want to be associated with the issue claiming that we were collecting evidence to forward to the International Criminal Court (ICC). We were thus unable to collect the expected number of text messages for analysis since most people did not have handsets with a large memory to store them and thus had deleted them; however we analyzed the few that we collected which we believe are more than enough. We on the other hand collected 35 e-mail messages that were sampled purposively to get the e-mail messages analyzed for this study. Data from the Kenyan key Blogs such as Mashada, Thinker’s Room, Ushahidi (witness) and What an African Woman Thinks were collected and analyzed. We did a content analysis of the e-mails, text messages and blogs specifically focusing on the use of derogatory terms, demeaning words, the nature of ethnic animosity expressed and, on a positive note, how these new digital technology media helped to counter negative ethnicity.

11. Subjectivity and validity

As researchers, we filtered data through our own expertise and knowledge, which enabled us to derive meaning (Creswell, 1998; Denzin & Lincoln, 1994), yet this filter also likely colors our analysis and interpretations. We minimized possible negative effects of subjectivity by analyzing data from a variety of new media sources such as e-mails, text messages and blogs.

12. Findings

Although the new media in Kenya portrayed the violence as purely political, its basis was clearly ethnic or tribal. Initially, the violence in Kenya was described as a revolt against disputed election results, but when observers began to identify ethnic patterns to the violence, the comparisons to the Rwandan genocide flowed swiftly through the international media. The Western media tore Kenya into shreds. For the two months, the hitherto peaceful Kenya found itself painted in the worst of adjectives, such as “genocide”, “ethnic cleansing”, savagery (or tribalism) and so on. For the entire two months after the 2007 December polls, Kenyans waited anxiously for the Western media to change tact and be compassionate. It never happened. For failing to cultivate its own niche, the Kenyan press which normally borrows heavily from the Western media--found itself torn between the sensational reporting of the Western media and the hard facts on the ground. It chose sensationalism. At a recent meeting under the aegis of The East African Editors Forum, top editors within the region accepted that they had played second fiddle to the Western media and engaged in a soul-searching of their true call. Adam Mynott, who reported on the crisis for the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) does not believe that the BBC exaggerated the scale of the violence, and he shares the criticisms made of those who compared the violence to the Rwandan genocide. “I don’t think the BBC did compare the violence to the Rwandan genocide, although others did. It’s a ludicrous parallel to draw,” he says, “800,000 people died in Rwanda and 1,000 people died in Kenya, so it is a comparison that is odious.” (<http://commonco.typepad.com/8months/2008/02/reporting-on-co.html>)

Every day, footage of the police beating protesters, houses burning, displaced persons, blocked roads, ad infinitum, was aired on online bulletin boards for all to revel in. Whereas telling-it-as-it-is is encouraged in the media, still it has to be done in a responsible and balanced way. But the slant of the Western media coverage was appalling. They put a spin on events, negating the very principles of a fair and just practice of the trade. They disproportionately made everyone to think that the whole country was aflame (<http://www.e-ir.info/?p=475>)

New media reports on the Kenyan elections especially blogs of the protests following the inauguration of President Kibaki almost invariably included the word 'tribal'; the reference is to 'tribes' and 'tribalism' as primordial identities untouched by history, as ancient hatreds immune to modernity, as pathological conditions peculiar to Africa. During the violence that surrounded Kenya’s recent elections, for example, Mashada blog documented that “tribal war” had exploded between the Kikuyu and Luo with picture footage of “gangs going house to house, dragging people of certain tribes out of their homes and clubbing them to death”. This was an “atavistic vein of tribal tension that always lay beneath the surface but up until now had not provoked widespread mayhem” (http://www.recesspa.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=98:a-framework-for-media&catid=44:april&Itemid=191).

As Oyugi (1997) correctly argues, when political contradictions are not adequately addressed in the media, they tend to have adverse consequences on inter-ethnic relations in the society. Conversely, Wa Wamwere (2008) contends that these clashes cannot properly be described as ethnically motivated, ethnicity is a positive distinction, and has nothing of the hatred here

at work. Generally, Kenyans primarily identify themselves according to their tribe or ethnic group first, and then secondly as Kenyans.

