Assessing Peace Journalism on Kenya Television Network’s Diaspora Voice in the 2013 Elections

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Résumé

Les élections kenyanes de 2007 avaient été caractérisées des actes de violence inouïe ayant entraîné plusieurs milliers de morts et conduit à l’inculpation par la Cour pénale internationale de Mr Kenyatta et Mr Ruto pour leur implication personnelle dans la commission de ces actes considérés comme constitutifs de crime contre l’humanité. Un nouveau style de journalisme, le “journalisme de la paix”, avait alors vu le jour la veille des élections de 2013 pour empêcher la répétition de ces actes et le Réseau kenyan de télévision en était devenu le chantre à travers son programme dénommé la “Voix de la Diaspora” qui diffusait des messages de paix pendant et après les élections. Cet article qui recourt à l’économie politique des médias évalue de manière critique ce “journalisme de la paix” et ses effets. L’auteur soutient qu’un tel style non-critique ayant permis de passer sous silence les nombreuses irrégularités électorales au nom de la paix et des intérêts du capital dominant aura néanmoins contribué à desservir la presse dans son rôle de quatrième pouvoir et aura permis aux politiciens qu’elle pensait servir de se retourner contre elle en votant des lois tendant à réduire son indépendance.

Keywords: Democracy; Diaspora Voice; Elections; Kenya; Kenya Television Network; Journalism; Peace, Peace Journalism.
Introduction

This paper argues that while Kenyan Television Network (KTN) can be appraised for covering peace messages in the run-up to the 2013 elections, it missed the opportunity for implementing a much needed alternative approach to journalism (Peace Journalism) by the deliberate, yet casual manner in which the complexity of peace, its existence and non-existence was narrowed down to a single programme that this paper investigates (Diaspora Voice) (DV).

The original Peace Journalism (PJ) Model was set out in table form by professor Johan Galtung, a founder of the academic subject of Peace Studies and the set of analytical and fieldwork method known as peace research. The model was based on distinguishing between peace oriented journalism from violence oriented journalism. PJ is seen as solution and truth oriented while war or violence journalism is more concerned with propaganda and victory oriented (Lynch & McGoldrick 2005).

PJ is a new concept in journalism that argues for a particular kind of reporting that will lead to the realization of peace rather than conflict. PJ is therefore opposed to traditional war reporting or sensational reporting often found in mainstream media. The latter is driven by the “if it bleeds it leads” mentality designed to attract audience attention and seek a larger share of the media market in order to make profits. The key rationale in PJ is that in any conflict, reporters must strive to be objective and be able to present a ‘win-win’ scenario for both sides and avoid reports that would escalate violence. There has often been arguments about the practicality of presenting a win-win scenario in situations where reporters themselves are directly involved in conflicts like disputes between two nations, or ethnic communities and questions of whether or not there is anything like objectivity in the first place. But these are questions beyond the scope of this paper.

While the paper does not intend to argue that peace messages on the two episodes of a single programme (DV) on one television channel in Kenya (KTN) may have contributed to peaceful elections witnessed in 2013, it investigates and assesses the manner in which these peace messages constructed peace discourses to the audiences with the aim of arguing for the role of PJ in electoral reporting and how this may enhance democratic reforms through free, fair and peaceful elections.

The paper uses critical political-economy theory of the media, agenda-setting theory and concepts derived from PJ schema to analyze peace discourses in two special episodes of DV focusing on elections peace messages on 6 March 2013 and how they framed KTN’s general news coverage of the 2013 elections. These episodes were selected because of one important issue. Apart from the fact that they contained deliberately constructed electoral peace messages, the messages were divided into two. The first set of peace messages were those emphasizing the need for Kenyans to maintain peace during the elections or when voting while the second set of peace messages were meant to sensitize Kenyans on the importance of maintaining peace after vote tallying and the declaration of either the election winners or losers.
Conceptual Framework, political economy of the media and peace journalism

Liberal democracy implies a low degree of political control of the media and a high degree of tolerance among political elites for the unwelcome and critical things which journalists would write and say. A liberal democratic political system demands journalistic criticism of elites as a condition of its legitimacy. Critical and pluralistic journalism is viewed as a safeguard against the possibility of a return to the authoritarian rule and as a watchdog against the abuse of political power (McNair 1998: 83) and (Ogenga 2008). The Kenyan media is assumed to operate under a liberal democracy.

