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**From Cyberspace to the Public: Rumor, Gossip and Hearsay
in the Paradoxes of the 2007 General Election in Kenya**

Hezron Ndunde
Egerton University



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Abstract

While political control, draconian press laws, selective communication and downright misinformation and disinformation by the state took centre stage in the wake of post-election violence in Kenya, the citizens had to seek alternative ways of satisfying their information and communication needs. Among these alternative ways were what Spultunik terms as “small media” such as graffiti, flyers, underground cassettes, internet listservs, slogans, jokes and rumors which despite being rather diffuse and not direct in their engagement with the state and global structures of repression, nevertheless, served as vital and pervasive undercurrent and reservoirs of political commentary, critique and potential mobilization. Out of thousands of such encounters, “public opinion” slowly formed and became the context in which politics was framed. Cyberspace was easily adapted and embraced as an essential aspect of resistance struggles, beginning with news forums, interactive websites, and/or personal weblogs (blogs). Electronic communication, whether via computers, wireless PDAs, or text messages between cell phones, created new forms of relatively facile information transmission, communication, coordination, and connections between social actors that in turn enabled new kinds of social mobilizations not tied to specific locales. Anyone anywhere having access to a terminal, or even a handheld phone or PDAs with Internet capability could provide information to anyone else as often as events took place. He or she could contribute to a thread (online discussion) and make his or her opinion known. Various websites, blogs, and chat groups assumed the qualities of “public spheres” where people could find or provide information, debate ideas, develop critiques, and envision strategies. Critics on both sides no longer felt obliged to be physical present in Kenya to be relevant to the ongoing struggles for justice. However, discussions at this level tended to reject the same tensions and multiple division that politics of belonging and autochthony had brought to the fore. Internet discussion did not only shape what was discussed by the society, it also reflected the inherent divisions extant. Does this confirm that withholding relevant information from the public results in an attempt by the same to invent that information? And that, are such inventions a flattering mirror of the status quo? Does such interaction foster and/or recognize new forms of identity whose performative expressions include organizing actions and using the internet to coordinate with other groups? Does rational argument prevail in the discussions, and can consensus be achieved? This are questions to be answered.

Introduction

The late December 2007 to March 2008 post election violence in Kenya, saw the government attempt to control the flow of information. This included a ban on live coverage of radio and major private TV broadcasts. There were also threats of prosecution on those creating or forwarding sms (phone texts) through their cellphones by the then Minister for Internal Security, John Michuki. Leading communication companies, Safaricom and Celtel [now *Zain*] were engaged by the state to warn the information starved citizens to desist from sending messages that were likely to perpetuate violence and hostility that had been brought about by a disputed election. This can be referred to as draconian press laws, selective communication and downright misinformation. However, if there was reason to be pessimistic and cynical about the turn of events, there was on closer inspection, cause to be hopeful as well. Majority of the people were neither mystified nor wholly duped by the state controlled media menus, in this case, KBC [Kenya Broadcasting Corporation] TV and Radio. In other words, there was recourse to radical or alternative media for initiative or agency to challenge the extant official discourse. This included graffiti, flyers, internet listservs, cellphone texts [sms]¹, slogans, jokes, rumors and cartoons which, despite being rather diffuse and not direct in their engagement with the structures of subjugation, nevertheless served as vital and pervasive undercurrents of political commentary, critique, and potential mobilization. In this way, these components served as crucial public spheres.

The resort to these alternative means of communication served to illustrate the extent to which citizens, not just voters, and others (ambassadors from different countries, for instance) perceived the December elections not just as a means to changing a government but, even more critically, as an important way of engaging with the discursive of nationhood. Whether scholars or shoe-shiners, hawkers or doctors, the operational assumption was that all the issues that usually come up within citizens' moral economy would be addressed and resolved contingent to the political positions that one would take in support or otherwise of specific political parties.

It is worth noting that current discussions on the role of the media before, during and after the 2007 general election (see for instance Oriare, 2008; Omanga, 2008).are largely informed by a reading of the 1994 Rwanda genocide in which Radio Television Libres des Mille Collines (RTL) is adjudged to be guilty of incitement to violence, urging people to "kill the Tutsis,

¹ In everyday interactions, cellphone text messages are popularly referred to by the acronym 'sms'—short message service—which is used both as a noun and a verb. Text messages will be used interchangeably with the popular form.

Inkotanyi [cockroaches]" and moderate Hutu neighbours. This is widely thought to have contributed to the slaughter of 800,000 people in 1994 (see for instance Thompson 2007;Kezio-Musoke,2008). Subsequently, any analysis of the media's role in the Kenyan context cannot be done without taking cognizance of the fact that the contested issues (land, majimbo, perceived exclusion from political power) had been long in the making (see *Sunday Nation*, 2007; Siele, 2007) and that media coverage of them then in a way shaped the way they were fought out during the 2007 election campaigns. For the purpose of this study, the argument is that, the media played other significant roles in the public space, particularly as a mobilization tool for various political groupings.

Vernacular FM radio stations have been blamed for inflammatory broadcasts during the period before the December 2007 elections (see for instance Orlale and Kadida, 2008; Njeru 2008; Ugangu, 2008). According to the Inter Press Service (IPS), a global news agency, even before the election, many radio stations broadcasting in Kikuyu, Luo and Kalenjin languages (the major protagonists in the election) were airing inflammatory comments about members of other communities.

This may however, be attributed to the fact that radio has a high penetration rate, 95% according to Obonyo (2008). David Ochami, a commissioner with the Media Council of Kenya, observed that long before the elections radio stations were inciting ethnic consciousness "making people support leaders from their own tribe and harbour bad feelings about people from other communities". Call-in shows provided a very vocal platform for "hate speech", as callers were not always vetted before being put on air, writes the IPS. Insults of "baboons", "weeds" and "animals of the west" were common and though the comments rarely called for violence, they did often draw on cultural differences and long-standing disputes about access to land, control of state power, *majimbo* [regionalism], national and ethnic citizenship among others. According to Caesar Handa of Strategic Research, an organization monitoring the airwaves after the election, the chilling power of these comments was very worrying in a country where many people trust their local stations and take what they broadcast as the truth. (<http://www.alertnet.org/db/art/47985/2008/01/7-151431-1.htm>)

But then, while the charges leveled against especially vernacular FM radio may be true up to a point, it is necessary to consider the fact that radio broadcasts intersect with a whole range of other popular modes of communication—politicians' rhetoric in village *baraza* (public meetings), traditional and contemporary folklore, TV broadcasts and newspaper reports as well as gossip, hearsay and rumors in complex ways. Thus, an analysis of the media in

relation to Kenya's post election violence ought to be undertaken within broader terms than is presently the case in on-going popular discourse. Indeed, one of the crucial assumptions of this paper in relation to the question of governing the African public sphere is that the media enabled people to develop particular political positions and consciousness in regard to specific issues such as land, control of state power, *majimbo* [regionalism], national and ethnic citizenship among others.

However, the thrust of this analysis is on the role of the cyberspace—internet, e-mail messages and cellular telephony which, being 'virtual publics' sites and unlike conventional print and electronic media, permit 'invisible' communication between large communities of consumers. The cyberspace is understood to wield clandestine power, i.e. without the usual, authoritarian means such as guns and other items of coercion. This "new media" has brought quite a wave of intensity in many ways not witnessed before. Some of these intense changes include, structural changes in cultural and economic dynamics, dissolving of national boundaries in terms of trade, beliefs, democratic processes, customs and cultures, a shift in employment and skills level at all levels, and a weakened control of power mechanisms, by governments (Banda, 2003). It invites participants to take up positions by means of persuasion and propaganda and often succeeds because it has emotional appeal. For instance, the Mashada forum, (www.mashada.com) an online chat room, "has been forced to close due to the large number of inflammatory messages posted on its pages. The majority of interaction on Mashada.com has begun to reflect the negative aspects of what is happening in Kenya, facilitating civil discussions and debates has become virtually impossible" the forum's moderator, David Kobia is quoted as saying on the White African blog. This was a consequence of such covert power.