Indeed, Kenyan media reports, during what many regarded as ethnic-divided elections, contributed to the violent ethnic clashes that killed over a thousand people and displaced more than a quarter of a million others (<http://www.westminster.ac.uk/schools/media/news-and-events/events/2010/racism,-ethnicity-and-the-media-in-africa>)

13. Short Message Service (SMS), Electronic mails and Blogs

In Kenya, as in the rest of Africa, Short Message Service (SMS) is the most widely used digital application (Bayne 2008). Prior to, during and after the 2007 elections the new media and specifically mobile phones, e-mails, and blogs emerged as significant communication tools. This new technology was perceived to be efficient and a cost effective way of mobilization of voters by the Kenyan politicians prior to the elections. Mobile telephony and more specifically the Short Message Service (SMS) was spreading very fast like a virus. The vial nature of SMS was capitalized on by the political parties for political marketing and thereafter the elections as a tool for spreading ethnic hatred and organizing ethnic violence. The political marketing experts as well as independent mobile phone users, bloggers and the owners of the e-mail accounts, generated these messages. Significantly, most of the ethnic based jokes, humor and hate speech were written in Kenya's local vernaculars. Very few were written in English while the rest were in Swahili. The reason for using the vernaculars was, first, that some of the messages lose their weight and meaning when translated into Swahili or English. Secondly, ethnicity is very central in the Kenyan election process. Political language is translated and interpreted using ethnic background and history as such any political communication must be codified into relevant vernaculars for it to leave an impression in people's mind. On the one hand, these messages focused intense attention on the competing presidential candidates from both the Party of National Unity (PNU) and the Orange Democratic Movement (ODM) in a way that promoted a healthy debate through providing new space relevant for democratic strengthening never witnessed before. On the other hand, these new media devices led to negative political campaigns that also became extremely ethnic based after the elections.

However, if the ethnic discourse of disparagement was covert in the public, in private it was more overt and marked outright disparagement (Waki, 2008). Largely, the SMS in mobile phones was a remarkable medium. There were so many messages used to campaign prior to the elections but we just use the sampled examples to illustrate our point. On the part of ODM supporters, one message that was circulated read:

A Deadly Mountain Flu known as PNU, which affects the brain, has been reported in Central Kenya. The region is under quarantine. People in other parts of Kenya are advised to take ODM pills. One full orange for 3 months to avoid infection.

(<http://inanafricanminute.blogspot.com/2007/04/dark-sideof-mobilization.html>.)

This was coded ethnic discourse. In the first place, PNU was seen as a Central Kenya affair. Therefore, PNU was mainly seen in terms of the Kikuyu ethnic group who are the leading inhabitants of Central Kenya. Secondly, PNU was also seen as a negative thing (flu or disease) that is associated with Mount Kenya region. In fact, the supposed sacred cows in

President Kibaki's first five-year tenure were referred to as "Mount Kenya Mafia" (see Onyango 2008). This was a referential strategy that associated PNU stronghold with a disease rooted mainly in the Gikuyu, Embu and Meru Association (GEMA) - mega-ethnicity that had its stronghold in the Mount Kenya region. To many Mount Kenya out-groups any time the mountain is mentioned, the bell that rings is that of GEMA, because all the conglomerate ethnic groups of GEMA come from around Mount Kenya. This message of disparagement ended with a fallacy cushioned in persuasion, in line with the spirit of campaign. It persuaded people to take a full orange for three months to avoid the flu. The implicit message here was that people who were targeted by the message were to remain steadfast in ODM during the whole period of the campaigns (shown by the three months). The issue of quarantine was also a persuasive strategy that appealed to the audience of the message to keep off PNU. The idea of full orange was very precise to ODM's party symbol that was a full orange.

On the part of the PNU supporters, one short message against the Luo ethnic group read thus:

Do you want to be ruled by Luo to take us back to joblessness? Safeguard the Kingdom. Let us ALL come out and give all the votes to Kibaki so that we are not ruled by an uncircumcised man who will make us wear shorts and plunder all our wealth. It's your vote that will prevent our country from going back to Egypt. May our God bless you.