A political system largely determines the political culture in a country. Considering the Kenyan context, critical political economy of the media indicates that the media has some degree of autonomy and freedom to report and even criticize the government but still identifies certain authoritarian tendencies that prevail through censorship and control (McNair 1998). Journalists are supposed to hold politicians accountable for their actions and expose corruption.

Leftist critics of liberal democratic political systems, however, see the freedom to attack the ruling class as opposed to being symbolic and employing superficial attacks on the management of capitalism, which, by removing the rotten apples from the barrels, ultimately serves to strengthen the system and its inherent inequalities (McNair 1998). Journalists have an economic relationship with the state. This is in cases where the political apparatus has control over sources which can be employed as a means of exercising pressure.

Although the Kenyan media can be said to have a legacy of colonial inheritance, like many other media in Africa (Kariithi 1994), it has been structured along the western commercial model and it operates to make profits.

McChesney (2003) and Williams (2003) argue that economic factors/ market forces impact on the media in ways in which it becomes an industry. The media therefore operates as an economic institution in the business of cultural production. Journalists come up with news stories that will encourage readership and sell the readers to advertisers. In a sense, media owners are in a position to control the kind of news stories that will appeal to their readers interests and at the same time not offend advertisers. This can sometimes lead to sacrificing journalistic freedom, creativity and integrity at the altar of owners and advertisers who exert a major influence in the content. For instance, journalists cannot afford to give negative publicity to their advertisers.

With regard to market forces discussed above, politics in Kenya is considered newsworthy and often politicians who scoop the lions share as sources in news stories are relied upon by journalists when covering events leading to some form of framing and stereotypical representation of issues. Of course the more credible the source, the more likely it will be utilized in the process of news construction.
Critical political-economy theories of the media are more concerned with the idea of media ownership, the media market and financial support. The manner in which the media operates is shaped by their owners, the market environment and financial support. In this environment, the media manufactures cultural content that sustains the system “capitalism” (Curran 2000b; Chomsky 2003).

The media is in the business to maximize profits just like any other business organization in capitalism (Williams 2003; Mosco 1996; Hesmondhalgh 2007). Central to this argument is the idea that the product or the content of the media may be shaped by corporate interests, basically the interests of the owners. Media owners ensure they appoint journalists who share the same ideologies as theirs in the market driven system into managerial position to sustain their interests and the interests of a particular class (Ramaphosa 1999).

In the 2013 elections, it was evident to any viewer that Nation Media Group, Nation TV and newspaper were biased to opposition while the Standard Group, its television channels (Kenya Television Network) and Standard newspaper were equally biased in favor of the Jubilee Alliance. Television channels such as K24 that is virtually owned by Uhuru Kenyatta gave the Jubilee Alliance favorable coverage while others such as the Royal Media seemed not to have a clear position. On some occasions, they would appear to be pro-Jubilee and anti-opposition while in others they appeared pro-opposition and anti-Jubilee. However, this could be because of issues of ownership. Royal Media is owned by S. K. Macharia, a Kikuyu Elite and given the tribal undertones and the ethnic pattern of voting that characterized the 2013 elections like all other elections in Kenya, the character of Royal Media is not surprising. Royal Media would not want to appear so much anti-Kikuyu or pro-opposition to the extent of being called a sellout.

News and investigative reports that journalists produce have user value for maximizing profits (Chambers 2000). The media is thus obliged to meet the needs of owners, the audiences, advertisers as well as media employees by employing a delicate balance between these stakeholders (Picard 1989). This obligation influences media content (Gandy 1997). Mbeke (2008) argues that the Kenyan media has never been in a comfortable position with regard to the political, economic, technological and social environment. Often the media environment has been politicized and little has been done in terms of policy to address issues that could lead to a stable, independent and critical media which means elitist ideas are circulated to the masses through the media with no opportunity for contest.

Agenda setting theory (McCombs, Shaw & Weaver 1997) argues that the media can set a powerful agenda for change by deceiving the masses into accepting a false idea (false consciousness) through repetition and emphasis as argued later in this paper under the sub-section “tyranny of numbers”.

Concepts from Peace Journalism (Kempf 2007) are used to argue for a brand of journalism that will encourage dialogue and deliberation rather than conflict in the context of contentious events in Africa such as democratic elections.
Kempf two-way model in deconstructing war discourse in PJ emphasizes on the solution oriented conflict reporting which is people oriented, focuses on common rights and peace initiatives, humanizes all sides and redirects anger against war instead of against the enemy (Kempf 2007).