The internet has produced new public spheres and spaces for information, debate, and participation that contain the potential to invigorate democracy and to increase the dissemination of critical and progressive ideas. Indeed, the thousands of conversations taking place on a myriad of diverse topics through blogs, e-mail lists, chat rooms, or Web pages seem to validate the expansion in cyberspace of the loose network of informal public discourse that has existed to various degrees in modern society (Kellner, 1998). However, an observation of cyber-discourse also shows that "confrontation, misinformation, and insult characterize many public forums on the internet" (Katz, 1997). It is more difficult to police the content of cyberspace, who receives it and what they eventually do with it. In the Kenyan context, this was roundly demonstrated by the helplessness of the permanent secretary in the Ministry of Information and Communication Dr. Bitange Ndemo who stated that even though

he had in his possession contacts of people who spread hate messages through their cellphones, the law did not allow him to prosecute suspects on the basis of such ‘evidence’. However, even in the face of weak laws relating to the phenomenon of hate speech, it is significant that the government finally acknowledged the uses to which these “new media” could be put as alternative sources of information and communication.

Political rumors and hearsay were carried both by the word of mouth and the critical private press. Increasingly, the internet and the cellphones were vehicles for such rumors, as newspapers go online and electronic discussions multiply (Nyamnjio, 2005). Rumor defined not as falsehood but as the emergence and circulation of information that is either not yet confirmed publicly or refuted by official sources became (Nyamnjio, 2005) an integral part of the Kenyan social fabric.

Methodology and Theory

This study made use of several methodological approaches ranging from library research to fieldwork. First, the researcher surveyed available literature on soft forms, in this case sms that appeared in the local press between January and July 2008. Second, phone texts were collected from various sources—individuals as well as institutions—and analyzed thematically and stylistically. Third, the content of e-mail messages sent to the researcher by known and unknown individuals was analysed thematically.

In terms of theory, this study is principally informed by Anderson’s (1991) *Imagined Communities*. The central question undergirding Anderson’s work is “how do people forge ideas of ‘community’?” The value of Anderson’s work for our purposes lies in the extent, to which it enables us to evaluate practices, be they verbal or written, by means of which people who do not otherwise share common values (language, ethnicity, religion, geographical location etc) constitute a sense of community. The solidarities thus established might be temporal but the vital issue is that individuals in far-flung places rally around a common issue and can identify with one another on the basis of this common element. Subsequent research, particularly in the field of folklore from which much of the study data is sourced, enables us to extend Anderson’s thesis to different fields such as cyberspace and the “new media”. For instance, where the written word is central to Anderson’s argument about community, folklorist Degh has shown how in the age of modern telecommunications, virtual communities proliferate in cyberspace. Blogs, chat rooms and e-mail allow individuals with divergent interests to converge and temporarily invent their own communities (Degh, 1999). The strength of the idea of temporal groups, for long an established idea in folkloristics (see

for instance Ben-Amos,1982), is that it enables us to appreciate the possibility that individuals can simultaneously belong to various in-groups (see for; membership to one does not necessarily call for disloyalty to another. The idea of multiple-belonging opens outwards to that of networks (see Noyes, 2003), meaning that individuals can draw on their outside connections without necessarily being circumscribed by their allegiance to their community. There are useful implications from the foregoing theoretical bearings in regard to the Kenyan situation. Through the textual and verbal practices they engaged in citizens are found to have come together regardless of especially ethnicity and to find common political cause around which to identify thus creating a “public sphere.” Narratives and messages targeting common ‘enemies’ thus became tools of mobilization. This however is not in any way to impute that they were suddenly rid of their ethnicity; emergent technology was used to bridge the gap between ethnic groups in the pursuit of a common cause as espoused by particular political groups.

Cyberspace politics

It is true that the internet is not free from the logic of domination and appropriation typical of neoliberalism. But it clearly offers real alternatives if well harnessed to serve popular social causes (Nyamnjio, 2005). Although connectivity is lower in Sub-Saharan Africa than other regions of the world (Mbarika, Jensen, Meso, 2005; Leslie 2002), local cultural values of sociability, negotiation, interconnectedness, interdependence and coexistence (Nyamnjio, 2005) makes people to access the internet without being necessarily connected. The internet thus became an important tool in communication media that enabled relatively inexpensive, instantaneous communication from the many to the many. It quickly becomes a general tool for the exchange of information and, in turn, the basis of various online activist virtual communities that act as "public spheres." More and more people are recruited to such spheres by virtue of their political sentiments and/or connections to like-minded folks. Thus in Kenya, it increasingly became fashionable for people to assume online characters, different from their real personalities, thus creating a completely new realm of operation– the virtual world.

The Kenyan Diaspora has been accused as having taken a lead in this sort of engagement. When these hateful messages from the Diaspora reach Nairobi, they were seen by those on the ground as gospel truth. The rumors and opinions circulating on the forums quickly take the place of news. As such, urban residents used cyberspace interaction more than those in rural areas. However, this is not to underestimate the potency of the messages that were circulated through the internet. Cyberspace-based discussions were fed onto rumor and information from

the press. Two main forms of engagement were utilized. First there were mass e-mails that would be authored and then be endlessly edited as appropriate before being forwarded by both known and anonymous correspondents. Then there are the 'ethnic' web blogs in which Kenyans debated and (re)defined their identities in relation to specific questions (culture, politics, economics amongst others (See Odhiambo, 2007). Popular sites included: www.jaluo.com (the subject of Odhiambo's analysis), www.kikuyu.com, kalenjin.com, kisii.com. While some discussion sites are named to obscure an ethnic component (www.kenyans.com, www.mashada.com, africanbulletsandhney.com amongst others) discussions therein nevertheless often entail recourse to ethnic othering. Even the ethnically marked sites are not mere platforms for the expression of a cultural imaginary. Usually, the self is projected in antithetical placement to other ethnicities in the civic nation. Thus for instance, www.jaluo.com enables the diaspora Luo to explore their grievance about political exclusion and betrayal: "several contributors to the website felt strongly that Luos² (*sic*) should either try the option of federalism or secession from Kenya and join Uganda" (Odhiambo, *ibid*:18). These sort of ideas are woven back and forth between chatrooms, e-mail, sms and eventually everyday conversation be they rumors, gossip or hearsays. This is the manner in which for instance the "emptying" of the Kikuyu from the Rift Valley ("there is nary any Kikuyu in any other province") and that survivors be confined to Central and Eastern provinces was celebrated and ironed out into a 'logical' proposition.³

While it is true to say that e-mails were more limited than sms in terms of penetration, it is also correct to argue that their content was more virulent. This might be due to the fact that unlike text messages that can only take up a limited number of characters, they afford correspondents enough space to vent pent-up emotions. Usually writing an e-mail takes more time and it is therefore assumed that the words that are committed to print are the product of deeper reflection than is the case with sms that are often composed and sent off on the spur of the moment. E-mail messages before the elections were mainly propagandistic with writers pitching for their preferred presidential candidates by drawing out 'proof' and equally vilifying the other contestants for the top seat. Writers were still hopeful that their man would win. However, there is a conspicuous shift in tone in post-election e-mails. In these, arguments are formulated to rationalize either the claims that Kibaki 'stole the election' or that 'Raila actually won' in accordance with ones political preference. These texts evince both

² The Luo are a community in western Kenya from which the opposition candidate in 2007 General Election, Raila Odinga comes. He became the Prime Minister after a peace agreement brokered by former UN Secretary General Koffi Annan

³ This is an E-mail 'discussion' circulated by some US-based Kenyan scholars.

bitterness and despair at the “failure of democracy”. Questions are raised about the allocation of resources, the participation of people from outside the Mt. Kenya region in national politics as well as the role of the judiciary in fomenting rather than stemming conflict. Here mainly diaspora-based scholars were actively participating in popular discourse even though their ideas were often at variance with reality. For instance, the effort is made to downplay the role of ethnicity in the 2007 elections; anyone who was in Kenya at the time would easily recall the density of ethnic animosity, especially against Kibaki as a Kikuyu. At any rate in a method that can be seen as reverse tribalism, there was a heavy emphasis in ODM campaigns that the movement stood for the dreams of Kenyans other than those in PNU (i.e. Kikuyu).