(<http://allafrica.com/stories/200802291070.html>)

In this text message, an ethnic stereotype that was coined against the Luo during the colonial period is revisited. During the colonial period, careful social engineering came up with ethnocentric labels that labeled the Kikuyu as cheeky, the Luo: genetically lazy and the Maasai as trustworthy albeit trustworthy natives (Ochieng, 1975). Thus, this is the right place to place "the Luo to take us to joblessness" referential strategy in the above discourse. In the question of the Luo not being circumcised implies not being ripe to lead. The Luo do not traditionally circumcise their male, the inner groups that supported PNU traditionally circumcise their male. The question of male circumcision has been a very intriguing point in ethnic discourse that is associated with top leadership. Although Ochieng (2001) reckons that the circumcision trivia on the Luo is remarkably central Kenya discourse, it is, however, true that this discourse is common rhetoric among the male circumcising groups of Kenya when referring to the Luo in negative terms. In this line of thought, among the people of Coast, the Luo are called "watu wazima", that is complete persons, because they have not been cut. Similarly, the Bukusu refer to the Luo as "omusinde", the uncircumcised. Actually, in the National Referendum campaign on the new Constitution in 2005, Honorable Simon Nyachae, who hails from Nyanza with Raila Odinga but from the male circumcising Kisii group also expressed the uninitiated boy sentiments when referring to Raila Odinga. The idea of "putting on shorts" can be seen in the context of "boyhood."

Although Kenya is a tropical country and therefore putting on of shorts would be good for adults, generally, it is boys and not men who are associated with shorts. This is understood in full in relation to our discussion on circumcision above. "Going back to Egypt" is taken from the Bible, a Holy Book. Egypt is associated with the suffering of God's chosen people. In this text, therefore, we see a fallacious campaign maneuver that was sought to associate ODM leadership with suffering. The conclusion of the text was "may our God Bless you", that was, in a nutshell, a false appeal to revered authority. However, whereas we know that God is not discriminatory, in this message the appeal for God's blessings was for those who were to

heed the message of not voting for a Luo and God is reduced to a specific group; that is, the senders of the message and their targeted ethnic audience seen in, “our God”. The issue of revering PNU in this text was seen in the urge to safeguard the “kingdom”, which was in fact a mega- ethnic kingdom, no more no less. The use of ALL in capital letters was populist and a persuasive appeal. This is the important background to the discursive analysis of new media and ethnicity in Kenya prior to, during and after the 2007 elections.

This epithet also seems to combine gender discrimination with ethnocentrism. Gender discrimination occurs in the sense that the uncircumcised are viewed to be feminine and thus unqualified to rule. Specifically, the comment on the suitability of a political candidate, depending on whether he had been circumcised or not addresses the politics of ethnicity and gender in relation to power. When people are criticized for their lack of circumcision as evidence of their demeaned ethnicity, the insult is as much targeting masculinity as ethnicity. Mwalongo (2008) asserts that, the history of sexist use of language makes that terrain of insult more readily available and makes certain such an ethnic slur doubly demeaning.

Yieke (2008) documents how utterances that urged Kenyans from particular ethnic groups settled in various parts of the country to return to their region of origin expressed a “politics of inclusion and exclusion” that related directly to longstanding land disputes and the movement of ethnic groups. Certain references were not newly invented for the election violence but rather resembled statements made about people from surrounding nations who had entered Kenya as refugees or economic migrants and were no longer welcome. These individuals castigated as “foreigners” and “visitors” were clearly positioned as having no entitlement to Kenyan residence. Using such terms in reference to Kenyan citizens has the effect of suggesting that they too can be disenfranchised from civil rights, land, residence, and even identity as Kenyans. Note here that seemingly ordinary terms such as foreigner and visitor gain hurtful power when used in a context of ethnic mobilization.