Mandelzis argues that in scholarly studies of peace discourses, she has always found out that most actually deal with war discourse framed in “conflict oriented way” (Mendelzis 2007: 2). Although studies on media peace discourse are rare, we are increasingly seeing an emphasis on peace in the media and elsewhere in bodies such as United Nations Education Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) that are paying attention to peace studies, peace theories, peace discourse and peace research. In the last few years, such initiatives have led to the construction of “peace culture”, a term popular with organizations such as UNESCO (Mandelzis 2007).

However, the lack of perspectives on peace, among other things would be responsible for the prevalent scarcity of literature on “the relationship between mass media, communication and the culture of peace” (Mandlezis 2007: 2). This concern underscores the importance of this study that strives to give a critical appraisal on discourses of peace in the media (KTN), however remote they might be, in the hope of contributing to the scarce literature about the relationship between mass media, communication and peace and therefore nature a culture of peace in sub-Saharan Africa.

The mass media should be used as a tool for fostering understanding between global communities to build peaceful and prosperous societies. In addition, the universal ethical conducts of journalistic practice require journalists across the world to stick to the right side of the civilized discourse. Journalists in this context have an obligation to act for peace and against any kind of war propaganda. According to Kempf:

*Journalists are responsible for the way and how they report; and even the creation of opportunities for society at large to consider and to value nonviolent responses to conflict...it is not an external role imposed to journalists from the outside. The obligation to create these opportunities results directly from the role assigned to journalism in democratic societies* (Kempf 2007: 3).

PJ may therefore provide an excellent opportunity for reporters working in countries in sub-Saharan Africa such as Kenya with the much needed opportunity for reconstructing journalistic ideological fractures despite its shortcomings.
Legal, Political and Economic Environment of Media Operation in Kenya

The Kenyan Communication Act (No. 2 of 1998) as amended by the Kenyan Communication (Amendment) Act 2009 provides a framework for regulating the communication sector in Kenya. Even though there is a general consensus by various stakeholders in the media industry that the media should exercise self-censorship as the best way of encouraging a robust and free press, the Kenyan media is still regulated by the constitution that provides for certain independent legislation and institutions to check the conduct of the press such as the recently introduced Kenya Information and Communication (Amendment) Bill aimed at further amending the Kenyan Information and Communication Act of 1998. The Bill established the Communications Authority of Kenya (CAK) to replace Communication Commission of Kenya (CCK) and was criticized among many things of imposing hefty fines on errant journalists and media houses in a move that many saw as a ploy to intimidate and gag the media.

Institutions such as Media Council of Kenya (MCK) also check on the conduct of the media. The MCK has a tribunal. Members of the public can approach this tribunal to complain about media content that they find offensive.

The worrying issue about CAK is that while its members are drawn from the public, the executive has control over appointments since membership positions are advertised through the Information Communication Technology (ICT) Cabinet Secretary directly appointed by the president. Therefore, there are high chances of political influence.

Historically, the Kenyan media in general has a trajectory of colonial inheritance. It was commercially structured (Kariithi 1994). Media content has therefore been shaped towards fulfilling audience demands but other than that, it has often come under severe pressure to fulfill the wishes of their owners. Mbeke (2008) argues that the Kenyan media has never been in a comfortable position with regard to the political, economic, technological and social environment. Often, the media environment has been politicized and little has been done in terms of policy to address issues that could lead to a stable, independent and critical media. The media environment has been volatile, one that gives room for bullying and gagging whenever it strives to function as a watchdog in exposing government scandals and other issues of public interest.

In Kenya like elsewhere in Africa, the government owns a national broadcaster called Kenya Broadcasting Corporation (KBC). There is also a good number of privately owned media mainly owned by powerful politicians (Ogenga 2010). The political and economic environment in which the Kenyan media operates therefore possibly influences media content. Unraveling agendas and competing interests in this political and economic environment can give insight into understanding how the Kenyan media operates and how it can be transformed. This environment demands that the media conforms to pressures from politicians on one hand and the audiences and advertisers on the other.
The environment is characterized by friction that can sometimes lead to framing, propaganda and distorted representations. This kind of distorted representation raises theoretical concerns regarding realities and meanings constructed in the minds of the Kenyan audience (Ogenga 2010).

Were the 2013 elections peaceful or the media scared and blackmailed audiences into voting for peace instead of genuine change in what was called “manufactured consent in the context of moral panic” (Hall 1978)?

The Kenyan audiences tend to believe in what they observe, read or hear from the media. As one of the mainstream television media outlets in Kenya, KTN has earned its reputation as the oldest privately owned television network with a tradition of presenting serious news content that is objective and reliable. KTN is largely owned by entrepreneurs from the Kalenjin community in the Rift Valley. Retired President Daniel Arap Moi is among them.