The Cellphone: A critical Public sphere

The cellphone has a phenomenal ability to spread information especially when complemented by the internet and rumor. It's worth noting that while mobile phones can indeed be seen as the “outlet of voice” that Obadare describes, counter forces can also appropriate the technology. This was the case with the 2007 Kenyan Elections, when the opposition sympathizers used mobile phone text messaging for mass communication (Obadare, 2004). However, quickly realizing the power of the technology, the government also began sending misinformation via text messages. At the same time, the government was warning mobile phone users of possible prosecution if they use SMS to cause public unrest, ‘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.’ ‘Smsing’, a practice that by now has garnered the force of tradition, wields enormous power over Kenyans. This was forcefully brought to the fore when, during the Kriegler Independent Review Commission probing the 2007 General Election hearings in Eldoret on July 8, 2008, a text message, allegedly from a senior politician from the area, was circulated: “Don't allow people from outside to intimidate you in your own backyard”. Proceedings were temporarily derailed. Like other messages that were being circulated before and during the elections, the dominant idea here is the insider-outsider trope but which takes on particular resonance in the context of resident versus settler Rift Valley land politics, an issue that occupied a central plank in both the election and 2005 referendum campaigns.

At another level, Charles Lewis describes the use to which the mobile phone was put to in Zimbabwe in passing information amongst pro-democracy supporters of the stay-away in 2003 called by the Movement for Democratic Change, MDC after the copies of the only independent newspaper, Daily News were burnt. He writes, “The Zimbabwe stay-away in

2003 was certainly a striking case of the use of ICTs in support of the right of assembly and freedom of association. The use of mobile phone text-messaging was supplemented by a plethora of web sites that carried information and news about the unfolding protests.” Although Lewis acknowledges that the stay-away was not as well supported as the MDC had hoped for, he argues that the use of mobile phones alongside the use of traditional media like newspaper adverts and leaflets was a “key component of the campaign”. And while not the first to use mobile phones, Lewis argues that Zimbabwean activists used ICTs in “several innovative ways to exercise the right to assembly and freedom of association in the face of ongoing government repression.” In conclusion, Lewis states that the case of Zimbabwe shows how the “the spaces [virtual] and channels through which individuals and organizations interact and mobilize, assemble and associate” has fundamentally changed as a result of ICTs (Lewis 2006). Michael Stein observes in ‘Using Mobile Phones in Electoral and Voter Registration Campaigns’ that mobile phones are “powerful tools for democratic participation and the growth of civil society”. Stein states that mobile phones “connect seamlessly with existing political strategies and movements, and reveal new techniques for mobilisation, education and engagement” (Stein, 2006). One of the key attractions of sms is the medium’s ability to evade immediate surveillance. And the dissident action can be coordinated right up to the minute of execution by collaborators who do not need be physically present in the country to be useful in the ongoing struggles (Nyamnjio, 2005). By the time law enforcers seek transcripts from particular service provider’s databank, a text will have traveled around the globe and back, rendering detection efforts nonsensical since the message will already have been delivered. Ironically, in areas where news sources were inaccessible for whatever reason, friends and family members abroad would monitor the media in their countries for reports on Kenya and text this information to their families in Kenya.

In Kenya, with increased political contestation between the two major parties, that is PNU and ODM, the text messages were framed within a sense of the gravity of threats posed by each of these parties against the other. Hence it will be noticed that the bulk of text messages used here (Appendix I⁴) revolve around Kibaki/ Raila and the PNU and ODM which they are taken to represent respectively. Few texts about Kalonzo were circulated and those that did merely ridiculed him as a spoiler and a non-starter. Indeed during the campaigns, Raila referred to the December elections as “a two-horse race” with Kalonzo as a mule. Opinion on the ground did not see Kalonzo as a real threat either to Kibaki’s presidency or to Raila’s chances of

⁴For ease of reference, variants of the same text have been categorized alphabetically after the main entry marked by a number. Only the spelling in these texts has been edited for clarity.

ascending to power. As a result, the real sms warfare was waged between supporters of the two main presidential contestants. A significant number of the 2007/08 texts are formulated upon ethnic labels, in this case anti-Kikuyu and anti-Luo stereotypes. This suggests that ethnicity was one of the critical platforms upon which the elections were contested. The sms were nearly always direct insults directed at individuals. For instance, consider the following text in Appendix I:

2. b He is cold, he is a time player, he is a terminator, a destroyer, a demolist with an odd national constituency. He is Raila Odinga and he hasn't what it takes to deliver Kenyans to the Promised Land. Join other Kenyans in stopping this great son of Africa. Today the people have spoken. Send this sms to 10 people

The tone of the message is bitter, perhaps because of the perceived gravity of the issues at stake such as majimbo, exclusion from power and the sharing of national resources.

In terms of structure, the texts work by combining a number of stylistic strategies. First, they make use of traditional sayings and proverbs to evaluate individuals' capacity for leadership. Cultural assumptions about who can or cannot be a leader are evident in especially anti-Raila texts. This idea runs through the following Kikuyu texts:

Appendix I 57:

[We in GEMA have 6 million votes! How can we allow ourselves to be ruled by an uncircumcised boy and to go back to idleness? Come out and let us give all our votes to Kibaki so that the country will not be ruled by an uncircumcised boy who will force us to put on shorts and who will destroy all our wealth. Circulate this message to 50 or more people from GEMA. Your vote will prevent the country being taken back to Egypt] Received as an SMS and written in Kikuyu.

Appendix I 58:

[A man seated on a traditional stool outside his hut sees further than an uncircumcised boy perched atop a tree or a mountain]. This message should be relayed to boy Raila]. Received as SMS and written in Kikuyu

The above texts would reverberate with Kikuyu/GEMA voters precisely because in their cultural set up circumcision and the assumption of manhood is a key requirement for anyone aspiring to a leadership position, an idea that circulates in the popular imagination through contemporary popular music (see Wa Mungai 2007:344-347).

At another level, these texts work by means of extensive allusion: to history (Appendix I, 44: Raila's role in the 1982 coup), the Bible (extensive parody is made of prayer), personalities in current affairs (Dick Morris), contemporary events (Appendix I, 25: The Orange revolution in

Ukraine; no.50:Zuma and Mbeki). As a genre sms are also highly reflexive as can be seen in instances where texts are parodies of others (see for instance Appendix I no.42a and 42b;43 a,b and c;47 a, b and c; 48 a and b; Appendix I,12 etc). Text 59 in Appendix I is taken from the 2005 referendum campaign on a new constitution. On the whole these messages are highly intertextual and for readers to make sense of them it is necessary to fall back on other discourses, of which music and religion are examples, which are usually simultaneously at work in other media such as newspapers, television and radio amongst others. Thus we see that the broad pool of popular culture becomes a critical resource not for both the crafting and reading of cellphone text messages.

Humor is yet another stylistic strategy. The three texts below allude to a TV advertisement for Crown paint featuring Peter Marangi who speaks English with such a heavy dose of first-language influence as to mark him clearly as a Kikuyu.

Appendix I, 55.

- a Breaking Newz: Peter Marangi is painting state house Orange. Have u heard Peter Marangi has already painted State House orange in readiness 4 Raila?
- b I think democracy's an ass! On a lighter note, Peter Marangi says the orange color at State Hse ws only the undercoat. The final color is blue. 'laughing 2 kp frm crying'.
- c Hi. *Kwani* [so] the undercoat is taking forever to dry so that the final one may be applied? This waiting is getting onto everyone's nerves.

The dynamism of sms as a mode of communication is demonstrated by the fact that the above texts were composed and adapted simultaneous to the announcement of vote tallies by the ECK. The mutation of content (the winner changes from Raila/ODM to Kibaki/PNU) suggests that these texts were composed with an eye glued to the TV broadcasts issued from KICC.

Metaphor and euphemism are another critical structural element that is extensively applied in sms-lore. For our purposes, it is significant that these metaphors render the competition for power in terms of sexuality. The texts below are taken from Appendix I and they satirize PNU's (*Kazi iendelee*) and ODM-K's 'Wiper' slogan—the latter is derived from the practice of crowds waving back to preachers at Christian rallies:

- 66. a) Campaign can b fun! At dawn when ODM is already out, PNU men can still be heard from their bedrooms whispering; PANUA KAZI IENDELEE while ODM-K men r still being told; niko wet, NIPATIE WIPER.