Those who engaged in negative ethnicity during the 2007 election violence voiced not just the well-worn and familiar stereotypes of commonly circulating ethnic jokes about lazy or lascivious politicians or ethnic groups, but they also used cold, dehumanizing language. They called people “spots” or “weeds” that needed to be cleansed or pulled out. They referred to fellow Kenyans as animals (e.g., mongoose, snakes) or insects (see, Mwalongo 2008). The following blog on Mashada tells it all, “Kikuyu are like mongoose which is ready to eat chickens. All other tribes, i.e. Luo, Kisii, Luhyas are all animals in the forest. They cannot be able to lead this country like Kikuyus.” The use of dehumanizing epithets, as well as the refusal to speak of certain groups of people as humans, is a key indicator that groups in conflict may have become locked in axiological opposition (Rothbart and Bartlett 2007). One other e-mail referring to a Kibaki minister with his portrait read:

Rattlesnake Me-Chuki (hatred). This man is the most famous rigging mastermind Kikuyu in Kenya. Known for his 'rattlesnake' temper, he has a tongue that dates back from colonial administration. Look at his eyes, cunning and foxy. He is the power-behind-the-throne. He is the shadow president of Kenya.^{iv}

The rationale implicit in the use of dehumanizing, value-laden language is: “We are the good and they are the evil. We are the people and they are the animals. We are the worthy and they are the killable.” Such dualistic rhetoric tends to be an indicator that significant violence is

possible. Some uses of dehumanizing language may operate as fighting words that incite ethnic violence in self defense by those who experience insult and threat. Relatedly, these words also offer an ideological justification for those - either speaker or hearer - who might engage in physical violence. As an aside, for words to cause or justify ethnic violence, that is, to have a specific effect, technologies of violence must also exist. Words alone may heighten emotions, but when people decide to engage in violence they must have the tools (even rudimentary) and the organization (even haphazard) to do so.

From the foregoing discussion of ethnic conflict in Kenya, we can infer that ethnic discourse depicts ethnic conflict. The argumentation scheme in ethnic discourse is one that explicates positive self-presentation and negative other-presentation. It is in the question of positive self-presentation and negative other-presentation that we locate the issue of discrimination in ethnic discourse. In this respect, we argue that ethnic discourse decries, discredits, debases, degrades, defames and so on, members of the competing out-groups.

Referential strategies are strategies in which one constructs and represents social actors, in-groups, out-groups by ways of reference tropes, biological, naturalizing, depersonalizing, metaphors, metonymies as well as synecdoche. Predication strategies are, for example, the stereotypical, evaluative attributions of negative and positive traits in the linguistic form of implicit or explicit predicates. They are very close to referential strategies. In Kenya, there are a number of ethnocentric labels that embed referential and predicative strategies that are used concerning various ethnic groups. For example, in the text message, "...uproot the "sangari", 'shake off the soil', 'gather it together' and 'burn it' " (Waki 2008: 218). The Kikuyu here are labeled as 'sangari' – weed by the Kalenjin ethnic group while in other text messages they were labeled as Kenyambi (Kikuyu grass, a weed, by the Gusii), the Kalenjin on the other hand are called warriors.

In the deep heat of the campaigns before the 2007 general elections, disparaging ethnic discourse was evident across the partisan divide. For example, there were e-mail messages that openly called Raila Odinga of ODM "One Dangerous Man" (Hirsch 2008: 8). This referential strategy depicts pars pro toto (part standing for the whole) (Reisigl and Wodak 2001:45 cited in Onyango, 2007), where Raila was taken as a part to represent the Luo community or the whole of ODM. Just one year before the 2007 general elections, Odinga's biography had been released that was interpreted by strong PNU adherents as having implied that he actively participated in the abortive coup of 1982, during Moi's regime. It is important to note that during this abortive coup, most of the top brass coup leaders who were later executed were the Luo (Raila's ethnic group). Thus, in the text of "One dangerous Man" (a caricature of ODM, so to speak), was the implication of danger implied in a dangerous coup plotter who should not be entrusted with the legitimate reins of power. On the other hand, ODM supporters presented a counter argument to PNU's "One Dangerous Man" text. To them the counter text was "One Daring Man" that depicted Odinga as an unrivalled political rights crusader in Kenya.