During the 2013 elections, the Kalenjin merged with the Kikuyu to form a coalition called the “Jubilee Coalition”. This coalition consisted of Trans National Alliance (TNA), mainly composed of members from the Kikuyu, the largest ethnic group in Kenya community, United Republican Party (URP), mainly constituted members of the Kalenjin community, as the main partners, with smaller parties like Party of National Unity (PNU) of the immediate former President Mwai Kibaki. It was interesting to find out how the KTN would represent the 2013 elections, especially when the leaders of the dominant parties (TNA and URP) in the Jubilee Coalition, namely Uhuru Kenyatta (now Kenya’s fourth President) and William Ruto (now Deputy President), had been indicted by the International Criminal Court (ICC) to answer cases related to crimes against humanity committed in the aftermath of the 2007 post-election violence. The ICC question was in fact a motivating factor behind the birth of the Jubilee Coalition judging from their election campaigns that managed to convince voters that a vote in their favor was a vote against Western imperialists and superpowers who wanted to use the ICC to impose puppet leaders on Kenyans by eliminating them in the presidential race, an idea that was popular to most voters and made the two leaders laugh their way to State House as they could rely on the “tyranny of numbers” (Ogenga 2013).

Context of Media and Elections in Kenya, 2007-2013

In the run-up to the 2007 general elections, the media did a tremendous job covering campaigns and providing air time and space for candidates to reach the masses with their electoral manifestos. They also did well in releasing opinion polls that proved largely correct in predicting the outcome of parliamentary elections.

One reason for the contested presidential election is that the media made extensive coverage of the voting process and released unofficial results in which Kenyans believed. The problems arose when the official results did not match what the media had predicted. Soon after being sworn in, the government banned all live broadcasting, a move that undermined freedom of the press and the very fundamental freedom of expression.
During this period of media blackout, a member of Kenya’s Human Rights Watch, Maina Kiai, was quoted in an article published in *The Star* on 7 January 2008 titled “Kenyan Media Spurns Violence and Calls for Peace” saying that the Kenyan media had failed to search beneath the surface for the root causes of the political crisis. He accused the media of suppressing the reality of what many saw as tribal cleansing related to the disputed presidential election. He argued in the article that “the only way to peace is through truth and justice. It’s not enough to be calm; we need the truth.”

Kiai’s argument about the situation raises two issues, especially considering his background as a member of a non-governmental organization championing human rights in Kenya (Human Rights Watch). The two issues are:

• that the media should be able to function freely by informing Kenyans without fear, favor or intimidation. However, the media should inform within the boundaries of social responsibility. While they strive to report the truth by providing facts and objective accounts of events they must do so in a way that will not incite people into more violence.

• the idea of tribal cleansing that the media suppressed ought to be dealt with through truth, justice and reconciliation and not through silence and denial. Tribalism in Kenya is an identity problem which is aggravated by the stereotypes attached to the “other”, whether these are negative or positive. Identity issues are ideological and one of the ways in which ideology thrives is through propaganda and the naming or blaming of the ‘other’.

The worst cases of “othering” become violent and have in them elements of tribal cleansing and genocide. In what appeared to be akin to genocide in the eyes of many, the Kenyan situation in the aftermath of the 2007 elections was discussed during the 2008 AU summit in Ethiopia. But what is interesting is how the Kenyan media resisted the influence of commercial factors when writing news content about the violent elections.

The media avoided naming either victims or perpetrators of violence, employed investigative/critical journalism and chose to preach peace –this was perhaps the first evidence of experimenting PJ in Kenya which was a positive move that helped reunify Kenyans. The Media’s conduct demonstrates how the local press was on its way to maturity in terms of its functions in the society.

In any human rights issue related to two or more conflicting interest groups, the rule of law anywhere in the world will defend the idea of balancing rights to see which rights outweigh others and which infringe on others. In this case, the Kenyan media seem to have understood that the right to peace outweighed the right of Kenyans to know (freedom to receive information) which tribe was killing the other and in what manner; information that would only have aggravated the situation (Ogenga 2008). However, the Kenyan media still failed audiences or voters in their coverage of the 2013 elections. even though it provided figures of the 2013 electoral results that would help them independently come up with the tally, the process was interrupted by the failure of the electronic tallying system and therefore they missed the opportunity to take the lead in independently predicting the winner (Ogenga 2008).
Nevertheless, the answer to the question of whether or not their coverage of the 2013 elections was satisfactory is Yes and No. Yes, because they organized a presidential debate, the first of its kind in Africa, modeled on the American presidential debate, which gave Kenyans the opportunity to question presidential aspirants, scrutinize their manifestos and assess their commitment to nation-building. The coverage of the campaigns was also fairly well done even though the Jubilee Coalition appeared to have much more extensive and favorable coverage than the Cord Coalition for obvious reasons related to political-economy of the Kenyan media and issues of media ownership and control.