In informal Swahili, *kazi* means sex, and the suggestion then is that ODM men (predominantly Luo) are better than those in the other parties because they finish ‘working’ on their women early. The play between the acronym PNU and the Kiswahili ‘panua’[open] is aimed at depicting the mainly Kikuyu men in that party as ineffectual lovers who have to plead for sex from their women (“open so we can continue with the job”). On the other hand, the males in ODM-K (perceived to be a party for the Akamba⁵) are ridiculed for going to bed with women who have been ‘worked’ to exhaustion which is an allusion of the stereotype of the Akamba as promiscuous. Texts 67 and 68b have a direct bearing on this perception: “Under Kalonzo’s government, sex will be legalized and free”; “With Ngilu in, the pentagon becomes sexagon. No wonder they have been singing ‘*bado matombano*’[Kiswahili: intercourse has not begun].” Similar wordplay is noticeable in the following variant of text 66a:

66.b) Why you should be in ODM. ODM women scream YAWA, YAWA, YAWA in praise of *Nyundo* while men in PNU are busy telling their wives to *PANUA PANUA ili kazi iendelee*. Women in ODM-K are so wet that their men keep asking *WAPI WIPPER!!!!*

The extensive use of sexual metaphor might be accounted for if we consider the fact that Kenyan politics is predominantly a masculine space (Wa Mungai 2007:352-355). It is thus common linguistic practice to figure political opponents as subdued, conquered females as a means of claiming one’s ‘superior’ masculinity and hence power (See Dundes,1987).

A major stylistic element of sms is the use of mother tongue. The obvious reason for this is the need to keep out others deemed not to belong to the message sender’s in-group. However, the logic of doing so fails if we consider the fact that many Kenyans are multi-lingual; an informant reported that in much of the Rift Valley, village translators would listen into various vernacular FM radio stations and then inform area residents what the “enemy” was plotting. In the case of sms, translation ensures that there can be no secrets in these transactions. In this case, the real value of using mother tongue lies in the fact that some vernacular idiom cannot be accurately or fully rendered in translation and thus particular nuances will be lost. In this way, users of a vernacular can still negotiate meanings amongst themselves without outsiders catching on. For instance, few Kikuyu speakers are aware that ‘Kimbararigi’ Appendix 1:.63 means chameleon; it would be much harder for a non-Kikuyu speaker to grasp the sense of such a text. By the same token, when the Kalenjin call for the

⁵ Akamba are a community in the Eastern Province of Kenya, from which Kalonzo Musyoka, the ODM-Kenya party presidential candidate is descended. They consider themselves as cousins to Kikuyus.

“cutting of grass”, no translation would capture the fact that this is an allusion to *chemulbai*, a weed that grows amongst the millet and which has to be carefully identified before removal since it closely resembles millet.⁶ In nearly all such cases obfuscation might be achieved by the use of common words.

The construction of monsters/animals is a fairly widely deployed tactic especially within the domain of ethnic stereotypes (see Wa-Mungai 2007:347-349). Usually, the full reference to the Luo in this regard is ‘animals from the west’. The metaphorization of particular ethnicities in non-human term is a common practice. For instance, it has been reported that during the 2007 campaigns, the Kalenjin broadcaster Kass FM referred the Kikuyu residing in the Rift Valley as ‘*madoadoa*’ [Kiswahili: spots] and ‘mongoose’ [*kamunne/kibungbungit*] and ‘grass’ while referring to themselves as “people of the milk” (Obonyo, 2008). Sometimes the animal imagery is turned around to valorize particular qualities that a group might have of itself. The two texts below which were received as the vote count began indicating that Kibaki had overtaken Raila demonstrate this amelioration process.

Appendix I, 20: [Oh! Oh! God the father! Help that it (snake) may at least come back to life by the tail. Peace! Praise God peace. May it (the Kikuyu nation) have a firm foundation?

Appendix I, 65: [We are ahead like the snout of a he-goat. God loves the nation of Kikuyu and Mumbi. Say leadership is ours. Repeat again (*sic*). Say may our leadership last forever. Say may it (enemy) perish. May it never prosper? May it disappear from the face of the earth following the roots of the Mukongoe.]

Received as SMS and written in Kikuyu

During the campaigns, it was common in everyday conversation to hear references to the Kibaki government and by extension to the Kikuyu community as ‘*nyoka*’ [Kiswahili and Kikuyu], a snake that must be killed. Text 20 refers to the fact that sometimes if a snake’s tail still shows signs of life after the head has been crushed the serpent is not dead and it could come back to life. The snake here speaks to the survival of the Kibaki presidency (and by extension the Kikuyu); the prayer is that the government/community will be so strong as to never be removed from power. The he-goat, calling to mind the sexuality contest discussed above, signifies conquest/domination over the herd; the speaker celebrates an assumed Kikuyu domination of other ethnicities. There is a process of complex coding and an

⁶ I am grateful to my Kalenjin and Kikuyu informants, who wished to remain anonymous, for their assistance with translation of Kikuyu and Kalenjin words.

interweaving of discourses whose knowledge is a crucial background for any analytical reading of the text messages.

Finally, there is an inter-media structure to text messages. Sms, rumor and e-mail are a mutually reinforcing circular flow. Thus, it will be noticed that a text that might begin as a rumor may often end up on the internet and vice versa. It is also interesting to note that some of the rumors originate from newspaper opinion pieces before being taken up in sms and the internet. But whatever the source of rumors, they are a crucial axis along which the interpretation of both text messages and e-mail content can be done. Nineteen rumor texts, both oral and in text message form, were collected (Appendix II). Each of them revealed anxieties related to the 2007 election. Rumor, understood as “information that is spread without ‘secure standards of evidence’ ” (Fine and Turner 2004:19), works in situations where official information is lacking prompting people to fill in the existing gaps by inventing material; this is especially so in situations where official communication is either slow or non-existent. The peoples’ truth then is expressed by way of rumors. Kapferer (1987: 22-25) argues that rumor, is like spontaneously taking the floor to speak without being invited to do so, and is often in opposition of the official discourse. Rumor, Bourgault observes is ‘underground news, an alternative to the official press, which is tedious, censored, uninformative, and often unintelligible’, and as such is a ‘free and uncontrolled “medium”’, to which everyone is a potential contributor (Bourgault, 1995: 202). It functions in the same way that ‘alternative small media’ function. A key characteristic of rumor is plausibility; there are bits and pieces of fact about the people and events that are the subject of telling. Due to this ‘credibility’ aspect hearers of the rumor are easily drawn to believe its content without seriously questioning its authenticity. However, whether the rumor is about the US and Britain being out to effect a ‘regime change’(text 1) or the resignation of both the Kenya Army’s Chief of General Staff and the Commissioner of police (text 14) it is clear that the text’s authors are concerned with flaws, real or perceived, in the electoral process and its outcome. The gloating that is evident in text 10 seems to be rooted in a belief that because Kibaki allegedly ‘stole the vote’ then the suffering of his family is justly deserved. On the other hand, text 17 (“A city preacher prophesied about the death of 5 mps—four from ODM and one from PNU—because of their role in the post-election violence”) evens things out for those who believe that ODM should be blamed for the post-election anarchy. The internet was quite an efficient means of disseminating these rumors. For instance, the rumor about Raila’s visit to a Sangoma was “reported” in a South African newspaper before it was circulated via e-mail and finally by word of mouth. Overall, election-related rumors indicate citizens’

concern with the crisis that bedeviled the country. Rumor thus became a legitimate source of information. With increased government control of major radio and TV stations, the public had no other recourse but to wholeheartedly embrace rumor as the only uncensored source of information on the elections and the attendant crisis.

At a different level, the content of the text messages was interrogated thematically. A cluster of seven themes emerged. First, some of the texts appraise politicians' capabilities as leaders. Their personalities as well as agendas are scrutinized and weighed against those of opponents. Consider the following text on Kalonzo Musoyka:

Appendix I, 1:

It is now confirmed that Kalonzo Musyoka will on 22 Dec 2007 step down for Mwai Kibaki in exchange for Kshs 10 Billion and a VP's position. That was expected. We have all along stated that Kalonzo has always been a Kibaki/PNU Grand Project dubbed the MIRRACLE (*sic*). Kalonzo never intended to challenge Kibaki, leave alone trying to replace him. That's why he and Kibaki are focused on bashing Raila in a one way focus. Indeed Kalonzo has proved to be untrustworthy. He has betrayed everyone who he has associated with including his current supporters and Kenyans who thought he was an agent of change. *ASHINDWE*[defeated].-message Luos are passing on.