The use of mobile phones to pass negative campaign and propaganda message proved to be very infectious. As the Kenyan crisis unfolded, many cell phone owners received SMS messages that urged them to drive neighbors from their houses: "If your neighbor is a Kikuyu, just kick him or her out of that house. No one is going to ask you anything." Messages included expressions of ethnic hatred and warnings that one ethnic group would attack another. Opposition sympathizers who translated such messages into their respective vernaculars and passed them

on to their contacts personalized these messages that were centrally produced by activists. The mobile phone users actively participated and aggressively changed the course of the campaign prior to the 2007 elections and ethnic based violence after the elections. In addition, the mobile phone users aware of the limitation of SMS characters and aware of negative and limited coverage given to opposition parties by the state owned media dedicatedly invented lethal negative attacks and rumors that were targeted at PNU candidates. Although the SMS targeted the people with access to mobile phones, such messages clearly appealed to them to pass on the message and to ensure that as many people as possible accessed them.

Regarding the escalating violence in Kenya, the European Union (EU) spokesman in the country, one Bernard Barret is quoted as saying that rumors were being spread by mobile phone text messages predicting imminent attacks by one ethnic group or another and that this is heightening tensions. It is difficult to attach a positive or negative value to these messages collectively. If they are true, then they serve as a useful warning, enabling those who are due to be attacked to protect themselves or to flee. If they are not true, on the other hand, they cause unnecessary panic and might lead to those receiving them planning and executing attacks of their own in order to pre-empt the attack of the perceived enemy. Such messages according to a post on a Kenyan blog “What an African Woman Thinks,” were less sinister but just as dangerous. The author draws a parallel between the calls to genocide on Radio Rwanda in 1994 and the violent SMS ethnic campaigns in Kenya:

It is one thing to broadcast subversive messages on Radio as was the case in Rwanda, and is alarmingly the case with some vernacular radio stations in Kenya. It is an entirely different thing to send these messages to a carefully selected list of people on your contact list that will in turn send them on to their own select list of people so that the message spreads like a virus but catches only people who answer to certain ‘characteristics.’^v

And if you think this is farfetched, then take another look at the Akiwumi (1994) Report according to which some people defended their acts of aggression by saying that they had received word that they were due to be attacked and that, therefore, they were merely being offensive in their own defense. It was more dangerous because there was more stealth to it. It was not done in the open; it was done in secret, making it harder to put an end to it. In addition, the dissemination instrument was not situated in one central place that could be clamped down on easily as compared to old media. Rather, every mobile phone within and without the country or blogger was a potential dissemination instrument, making it almost impossible to crackdown on the proliferators of these messages. Observers were afraid that mobile phones would be for Kenya what Radio was for Rwanda.

Unfortunately in such a state of unrest, it was difficult to distinguish between fact and falsehood in the flood of text messages that were filling people’s phones each day. There were also messages spreading rumors that implicated Kenyan companies and institutions in promoting violence. The Nation Media Group had to officially deny claims, spread primarily through text messages, that their vans were being used to ferry guns to far flung parts of the country. Half truths, untruths and propaganda spread like wildfire. One person sends it to

five, those five send it to twenty, those twenty send it to one hundred, and so it spreads like wildfire.

Worse though, were text messages and e-mails that were unrepentantly filled with hatred and subversion. These became increasingly more frenetic in the days leading up to the 2007 general election, and reached a climax after the Electoral Commission of Kenya (ECK) botched up the tallying of votes and a disputed government was hurriedly sworn in. On January 1, 2008, Kenyans started to receive frightening text messages that urged readers to express their frustrations with the election outcome by attacking other ethnic groups. One such message reads, "Fellow Kenyans, the Kikuyu's have stolen our children's future...we must deal with them in a way they understand...violence." (Hirsch, 2008: 11). In reaction, another reads, "No more innocent Kikuyu blood will be shed. We will slaughter them right here in the capital city. For justice, compile a list of Luo's, Luhyas and Kalenjins you know...we will give you numbers to text this information." (Hirsch, 2008:11). Mass SMS tools were remarkably useful for organizing this type of explicit, systematic, and publicly organized campaign of mob ethnic violence. These messages are part of a troubling trend in East Africa. In April 2007, three Ugandans died in Kampala when violent acts were organized via SMS to protest the Government of Uganda's sale of the Mabira Forest to Kakira Sugar Works.