This is one of the situations where those who have the money and the instruments of power to control the media agenda have advantage over those who do not.

No, because despite their detailed analysis and in-depth reports about the 2013 elections, they failed to monitor the process in a way that would allow them to make a credible and independent conclusion of who the winner was. They failed to report the numerous electoral malpractices including the analysis of failed electronic voter registering and tallying systems.

In a commentary published in The Star and titled “Media Shouldn’t Cry, It Dined With the Enemy” that is unsympathetic to the recent cry by the media in Kenya due to the introduction of a controversial Information Communication Bill 2013 and the Media Council Bill that has introduced draconian clauses seeking to impose hefty penalties, as much as 500,000 Ksh, to errant journalists and up to 20 Million Ksh for media houses in the name of national security, Kendo argued that “Media houses should not be surprised that the government wants to control the Press. The executive has always wagged the tails of journalists and managers of media houses during elections and scandals”. Kendo explained how the media failed to occupy its central position in modern democracies by favoring the status quo in successive elections. He held:

Three days before the 2007 general elections, a local newspaper refused to question why Administrative Officers were deployed as party agents, even as massive evidence begged exposure. The silence served the status quo ...At 3 am March 9, 10 hours before the official announcement of the 2013 presidential elections results, a local TV station had breaking news declaring ‘Mr. President’ when the IEBC had suspended vote tallying. Claims of compromise surfaced...one campaign secretariat had budget for bribing journalists...impunity was being reloaded with the complicity of the supposed public watchdog. Now the watchdog is saying the Jubilee government is making laws to gag it, when in fact the executive has always compromised the Press. Media Houses censored results about the consequences of electoral choices, the unpreparedness of the IEBC to conduct free and fair elections. They did not want to rattle the managers of the first general elections after the 2007-08 post-election violence...they did not want to report IEBC’s inability to handle electoral technology. They did not want to report about the consequences of the ICC to Kenya when knowledge was pertinent. Fair reporting was buried in the avalanche of vested interests... (Kendo 2013: 22).
One of the issues the media failed to address was the issue of who was responsible for the 2007-08 post-election happenstance and consequences of ICC to Kenya which was a begging question given that one of the Presidential candidates and his running mate (Uhuru Kenyatta and William Ruto respectively) were facing charges related to crimes against humanity at the Hague. It has finally dawned to the local media that the ICC question was a difficult one to dodge because it was still hovering in the political-airwave.

In an opinion piece appearing in The Standard on 17 Nov 2013 and titled “Even as ICC Cases Continue, Kenyans Must Forge Ahead”, it is argued that:

*The ICC cases facing President Kenyatta, his deputy, Ruto and former journalist Joshua Sang are linked to the dark history we cannot wish away. The 2008 post-election happenstance represent a phase no Kenyan would fancy a recurrence. The Kenyan Republic was in the brink of collapse. Over 1,300 lives were lost, 650,000 people displaced and the seeds of ethnic hatred watered. To date, efforts of reconciliation, compensation of victims and reuniting have been neutered. The common refrain of the March 4 general elections was that ‘we accept and move on’. It is time we confront the bitter past honestly to ensure lasting nationhood. Burying our heads in the sand while individuals are still hurting over loss of loved ones and livelihoods during the skirmishes won’t take us far (The Standard, Nov 17 2013).*

The idea of media constructing peaceful discourses ahead of the 2013 general elections is however not far-fetched. In his briefing titled “The Media Coverage of the Hague Trials and the Construction of New Ethnic Subjectivities in Kenya” in the African Conflict and Peace building Review, Ogenga argues that the Daily Nation deliberately constructed peace discourses in its coverage:

*With two out of the four accused still in the 2013 presidential election race, it seems as if the ICC was preparing Kenyans for the verdict, which the court knew would receive mixed reactions. The newspaper often threw in words of advice reminding Kenyans that the country is bigger than individuals and whatever the outcomes of the cases, Kenyans must remain calm (Ogenga 2013: 169).*

However, the media can be accused of overemphasizing the need to maintain peace at the expense of critical political reporting which became an expensive affair in the long run. By failing in its watchdog role during the 2013 elections in the name of peace, the media, it can be argued, created a monster, invited it into the house and now they must learn to live with the consequences of choices they did not interrogate.