Depicting him as being unreliable, this sms send by supporters of ODM, is formulated on the basis of the stereotype of the Kamba as '*wasaliti*', traitors, with as servile mindset (see Skuma 2005). '*ASHINDWE*' [Kiswahili: may he be defeated] is adopted from the context of religion and is usually an invocation of God's power to defeat satan. It is also relevant that Kalonzo is a professed born-again Christian and the text seems to be censuring his perceived hypocrisy: upright Christians are not supposed to be cutting deals with the devil in this case, PNU. The attitude encapsulated in this text might help explain the disapproval with which the ODM greeted the eventual appointment of Kalonzo to the Vice presidency in January.

Of the three presidential candidates, Kibaki, Kalonzo and Raila Odinga, the latter's capabilities were the most scrutinized in these text messages. He enjoys uncritical praise (Appendix I, 2a. There is an e-mail version of this sms):

He is bold, he is a team player, he is a liberator, and he is a panafricanist, a democrat with a national constituency. He is Raila Odinga and he has what it takes to deliver Kenyans to the Promised Land. Join other Kenyans in supporting this great son of Africa. Send this sms to 10 people.

Raila also attracts outright hostility (Appendix I 2b):

He is cold, he is a time player, and he is a terminator, a destroyer, a demolist with an odd national constituency. He is Raila Odinga and he hasn't what it takes to deliver Kenyans to the Promised Land. Join other Kenyans in stopping this great son of Africa. Today the people have spoken. Send this sms to 10 people

Raila was keenly scrutinized because he was perceived by PNU supporters to be the real threat to Kibaki's hold onto power. Since the stakes were considered to be especially higher in the 2007 general election than in the previous one, all energies were focused at the key targets. While the bulk of sms available here tend to depict Raila negatively (dictatorial, with blood on his hands, power hungry), there is also some grudging admiration for his mobilization skills even by his opponents. The following sms was sent by a Kikuyu supporter of PNU: Appendix I, 3: "Raila strategized well, started campaigns early, propaganda, ethnicity, anti-Kikuyuism, youth vote, rebellion against age, etc". On the other hand there were few sms targeting Kibaki as a person; the bulk of them lampoon PNU collectively. This might be due to the fact that Kibaki's character is already well known; epithets like "hands off", "laid back", "aloof" amongst others have been widely used in the local press to describe him. To spend valuable sms space describing him further would therefore have been an expensive waste of resources.

A second dominant theme revolves around the question of 'tribal arithmetic'. Seven texts (Appendix I, 6-10) show a deep-seated concern with ethnic numbers: candidate x will win if voters (beginning with those from his ethnic group) from this and that tribe turn out *en masse* to vote for him. Underlying this dynamic is a realization that in political contests most voters identify first and foremost with a candidate from their own ethnic group regardless of his/her agenda. Unfortunately this is an entrenched practice in Kenyan culture (see Mutua, 2007) that not even many years of civic and formal education has succeeded in countering. E-mail messages and internet chat room discussions were particularly keen to paint both the 2005 referendum and the 2007 elections as a battle pitting all other Kenyan tribes (K41) against the Kikuyu (K1)⁷. A critical observation in this regard is that often during election campaigns (the same can be said of the referendum) even highly schooled people (players in the national political scene, scholars, business people, church leaders etc) tend to fall back on ethnicized thinking.

⁷ This is a reference to the common assumption that Kenya is comprised of 42 tribes; K1 is thus a code which means that the 'Kikuyu are just one tribe against the other 41 Kenyan tribes' and they can thus be easily annihilated. The balkanization of Kenya along these lines was publicly alluded to at least twice first by Budalangi MP Ababu Namwamba and then by Mvita Najib Balala. In an e-mail that is in my possession, John Mulaa, a US-based scholar called for the Gikuyu to be beaten back and confined into a small enclave.

Thirdly, some of the sms are attempts at some form of autochthonic ‘civic’ mobilization within the narrow parameters of ethnic consciousness discussed immediately above as seen in texts 11-12c in Appendix I. However, this call for people to come out to vote is not issued so much because voters need to fulfill their obligations to the civil state but rather it is because their primary duty is assumed to lie with their ethnic state; failure to vote would be to betray tribal interests. Slavery, such as that evoked by reference to the travails of the Israelites in Egypt, and untold suffering might occur if the presidency is captured by members of other ethnicities.

A sense of being besieged constitutes a fourth theme. Consider,

The house of Mumbi is surrounded by enemies and yet we had discarded our armor.
Let us beseech God to give us warriors who can protect the tribe and holy elders who
can offer a burnt sacrifice to God to ask him for peace and victory for our warriors.
Peace. Praise and peace to God. Praise.]

The above text (Appendix 1: 29) alludes to a people’s sense of impending doom; personal and collective ruin is envisaged if a member of the opposing camp wins the presidency. However, the bulk of these texts are directed at Raila especially because of the ethnic stereotype of the Luo as arrogant destructive group (see Skuma, 2005b; Wa-Mungai and Samper, 2006). In the main, the idea is to depict the Luo as a group that is hellbent on accessing power by all means: Appendix I,17. “This thing has gone 2 the wire n can go either way! Will Jaluo’s concede? I sense chaos in the air! If Kibaki wins, how will he govern without MPs?” Whatever political position writers had previously taken, they now seem to realize that chaos and general anarchy are a direct consequence of those choices. Indeed, as the lawlessness caught on, one notices a commensurate change in the tone of the text messages from gloating triumph to desperate resignation (see texts 21, 23-25,27-29). Texts 30a and 30b are a reference to the boycott of businesses perceived to belong to PNU supporters that was called by ODM. The latter text is a subtle sarcastic reference to the fact that the “divisions” amongst leaders are mere postures since Kenyan politics, mapped as harlotry, is, as we have seen above, devoid of real values and principles.

The theme of hatred comes up in three texts (Appendix I, 39-41):

39. No more innocent Kikuyu blood will be shed. We will slaughter them right here in the capital city. For justice to prevail, compile a list of Luos you know. We will give you numbers to text this information to [Original emphasis].

40. Fellow Kenyans, the Kikuyus have stolen our children’s future, we must deal with them in the way they understand better... violence!

41. “ Ru annoyed with Kipkalya Kones? How could he take a trip and fail to invite William Ruto with him? What are friends for? Damn it!!...ing. Vote for Dav”

The last one was received in May after the death of Kiplaya Kones and Lornah Laboso. Incidentally, whereas it has been assumed that there was a proliferation of hate messages, our investigation shows that these were far much fewer than it was thought. Many of the sms texts circulating around during that period are doubtlessly insulting but other than the three cited above they can hardly qualify as hate messages. In their numbers, and even in the likelihood that we never got hold of them, it is doubtful that there were enough hate texts to incite people to violence.

Lastly, in the gloom of murder, arson and general mayhem that lasted upto April 2008, Kenya experienced a “peace outbreak”. From musicians to preachers, politicians, and media houses and cellphone firms, Kenyans were assailed by calls to prayer and the quest for peace: Eric Wainaina’s patriotic song ‘*Daima*’ (‘Kenya Only’) quite nearly supplanted the national anthem in public gatherings and on TV. In similar vein there was a deluge of peace messages (texts 33-36). They mainly evince an abhorrence of bloodshed, which only a few months before was deemed to be “the better option” to a Kibaki/Kikuyu presidency, but it is doubtful that the conversion to peace runs deep. Indeed, as an informant angrily and repeatedly stated: “Forget about all these useless [Waki and Krieggler] commissions.2007 was only the taster. The real thing is on the way in 2012!” Whether these chilling sentiments—they have a bearing on texts 39 and 40 above—have any possibility of coming to pass or not, in any analysis of popular forms of engagement such as sms it is vital that we consider the issues raised in citizens’ moral economy. The content that has been presented here needs to be understood within the framework of Kenyans’ every day struggles, tribulations and successes in their various spaces of political organization.