These were the text messages that preached a radical and dangerous message. These were the messages that tell an individual all that is good about him/her on account of ethnic identity and all that is wrong with the Other on account of their ethnic roots. These were the sometimes hysterical text messages that justify hardliner stances and violence visited upon the Other simply because they are Other (ethnically). These text messages called on the recipient to act in a certain way on the basis of their ethnicity, and further, to regard the Other or act upon the Other in a certain way because of their ethnicity. What made these subversive messages spreading by mobile phone most sinister though, was the ability to select the audience.

According to Yieke (2008) mobile phones were also used to coordinate riots and attacks on various ethnic groups in Kenya. Text messages inciting ethnic violence started to spread as early as January 1, 2008, urging Kenyans to "deal with them (incumbent president Mwai Kibaki's tribe, the Kikuyu) the way they understand...violence." (Yieke, 2008:27) Messages in response called on the Kikuyu to "slaughter them (members of opposition candidate Raila Odinga's tribe, the Luo) right here in the capital city." (Yieke, 2008: 27)

There were also messages with a stern warning on members of the Kikuyu community to leave Coast region. One text message read:

Onyo kali nyinyi Wakikuyu Wakamba muliofika tayari na wale ambao tuko na habari wanakuja tutawauwa nyote. Hayo magari mlioleta tutayachoma yote. Kwa hivyo tunawapa masaa sabini na mbili muondoke. Muondoe magari yenu kabla ya muda kumalizika. Ama damu na majivu ya mali yenu itamwagika from Kaya Revolution Council. Similani Midzichenda.

(Human Rights Watch 2008: 54)

Translation:

You Kikuyus, Kambas, who have already arrived here and those we have information that you are coming. We shall kill all of you. We shall burn all those vehicles you have brought. Therefore, we are giving you 72 hours to leave. Get your vehicles out of here before this time runs out. Or your blood and ashes of your property will be poured. From Kaya Revolution Council. Similani Midzichenda (sic).

In retaliation other ethnic groups such as the Luo, Luhya, Kalenjin and to a lesser extent the Kisii communities living in Central Province which is home to the Kikuyu ethnic group were targeted during the post-election violence. Text messaging and e-mailing ordering non-Kikuyu ethnic groups to leave Central Province were done with precision. The perpetrators of these evictions appeared to have known exactly where non-Kikuyu people lived, their mobile phone numbers and their e-mails. The messages were sent to non-Kikuyu residents giving them an ultimatum within which they should have left. As a result Short Messaging Services (SMS) were used to organize, rally and galvanize the Kikuyu ethnic community against other ethnic communities.

Yieke (2008) estimates that, "... according to satellite mapping of the violence in the Rift Valley, 95 percent of the recent clashes in that area have occurred on land affected by (settlement) schemes." Much of the violence in this region is motivated by majimboism, which is a Swahili term referring to the aspiration of a type of federalism composed of semi-independent regions organized by ethnic groups. To many in the Rift Valley, however, majimboism legitimizes violence against Kikuyu's who are seen as encroaching on the ancestral land of other ethnic groups. It is also worth noting that there are signs that those who attempted to seek majimboism through targeted violence largely achieved their goals. Human Rights Watch (2008: 111) reports that:

The events of the first months of 2008 have dramatically altered the ethnic makeup of many parts of Kenya. Scores of communities across the Rift Valley, including most of Eldoret itself, are no longer home to any Kikuyu residents. The rural areas outside of Naivasha, Nakuru, and Molo are similarly emptying of Kikuyu while Kalenjin and Luo are leaving the urban areas. In Central Province, few non-Kikuyu remain. The slums of Mathare, Kibera and others in Nairobi have been carved into enclaves where vigilantes from one ethnic group or another patrol 'their' areas.