It is very clear that the media worked in favor of the Interim Independent Electoral Commission (IEBC) and the Jubilee Coalition. Little wonder the media was being praised by President Uhuru Kenyatta and the IEBC for doing an excellent job (Kendo 2013). It is well known that the media set agendas (McCombs, Shaw & Weaver 1997; Graber 2000) using words such as tyranny of numbers and values such as prominence (journalists quoting renowned public figures when reporting news stories) and humanistic rhetoric where audiences are bombarded with messages of peace through analogies of the 2007 violence.
In the latter strategy, women and children are used to capture the memory of violence in order to scare audience into submission (voting for “peace”). These strategies are used to satisfy the interests of the public in a number of ways.

**Peace Journalism Messages on KTN’s Diaspora Voice**

There was little doubt that KTN was experimenting PJ in the 2013 elections due to the violent nature of the 2007 elections like other elections in Kenya. Ngeta (2012) argues that most election violence in Kenya are driven by conflict over unequal distribution of resources, mainly land, and pegged on perceived historical injustice. It is argued that many rival communities use elections as an excuse to settle old scores.

The level of violence reached during the 2007 elections when different communities (especially the Kikuyu and Kalenjin communities) fought each other in some form of ethnic cleansing while competing for resources, mainly land in the Rift Valley region, could not be allowed to happen again by foreign and local investors and politicians some of who had interests and shares in the media. As noted earlier, KTN is largely owned by the Kalenjin elite. Therefore, a discourse of peace had to be constructed irrespective of the realities unfolding on the ground such as electoral malpractices, voter intimidation in places like Mombasa and other electoral chaos and fraud in different parts of the country, to avert any possibility of large-scale violence akin to what was experienced in 2007.

The main discourse on KTN’s Diaspora Voice was: “Vote for Peace” and thereafter, accept and move on which was more of a bid to secure Kenya’s elite’s properties in big cities and other parts of the country than a genuine concern for peace and stability.

In the quantitative analysis of the DV content, peace was mentioned 14 times and the need to conduct peaceful elections was mentioned five times in a bid by KTN to set an agenda for peace irrespective of the nature of elections. This shows that KTN was deliberate in their peace messaging (agenda setting) and almost acted as a peace televangelist. Contrarily, violence was only mentioned once in disregard of the fact that, it is electoral irregularities and malpractices that are responsible for disturbing peaceful, free and fair elections in the first place. This variation is critical since one of the ways in which propaganda and ideology work or thrive is through repetition and name calling. If a certain false idea is named and repeated several times, people tend to believe it is true.

The meaning of the frequency of occurrence of the words peace and peaceful elections is that the ultimate goal was that the election had to be declared peaceful irrespective of the malpractices. In this approach, questions of electoral irregularities, rigging and violence were insignificant and less important.
In the DV, it seems as if there was a general awareness of the electoral institutional weaknesses in terms of their readiness to conduct the 2013 general elections. Judging from the negative history of the electoral institution in Kenya and aware of the fact that the IEBC inherited a defunct electoral commission (the Electoral Commission of Kenya) that led to the chaotic 2007 elections and the violence that ensued, Kenyans were anxious of the possibility of another fresh round of violence as the following respondent notes:

In addition, the 2013 general elections were coming at a time when one of the presidential aspirants and his running mate were faced with criminal charges at the ICC. One would naturally argue that KTN’s timing for constructing peace discourse was well deserved. However, is peace discourse undermined citizens’ right to know about several electoral malpractices, rampant corruption and fraud in the name of “maintaining peace”. One of the voices from the US argued for peace irrespective of who wins as shown below:

*Good morning Kenyans. This is Cosmas, a Kenyan living in Boston. All I ask is for... is that all of you promote peace back there. Just accept the results because that is the leader that God has chosen. Make us proud.*

Fear was instilled on voters, mysticism and spiritual faith invoked to convince Kenyans of the necessity to accept the result because, apparently, the winner would have been God-chosen as argued by Cosmas. Analogies and humanistic rhetoric were used to remind Kenyans of the emotive 2007 violence with the hope that a repeat of the same would be avoided. The narrative used the plight of women and children to explain the emotional burden and physical pain inflicted by the post-election violence and warned against a repeat. The narrative went as far as using a child’s photograph saluting a peace signboard written “I choose to vote for peace.”