Conclusion

This paper set out to attempt an explanation of the interaction between the cyberspace and other communicative agencies in the governing of the African public sphere, in this case, Kenya. This was in relation to the events during the post election period in Kenya. It is revealed that despite the government’s attempt to muzzle the media, in this case, the print, radio and TV broadcasts, the citizenry resorted to alternative means of communication. The internet provided alternatives to the limited radio and television capacity in Kenya. This study has alluded to the reality that several networks took advantage of the alternative media to push ahead their agenda in situations where the state controlled menus continued to blunt the

aspirations of the citizens. However, the discussions revealed the tensions inherent in the fractured identities that citizens construct around the dual question of ethnic and civic nationhood. For instance, Diaspora Kenyans often consciously invoked their ethnic identities in internet discussions. These discussions were calculated in a somewhat misguided manner only meant to solidify the fortunes of ethnic groups within the larger political contests. In exploring how mobile telephony was harnessed as a public sphere, in the cause of social justice, it has been clear that the technology had great potential for communication, networking and debate. But at the same time it has also been clear that while mobile phones were widely used to propagate the primacy of ethnic states against civic nationhood.

On the whole, these alternative communicative avenues proved critical public spheres. They possessed immense potential for enabling citizen critiques of power and political processes with a view to solidifying awareness of democratic practices and political choices. From rumor to cellphone text messages, e-mail and web-based discussions, popular culture affords immense resources with which to process realities of the everyday. On balance however, whatever benefits may have accrued from the deployment of alternative media technologies as alternative public spheres and mobilization conduits in the 2007 general elections, it simultaneously had serious deleterious effects.

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NB: I am indebted to the Kenya Human Rights Commission, Tom Kagwe and other individuals who availed to me these SMSs and Email discussions.

Appendix I: Unedited cellphone text messages in thematic clusters and stylistic ategories from the 2007 campaign and after

Assessment of presidential candidates' personalities and agendas

1. It is now confirmed that Kalonzo Musyoka will on 22 Dec 2007 step down for Mwai Kibaki in exchange for Kshs 10 Billion and a VP's position. That was expected. We have all along stated that Kalonzo has always been a Kibaki/PNU Grand Project dubbed the MIRRACLE. Kalonzo never intended to challenge Kibaki, leave alone trying to replace him. That's why he and Kibaki are focussed on bashing Raila in a one way focus. Indeed

Kalonzo has proved to be untrustworthy. He has betrayed everyone who he has associated with including his current supporters and Kenyans who thought he was an agent of change. ASHINDWE.-message Luos are passing on.

2. a (there is also an e-mail version of this text) He is bold, he is a team player, he is a liberator, and he is a panafrikanist, a democrat with a national constituency. He is Raila Odinga and he has what it takes to deliver Kenyans to the Promised Land. Join other Kenyans in supporting this great son of Africa. Send this sms to 10 people

b He is cold, he is a time player, he is a terminator, a destroyer, a demolisher with an odd national constituency. He is Raila Odinga and he hasn't what it takes to deliver Kenyans to the Promised Land. Join other Kenyans in stopping this great son of Africa. Today the people have spoken. Send this sms to 10 people

3. Raila strategized well, started campaigns early, propaganda, ethnicity, anti-Kikuyuism, youth vote, rebellion against age, etc

4. This week's award goes to Ida Odinga who was at Kisumu bus stop today pleading with Kisii's not to leave. Our leaders must have the courage to finish what they start.

5. If you read Raila back to front you get a liar (from the 2005 referendum)

(Tribal) arithmetic questions

6. (Lang'ata constituency) In '000': Luhia 36, kikuyu 32, luo 30, kamba 6, nubia 10, others >5Total= 135k> Assume 80% vote i.e. 110livondo gets 70, Raila 40. So the guy is out as MP & there's a tech knockout for presidency!

7. National Security Intelligence Report on 07 Election: Kibaki 5,599,000, 55.99%; Raila 3,109,000, 31.09 %; Kalonzo 1,209,000, 12.92%. Send to 3 pple. U must wake up n vote 2 ensure Kibaki this win.

8 a. NSIS Latest polls leaked: With a 100% average turnout Raila 63% Kibaki 27%. With a 90% turnout Raila 58% Kibaki 33%. With a 80% turnout Raila 53% Kibaki 39%. 50% turnout RAILA 43% Kibaki 42%. Gemas are 4.3 m while the rest are 9.8m. To beat them our turnout has to be over 80% if theirs is 90% and the rest 40% like referendum, they win. Send this to all the ODM supporters. Come out and vote on 27th.

b. National security intelligence report on 07 election: Kibaki=5,599,000 (55.99%); Raila=3,109,000(31.09%); Kalonzo=1,209,000(12.92%). This may improve if people in central, south R/v and eastern turn out by 90%. Send 2 10 pple. We must wake up n vote in large numbers 2 ensure Kibaki wins this battle by a big margin.

9 a. Predicted Kibaki-4,687,651= 47.6% Raila-4,303,817=43.7% Kalonzo- 865,996= 8.8%.
Give upto 50,000 tolerance.

b. Rumored estimates; Kibaki 4,649,246=47.4% Raila 4,233,860=43.6% Kalonzo 875,293=9.0% Total 9,708,162=68% of registered voters .Kibaki wins by 365,149 votes. We should know kesho.

10. Breaking news:ODM rejects Njue's appntmt as a cardinal insisting it was not consulted and this's further manifestation of tribalism. They say da pope would have considered Bishop Deya, instead because of his work with miracle babies!

Call to, and consciousness of, civic duty

10. Voters (sic) turnout shall determine if Kibaki gets reelected or not. Lets (sic) ensure all of us vote. Send this sms to everyone in your phonebook.

11. (We in GEMA have 6 million votes, Do you want us to be ruled by an uncircumcised man to take us back to joblessness? Safeguard the kingdom. Let's ALLcome 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. Send this to 50 or more GEMA people. Its your votethat will prevent our country from going back to egypt. May our God bless you)

12 a.May our Good Lord shower u n ur family with His LOVE,may he surround u with a HEDGE OF PROTOECTION thru 2008.MERRY XMAS n VOTE WISELY.

b. (sudden awareness of the electoral process): May U have a Happy, peaceful and prosperous 2008.Though delayed and not accompanied by Form 16/16A I confirm these are Genuine prayers.

c) I take this opportunity to wish you and your loved ones a happy and prosperous 2008. Further delays might be termed rigging and I don't have any form 16 or 16a for the record. May the Almighty grant all your prayers in 2008 and beyond.

Sense of siege/impending doom/resignation

13. e.g.Raila,and the Luo, as destructive—Raila Boy Profile: 1982-coup attempt;1992-crippled Ford;1997-killed NDP;2002-Broke KANU;2005-tore Narc;2008-DANGER!!KILL AND BURY KENYA.U CAN STOP IT-VOTEWISELY,VOTE KIBAKI-SECURE YOUR FUTURE. Send this message to as many as you can.

14. Wooo! Do you want to let the kingdom to go the Luos by failing to vote? Vote for Kibaki. Failing to vote is tantamount to voting for the Luo. Send this message to three of your friends from our Kikuyu community. Kibaki Tena.