(See, http://www.knchr.org/dmdocuments/KPTJ_Final_Press_Release.pdf)

However, since new media, unlike old media, is a multi-directional tool, there is also hope that voices of moderation can make themselves heard. In 1994 in Rwanda, radio was used to mobilize the genocide, and moderate voices were unable to respond. In Kenya, as hateful messages extended their reach into the Kenyan population, Michael Joseph, the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of Safaricom, Kenya's largest mobile phone provider, was approached by a government official who was considering shutting down the SMS system. Joseph convinced the government not to shut down the SMS system, and instead to allow SMS providers to send out messages of peace and calm, which Safaricom did to all nine million of its customers. Kenyan mobile phone operators also cooperated with the Kibaki government to send messages to subscribers, urging them not to send or forward inflammatory messages. Juliana Rotich reported on the Mashada blog receiving the following message on her mobile phone in Eldoret: "The ministry Of Internal security urges you to please

desist from sending or forwarding any SMS that may cause public unrest. This may lead to your prosecution”.

Further, it is quite easy for governments and companies to identify and track individuals that promote hate speech. In the aftermath of the violence, contact information for the individuals who allegedly promoted mob violence was forwarded to the Government of Kenya. The ministry of information may have been premature in threatening prosecution for forwarding messages that incited violence. The Daily Nation newspaper (old media) reported on March 1, 2008 that the government had compiled a list of 1700 people who had forwarded text messages that incited ethnic violence. However no action was taken as Kenya did not yet have an applicable law to prosecute SMS, e-mail and blog-based hate speech; a debate was instituted in Parliament to create such a law (on electronic hate speech) which is already in operation and is being used to persecute hate speech peddlers in the forth coming constitutional referendum.

Negative ethnicity was not limited to mobile telephony. Blogs and e-mails were instrumental in documenting post-election ethnic violence in Kenya and in sharing this information with a global audience during an otherwise total media blackout instituted by the government. The Kenyan online forum “Mashada” became so filled with violent messages that its creator, David Kobia, shut it down on January 29, 2008 for a cooling-off period noting that it had been overwhelmed with hostile and divisive messages. A screenshot taken of the forum that day reads, “While we feel that people need a space to interact; the majority of interaction on Mashada.com has begun to reflect the negative aspects of what is happening in Kenya”:

Mashada will be back shortly...

While we feel that people need space to interact, the majority of interaction on Mashada.com has begun to reflect the negative aspects of what is happening in Kenya.

In the meantime, anyone who feels that they still want an avenue to express their views should either visit the blogs, or better still their own blog.

We still welcome any suggestions, comments or questions. Contact us.

*Let us promote Peace, Love and Unity in our country. Pray for our beloved nation **KENYA**.*

In an interview several months after the elections, Kobia noted that the media blackout caused many Kenyans to look for information online. He called the freedom of expression offered by Mashada a “double-edged sword,” admitting that it allowed people to share “imagined account[s] of the truth” and that for those with “the intent to spread ethnic vitriol on the website this is a microphone” (www.mashada.com)

However, a few days later, Mashada’s site administrator David Kobia launched “I Have No Tribe”, a site explicitly centered on constructive dialogue among Kenyans. As Ethan Zuckerman writes: (I Have No Tribe) showed posts from Kenyans around the country and around the world wrestling with the statement, “I have no tribe... I am Kenyan.” Kobia redirected the Mashada site to the new site, and it rapidly filled with comments - combative as well as supportive, as well poems and prayers. Kobia re-opened (Mashada) on February

14th, having elegantly demonstrated that one possible response to destructive speech online is to encourage constructive speech.

The examples of SMS and online bulletin boards illustrate the tension inherent in new many-to-many digital communications tools. In the Kenyan context, this architecture is a new space where the predatory impulse to deepen existing cultural divides meets head on with the civic impulse for constructive and healing dialogue. Just as human rights activists used digital tools to amplify their voice and lower their cost of operations, so too did citizen journalists, who used blogs, SMS, and e-mails to challenge the narrative presented by mainstream Kenyan media and the government.