The female voice accompanying the images of the child and the signboard is captured in the excerpt below:

*Back in 2007 I was in Kenya and I did not like the way it was. Hatutaki Kenya ikuwe [We don’t want Kenya to be] the way it was back in 2007. Nilikua [I was] home and I almost got killed with my son on my back, I don’t want a repeat of that. Please let us not see this happening again, it’s senseless, it’s stupid, it doesn’t need to happen. We need to be one, we don’t want a situation where in 04 March things are ok then 05 March we are a different country like in 2007.*

One interesting idea that the media generally captured in Kenya through political aspirants and voters or their supporters was the idea of demonizing the opposition even before the election/voting took place. The opposition was increasingly being constructed as losers who have a well-known history or tradition of crying foul after losing elections. Analogies were used in many narratives to remind readers or viewers of previous elections, such as the 2007 election, that the opposition also went court up crying wolf and refused to accept the results of the elections. The superficial manner in which these discourses were constructed closed their discursive framework in such a way that they narrowed the actual events responsible for the sham elections in 2007 to personalities.
It is well known that one of the reasons for the 2007 election failure was the defunct Electoral Commission of Kenya and others such as poor voter register, voter bribery and manual tallying of votes that opened room for fraud and rigging.

**Peace Messages and the Tyranny of Numbers Propaganda**

Many Kenyans can remember being treated to the tyranny of numbers propaganda which had already concluded a Jubilee coalition victory long before elections were conducted. Mutahi Ngunyi held that Uhuru-Ruto coalition had already won the elections hypothetically based on the high number of registered Jubilee voters nationally. This assumption was made in disregard of the fact that voter registration and actual voting are two separate events. There are occasions were registered voters fail to vote due to one reason or another. However, according to Ngunyi, the elections were already decided through voter registration which meant that voter registration was treated as actual voting to reach false a conclusion. While there might be some sense in what Ngunyi was propounding, one has to swallow his conclusion cautiously with a pinch of salt due to a reality that is beyond the scope of elections conceived as a one-time event. A critical observer would begin carefully questioning the tyranny of number fallacy by looking at the traditional ways in which the Government of Kenya conducts successive elections and other controversial public affairs events that concern the nation such as the national census and boundary demarcations as required by the new constitution.

In retrospect, the Kenyan government, following recommendations from the Waki Commission on conducting peaceful elections that largely guided constitutional reform, was under pressure to devolve governance. An exercise that required demarcation of the country into 47 counties according to physical size or geographic area and population where the latter would dictate the amount of funding for that county. County governance opened up a can of worms where competition for the share of national resources gained primacy.

This meant that the national census conducted in the country, the second from independence, did not begin from a clean slate hence the controversy that surrounded the release of the results to the public. The results of the census were delayed for several months after the constitutionally mandated date of their release, raising suspicion of manipulation and foul play. These are issues that the local media, KTN included, swept under the carpet.

In a nutshell, it is difficult to establish the truth about the actual population size of the 42 different communities in Kenya in relation to the recent controversial census which technically punctures Ngunyi’s hypothesis. But that is far from the point, for there are open incidences of poor voter registration and eventually poor voter turnout on the day of voting in some counties which the government can be blamed for. For instance, the government did not speed up the issuance of identity cards in some parts of Kenya and therefore many people were denied their constitutional right to register and vote even as the government, courtesy of the IEBC, boasted of procuring the electronic voter registration kits.
To make matters worse, the kits procured seemed to be malfunctioning in selected opposition strongholds and appeared to be working perfectly well in other areas—Whether this was deliberate or random leaves a lot to be desired. Finally, the entire electronic vote tallying system at Bomas collapsed, opening room for manual tallying—something that the Waki Commission cited as the main cause of discontent in the chaotic 2007 elections.

In fact, the Chief Executive Officer of IEBC Mr. James Oswago was recently arrested by the Ethics and Anti-corruption Commission in connection with charges related to fraud and corruption in relation to procurement of malfunctioned devices from Face Technologies, a South African company that was disqualified during the initial bidding process for the award of tender for the supply of Biometric Voter Registration Kits. The arrest was sensationalized by the media.

In an article that appeared on the Star and titled “Oswago Arrested over 1.3 Billion IEBC Tender,” Ngetich argued that Oswago and his deputy Wilson Shollei were expected in court to answer charges of abuse of office. The Standard Newspaper Wednesday also published a headline titled “IEBC Chiefs Seized Over 1.3b Poll Kit Tender.” Ombati reported how four top electoral commission officials were dramatically arrested and questioned over corruption claims linked to the controversial procurement of equipment that failed during the March 2013 elections. This is a clear indication that the electoral process had serious flaws that the media failed to scrutinize.