15. Nindamwirire!O uria gikaina.It is everyone against mt.Kenya
16. Aai anga uthamaki niwathii iriaini, turi ona mwihoko
- 17.This thing has gone 2 the wire n can go either way! Will Jalu's concede? I sense chaos in the air! If Kibaki wins, how wil he govern without MPs?
- 18.This s madness we shld nt get into.To hell with both ODM n PNU!
- 19.Tis a sad day when a certified comedian, Walter Mong'are alias Nyambane reminds people that what they r saying is being relayd 2 the world n no one can make sense of their shouting.
- 20.Ui!Ui! Ngai baba!Teithia nari iriuke na giting'oe ! Thaa! Thathaiya ngai thai.Ruroruma nyambo
- 21.For the first time, I felt this xtry breaking apart. Not a good feeling and I hope Kibaki knows how serious this is. The hateful mood out here is unimaginable.
- 22.Mwaki niwagiakana! Kai tuguthie njira ya bururi wa sumali?Itikirai tu wira uthie na mbele!Why intimidate Kivuitu?Chungwa ni poa lakini Kura zimepanuliwa Meru.GOD HELP KENYA!
23. Just bn watching Al Jazeera; its unbearable! Andu aitu marang'eo ta mburi! [our people are being slaughtered like chicken]Where's mungiki? We need them!
24. Please remember to pray for our people all over Kenya. They are being slaughtered. Tuombe Kenya
25. Raila is implementing to the letter a Dick Morris strategy, already used in Arkansas, US, Ukraine, Mexico and by extremist parties in UK.In Kenya, the script is: *Hype up ethnicity to win, demonize and isolate...*Hire pollsters to claim a massive lead, demoralize and scattle rival vote*Make constant claims of rigging to prepare ground for rejecting polls if defeated*Reject the polls result Ukrainian-style, get sworn in separately, and cite the flawed pools as evident *Prepare supporters for protracted demonstrations in Nairobi and other major cities and take over. Our counter-strategy as patriotic Kenyans. MAKE THIS PUBLIC & STOP HIS PLAN FOR CHAOS & DESTRUCTION.BE READY AND TAKE THIS TEXT SERIOUSLY AND PREPARE FOR ANYTHING AND PRAY.
26. SMS FROM VERY RELIABLE SOURCE 'QUOTE' ECK has been ordered by State Hse to release the following results: Kibaki---4,176,437; Raila---4,17,223; Difference---59,114.Very reliable source Arise Kenya and reclaim your country! TOP PRIOROTY
27. From Greek tragedy to greek farce! This surely isn't the outcome anyone desired.Does Kivuitu have a watch
28. This [killing and general anarchy] is tragic and just not the solution for Kenya

29. Nyumba ya Mumbi nindigicirie ni thu na niyaigire ngo ngirini. Nituthaithe Mwene Nyaga atuhe Njamba cia ita cingirangira Ruriri Na Athuri a Kigongona mangithinjira Murungu metie Thayu na utorania wa Njamba citu cia ita. Thaaaai Thathaiya Ngai Thaaai. [The house of Mumbi is surrounded by enemies and yet we had discarded our armor. Let us beseech God to give us warriors who can protect the tribe and holy elders who can offer a burnt sacrifice to God to ask him for peace and victory for our warriors. Peace. Praise and peace to God. Praise.]

30. a. Before selling anything, confirm identity of customers. We r boycotting all transactions with ODM sympathizers. Tenants should be vetted, employees scanned, and all fish markets boycotted, psvs to vet passengers, hospitals to vet patients, shops to vet buyers and the boycott continues! Lets c who suffers at the end.

b. (Response) R u boycotting harlt services too? what are we doing to each other? Aren't we all Kenyans?

31. Turikunyarirwo ukai tucire niamu ita ritari ndundu rihuragwo na njuguma imwe. [venue] thaa inyanya njumamothi 26/01/08. Ndugatire Andu a Rift Valley

32. Lets all come out today (27/1/08) and meet at [venue] to assist our brothers and sisters who have been forcibly(sic) evicted from their Homes. Come with three others from NYUMBA YA MUMBI(3pm) GREAT leaders from GEMA in attendance. THAAI THA-THAIA NGAI THAAI AMEN.

Peace-Prayer outbreak

33 a. From Safaricom: In the interest of peace, we appeal to Kenyans to embrace each other in the spirit of patriotism, and exercise restraint to restore calm to our nation.

b) From Celtel(now Zain): The Government of Kenya advises you not to take part in any unlawful assembly that may result in violence!

c) The Government of Kenya advises that the sending of hate messages inciting violence is an offence that could result in prosecution

34. a. Today is a day 4 prayers 4 those who are suffering, 4 those planning more atrocities to freez n c the face of God in those they treat as enemies, 4 us to repent coz our sins have brought a curse upon us n our families.

b. HIGH ALERT! Let us form a Prayer chain today at 9.30 am praying for peace in the country & surely peace will prevail. Kindly pass this 2as many people as u can.

35. Fellow peace loving Kenyans this is a campaign against war mongerers(sic) and their instruments of destruction against their own people. 'Avoid seeing (sic) KTN AND DO NOT

BUY STANDARD NEWSPAPER YOU WILL SAVE YOUR COUNTRY FROM THEIR WELL CALCULATED (sic) EVIL.’ Circulate this countrywide.

36. Only the dead have seen the end of war and the dead know one thing: its better to be alive.....!

Tempered Triumph

37. With victory in the bag we can deal with *njikia thui*. God bless our beloved president: God bless Kenya.

38. Welcome to PNU service. You are on KIBAKI TENA tariff. Your current Balance is 5 years. The expiry date is 27-12-2012. Thanks for choosing PNU the better Option.

Hatred

39. No more innocent Kikuyu blood will be shed. We will slaughter them right here in the capital city. For justice to prevail, compile a list of Luos you know. We will give you numbers to text this information to.

40. Fellow Kenyans, the Kikuyus have stolen our children’s future, we must deal with them in the way they understand better... violence!

41. sms received after Kone’s death :“ Ru annoyed with Kipkalya Kones? How could he take a trip and fail to invite William Ruto with him?What are friends for? Damn it!...ing. Vote for Dav”

Stylistic strategies

Parody and the coded prayer template

42 a. I visited a VCT center n was shocked that I am +ve with the virus known as Kibaki tena.It has no cure. Even the ODM tablets prescribed by thomed doctors from Nyanza can’t help.On diet, my doc advised me never to eat oranges but should eat lots of any other fruits esp. those of PNU species.The bad [news:..You](#) must infect very many other people.Just tell them about this virus. The good [news: All](#) those infected will be cured on the voting day.

b. Just visited a VCT centre and the doctor told me that I am ODM positive! And he told me there’s no cure when you are ODM positive not even PNU tablets could cure. He actually told me to eat a lot of fruits and he particularly stressed on one full ORANGE!

43. a. 4 Jaramogi so loved Kenya that he gave his only son Raila dat whoever votes 4 him shal hv everlasting poverty, hunger, disease n die in pain. VOTE WISELY /comp to text below

b. For Jaramogi so hated Kenyans that he gave his son Raila that whosoever believes in him shall leave in eternal slavery, hunger, diseases and die in pain. Look at Kibera, look at Nyanza. We do not need Kiberas and Nyanzas in the country. He is cold; he is a terminator, a destroyer, a demon with an odd national constituency. He is Raila Odinga and he hasn't what it takes to deliver Kenyans to the Promised Land. Join Kenyans in stopping this great son of Africa. Today the people have spoken. Send this SMS to 10 people.

c. For Jaramogi hated Kenyans that he gave his son Raila that whosoever believe in shall line in enternal slavery, hunger, diseases and die in pain. Look at Kibera, look at Nyanza; we do not need Kiberas and Nyanzas in Kenya!

44. Hi good morning. The Lord has made my heart so restless for Kenya and He impresses upon my heart that He has anointed the next president already as Stephen and now the president is required to endorse him as God only allowed him 5 years during which time he has attained sterling performance through the blessings God showered upon him. Kalonzo is God-fearing-a man after God's own heart. Untainted, intelligent, young and steady. Na kazi itaendelea... Raila's hands are full of blood and voting him is an act of endorsing foreign aggression. Remember 1982 coup. Read his book THE ENIGMA. We must not sell the sovereignty of Kenya. Kenya is under siege and this is now injury time. Let's face it. Even if Kibaki goes back the danger of impeachment is as real as daylight. Did we learn from the referendum? Read Amos 3.7 The next thing will be a balkanised state of anarchy Kenya. Pray that this message gets to Kibaki and he acts in good time. God has promised Jeremiah 29.11 to Kenya. Pray that...

45. Nake Ngai akiira Ibrahim atiri, 'amba uthii uruithie muruguo, ucoke umurehe ndimurathime"! Kwoguo kihii gitingiathana Kenya!! Pamoja tuangamize kipii! (incidentally, this correspondent voted for Raila but later expressed deep regret for having done so. His cousin from Kuresoi indicated that he had been given six ballots to put in the presidential box; he'd also voted for Raila).

46. a) X and his maramwendera xmas njega, na kazi iendee.

b) Ngai thathaya Ngai, thiguku njega na kura ina maciaro.

c) As we celebrate this christmas day & preparing to fold the yr 2007, I wish you all the best 4 now & days to come. Merry Xmas & blesd new yr 08 & remember 2 vote wisely!

d) (Against the background of electoral violence): May peace break into your home, thieves steal all your debts, love tick on your face, laughter assault your lips and problems forget your address! Happy new year!