14. Conclusion

There is solid evidence from our analysis for the proposition that new media and the World Wide Web offers a nascent public sphere in which a national conversation about ethnicity that has yet to happen might somehow be forged. It as well emerges that new media has a significant role to play in uniting or dividing a society with a variety of ethnic groups. On the contrary, this chapter also observes that ethnic based violent behaviors were largely motivated by encounters with hate speech in new media. The ethnic violence that characterized Kenya's elections appears to have been the result of deliberate manipulation and instigation by new media. From our analysis, 85% of the data analyzed indicated that the new media took a central role in fanning the post-election violence.

The chapter contends that the upsurge of ethnic violence instigated by new media has resulted into more pronounced ethnic consciousness and that Kenyan politics hinges primarily on ethnicity and not ideology. This, therefore, demonstrates that ethnic violence has had far-reaching implications for the country. Our analysis has also shown that the intervention - though late - by the mobile telephone companies and blog owners decision to counter the hate speech with messages of tolerance (for example, Kenya: One Nation, One People) and compelling local leaders to denounce egregious utterances - might have been effective in pre-empting the violence and in handling future instances. Our analysis has also shown that "some new media became sensational and unnecessarily alarmed their audiences and inflamed their passions".

Further, the chapter concludes that language is instrumental in accomplishing new media roles and new media entrepreneurs must wake up to the reality that all is not well. There is an urgent need for new media to redefine a prescriptive strategy based on historical reality and the current status of ethnic relationships in Kenya. This should encompass the promotion of ethnic enlightenment through the recognition of ethnic differences and the discovery of equitable ways to accommodate them. It is our contention that with responsible journalism, good governance, good media laws and high literacy levels, such cases as witnessed in the 2007 post Election violence in Kenya would be avoided.

The chapter's overall conclusion is that the role of the new media in Kenya's ethnic and political crisis was entirely preventable and controllable, and had it been prevented, the violence and the ethnic animosity itself may well have been much more limited. These were unambiguous criminal acts that demanded government intervention, including through

Section 96 of the Kenyan Penal Code which outlaws (among other acts) language calculated to bring death or injury to any person or community of persons. New media's role in the future may be critical in the reconciliation and restoration of democratic and ethnic legitimacy in the months and years ahead.

15. Solutions and recommendations

The government and non governmental bodies, using new media, should design activities that could broaden the public space for discussing ethnicity in productive ways. Dialogues, media presentations, and the recounting of histories of inter-ethnic cooperation could all be considered. In the wake of the violence, none of these were easy to pursue and might not have been possible until more time has passed. National dialogue on ethnic relations could be a useful parallel to addressing root causes as described above. Relatedly, efforts towards post violence remedies, including reconciliation among groups, should include an explicit discussion of the relations among language, power, ethnic violence, new media and the context and histories behind the recent expressions of hate speech in new media. Kenya, Africa is not alone in needing such a conversation; the United States and other nations would benefit from attention to the power of hateful language to effect violence in various forms.

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17. Key Terms and Definitions

New media

Emergence of digital computerized or networked information and communication technologies in the latter part of the 20th century which are manipulatable, networkable, dense, compressible and interactive.

Ethnic group

Group of humans who share the same primordial characteristics such as common ancestry, language and culture.

Ethnicity

Behavior and feeling (about oneself and others) that supposedly emanates from membership of an ethnic group.

Ethnic conflict

Cleavages between groups based on differentiations in ethnic identities.

Hate speech

Bigoted speech attacking or disparaging a social or ethnic group or a member of such a group.

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Endnotes

¹See, for example, David Anderson, "Majimboism: the troubled history of an idea," in Daniel Branch & Nic Cheeseman (eds.), *Our Turn to Eat! Politics in Kenya since 1950* (Berlin: Lit Verlag, 2008).

ⁱⁱ M-pesa is a popular safe, reliable and fast electronic money transfer system which allows Kenyans to bank and transfer money for daily business transactions using their mobile phones.

ⁱⁱⁱ KAZI560 is a Kenyan job alert service that matches subscribed job seekers to their career jobs through mobile phones.

^{iv} Make Text Not War, Humanitarian.info, <http://www.humanitarian.info/2008/04/24/make-text-not-war/>. of the 2007 Kenya's general elections

^v Ofeibea Quist-Arcton, "Text Messages Used To Incite Violence in Kenya," *NPR News*, <http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=19188853>