**In the name of Peace: Personalization, Ethnicization and Donge Discourse**

In the aftermath of the vote tallying that declared Uhu-Ruto (Uhuru and Ruto) the winners of the presidential election, an uneasy calm prevailed in the country and there was a strong emphasis for peace.

In some instances, personalization and ethnicization was used in the mainstream media where Raila Odinga (leader of official opposition) was represented as a person who did not want to concede defeat and was a threat to peace judging from the 2007 disputed elections where he called for mass action that led to violence. His supporters, predominantly from his Luo community around Lake Victoria in Western Kenya, were identified as hooligans who use violence to spoil societal calm or normalcy.

Ethnicity was also used to depict the Luos as the problem with visuals of how somber the mood in the opposition home turf (Kisumu City) was, where grown men were caught on camera crying wolf through the famous Donge or a Luo expression for “Is that not so” that made its way into Kenya’s political linguistics. Donge was coined by one of the agitated die-hard Raila supporter crying in protest of the Supreme Court ruling and treatment of evidence related to electoral fraud that upheld Uhuru Kenyatta’s contested slim victory. Since then, Donge has become a national phrase that is used as multilingual glue amongst the 42 tribes in Kenya and a cultural expression that captures the memory of injustice in a humorous way to offload temptations of resentment following the unpopular Supreme Court judgment that left most of the country (mainly opposition areas) mourning.
Donge is currently printed on T-shirts that are sold nationally and the televised “crying author” of the expression has moved from an eye-witness-political interviewee on mainstream national television to a national celebrity. Donge discourse is very important since it exposed the Supreme Court for setting the wrong precedence in its poor verdict which put the adolescent institution to a national task of redeeming its image by working harder to convince Kenyans that it can be the trusted custodian of law and order as it is empowered to be by the constitution of the land. The Supreme Court is still at pains of doing this. However, law and order that prevailed after the Supreme Court verdict, despite the manner in which one might want to approach the court’s ruling regarding fairness and justice, indicated the need of replacing big men and women with powerful institutions in the quest for nationhood.

**Conclusion**

Although this paper concludes that Diaspora Voice played a significant role by contributing to peaceful discourses about the 2013 elections, the overemphasis on peace failed to capture the importance of openness when it comes to national censors, voter registration, actual voting and vote tallying. This implies that the Kenyan media missed an opportunity for critical journalism in the name of peace, a reality that undermined its watchdog role in the society. It also reveals how the media allowed itself to be censored by perceived violence at the expense of taking a leading role in critical journalism regarding questions of malgovernance.

The vacuum created presented politicians with an opportunity to take advantage and control the political public-sphere through propaganda in order to manipulate public opinion in ways that would impact on the media’s future operation and its position in modern Kenya like it is now being witnessed through the controversial draconian amendments to the Information Communication Bill 2013 and the Media Council Bill that have led to the formation of a media oversight authority controlled by the executive.

This would explain the reason why even as we usher in a new era in terms of the new constitution that has brought devolution of power, the media is increasingly being intimidated and gagged by state politicians and it’s just a question of time before members of parliament make media legislation that will transform this crucial institution from watchdog to a lap-dog for many years to come – The Communication Commission of Kenya Amendment Bill, which is considered draconian by many stakeholders, was debated in Parliament passed and given Presidential assent and it is now law. Concerning questions of whether or not there is a direct relationship between peace messages on Diapora Voice and the largely peaceful 2013 elections, the paper does not intend to argue that the peace messages on the two episodes of a single programme (Diapora Voice) on one television channel in Kenya (KTN) may have contributed to peaceful elections witnessed in 2013. However, it investigated and assessed the manner in which these peace messages constructed peace discourses to the audiences with the aim of arguing for the role of Peace Journalism in electoral reporting and how this may enhance democratic reforms through free, fair and peaceful elections.
The 2013 general elections provided reporters with the much needed platform, raw materials and opportunity for reconstructing journalistic ideological fractures, as far as Africa is concerned, as a result of a prolonged and sustained tradition of chaotic, sensational, superficial, violent and caricatured reporting brought about by the commercialization and Westernization of media institutions. Unfortunately, this seems to have been a missed opportunity by narrowing PJ down to a single programme that this paper investigated (Diaspora Voice) (DV).

References