47. a. Your current balance is 10 hrs. Your renewal date is Kesho. Thanx for staying with PNU The Better Option. Merry CHRISTMAS N A PROSPEROUS NEW YEAR Kazi ikiendelea.

b. Your current balance is 5 years. Expiry date is December 2012. Thanks for staying connected to the better option, ODM.

c. Current balance.5 years expiry date 26/12/2012 now on Raila Tariff. Thanks for choosing ODM. Kazi Ianze.

48. a.(obituary) It is with great shock that I am receiving the news of your dear. Take heart, life must continue, may his soul rest forever in Othaya.

b. (Obituary) Nimukumenyithio gikuu kia ODM. Arari nyina[ni ithe wa raila odinga,William ruto,najib balal,joe Nyaga,wycliff mudavadi] wa anake ana,kihii kimwe na kairitu kamwe.Aciarirwo itura-ini ria referendum na agithomera[thukuru nyingi] thukuru ya Dick Morris Academy. Niambirie guthinio ni mwiri[na agikoma thibitari mwanya mwanya] thutha wa kuria icungwa ributhu na agikoma thibitari. Mathiko ni ruciu mbiririra-ini cia Lang'ata Andu ni maracemania pentagon house along orange street kuhariria mathiko.Ni Ngai waheanire na nowe wacokera.Ritwa riake rigocwo,Amen.

Allusion/Intertextuality;

49. A dubious Co. called Pentagon is peddling a fake drug called ODM claiming it cures more diseases than 'muarubaini' (neem).If you take ODM, it makes u drowsy, sycophantic, partly blind & suffer from amnesia. White becomes black & Truth becomes lies. If untreated ODM's effect lasts 3 months after which u'll feel cheated, used and abused. To detox ODM, take PNU syrup that has been formulated by renowned scientists with irrefutable track records. KAZI IENDELEE!

50. Zuma was fired by Mbeki in 2005 same with Raila. Now he is the President of ANC and by extension S.A. President in 2009. Raila is the Fourth President of the United Republic of Kenya by next weekend.

51. Desperate 4 votes from sex workers, Kibaki has now declared Koinage street a full district, ati ndio kazi iendelea...

52.Riu mwahotwo ndukugura nyama? I will eat only if it has orange taste!

53. Looks like this was free and fair and the future is orange!!!

54. Big changes.16 ministers out!!Well! Seems we will have raila for president! Mtavumilia kuwa wakenya?

55. a.(humor) Breaking Newz: Peter Marangi is painting state house Orange/ Have u Peter Marangi has already painted state house orange in readiness 4 Raila?

b. I think democracy's an ass! On a lightr not,Peter Marangi says the orange color at State Hse ws only the undercoat.The final color is blue. 'laughing 2 kp frm crying'.

c. Hi. Kwani the undercoat is taking forever to dry so that the final one may be applied? This waiting is getting onto everyone's nerves.

56. The sheng name for Maina is maish, Adhiambo is Adhis, true? Kariuki is Karis, Otieno is Ottis. Then doesn't it logically follow that Raila is...Rais?

Sayings and proverbs/Cultural construction of leadership

57 TIP Tip [Kalembe Ndile's Matatu party]? Gema twina kura 6 million!Mwoiga Twathwo ni kihii na tucoke mung'etho? Umirai tucikirie Kibaki ciothe bururi ndugathwo ni kihii gia gutuma twikire inyatha na kinine indo citu ciothe.tambia ndeto ino kuri andu 50 a Gema kana makiria.Kura yaku niyo ikugiria bururi ucoke misiri.

58. Muthuri aikariire njung'wa thingira-ini onaga haraya gukira kihii kahaicite muti iokana ona kahaicite kirima-iguru.Ndumiriri ino ni ikinyire kihii ti Raila. (When I asked her what she had against Raila, the correspondent indicated that for her it was personal; she had never dated and would never date a Luo, no matter how well-educated or wealthy because even if they might get the physical cut, the Luo remain "ihii" upstairs.

Repetition

59 from the referendum: Mwathani arokugitira kumana na maundu moothe ma mucukani ta mirimu,aici,arogi, thuya, nguha, mbuca, ndaa,ngunguni, na muno muno kiama kia ODM. Thayu wa Ngai

Intimate messages/ love note template:

60. Am very disappointed with u. I just hope what I heard about you is not true coz everyone is talking about it.If the ruma is true,pls,pls, 4ur sake, just do something about ur tainted image, and change for the better. Now, tell me, is it true what people r saying,that u r really in ODM?VOTE KIBAKI! SAWA?HAPI Madaraka

61. Am very disappointed with u. I just hope what I heard about you is not true coz everyone is talking about it.If the ruma is true,pls,pls, 4ur sake, and for the sake of people who care about you just do something about ur tainted image, and change for the better. Umeaibisha

not only your family but everybody who is related to you. Now, tell me, is it true what people r saying, that u r really in ODM? ODM?VOTE KIBAKI!SAWA?

62. (with dark humor) I didn't realize until today how great a friend you are. How caring, considerate, intelligent and sensible. Thanks for helping me fire Emilio. I owe you one. Kazi kwisha kabisa!

Vernacular sms: the construction of others as monsters

63. Kai kimbararigi gikuingira?.Nitwathira. Wee kweri niuraikirie kura?

64. Urogio ni gikeno uingihirwo ni migate ona thota ona nyama ugie na kwendwo ni arata ona thu ona nyamu—cia mucii na cia githaka--- especiaru cia githaka uhutio handu uthure wambaki ugie na kumena njaruo ciothe—especiari raira—na wahota nyamu yothe iriaga thamaki (nyamu yothe iriaga iria ingi)—cori ndathii nambere ndigukuwici gundi naiti—a cori ndiramini meri krithmathi—meri krithmathi enda hapi niu yia—na kathi ienderee!

65. Turi mbere ta maniuru ma ndurume.Ngai niendete ruriri rwa Kikuyu na Mumbi.Uga uthamaki ni witu.Cokera ringi.Uga uthamaki urotuura.Uga irotoma:irotharara:irothii uguo na miri ya mikongoe. Tambia ndumiriri ino kuri nyumba itu.

Sexuality, power and humor

66. a) Campaign can b fun! At dawn when ODM is already out, PNU men can still be heard from their bedrooms whispering; PANUA KAZI IENDELEE while ODM-K men r still being told; niko wet, NIPATIE WIPER.

b) Why you should be in ODM. ODM women scream YAWA,YAWA,YAWA in praise of Nyundo while men in PNU are busy telling their wives to PANUA PANUA ili kazi iendeleee.Women in ODM-K are so wet that their men keep asking WAPI WIPPER!!!!
(targeted both at women as a group and also at PNU and ODM-K political parties)

67. Under Kalonzo's government, sex will be legalized and free./plays on the stereotype of the Kamba as nymphomaniacal (see Evans Skuma's booklet on stereotypes)

68.a) With Ngilu(charity) in the pentagon, its becomes sexagon. No wonder they have been singing *bado mapambano*

b)With Ngilu in, the pentagon the pentagon becomes sexagon. No wonder they have been singing 'bado matombano'

69. (There is an e-mail version of this) The Odinga Destruction Mercenaries, today announced that its changing it's emblem from an Orange to a Condom. This is because it more accurately reflects its political stance: A condom allows for inflation, halts production,

destroys the next generation, is intended to protect a bunch of pricks and gives you a sense of security while you are actually being screwed! Kazi iendelee!!!

70. Kibaki tena kazi iendelee, Raila uraisi bado angonjee, Kalonzo maskini ajikolee.

71. Kibaki while addressing a big gathering at Lamu: "Akina mama hapo mbele mtanipatia? Na Nyinyi akina baba huko nyuma mtanipatia? Na mimi nataka mara mbili tuu."

72. To ease the tension the country is going through, please make love to someone from a different tribe and name the child KIRAKA i.e. KIBaki, RAila and KAlonzo.

73. Ndaguthaitha nama, mweri twendi sixi ndukanahaicane, na ndukanahaicwo niguu maru matikanathire ngirithi uremwo ni kwara raini mweri twendi seven. Merry Xmas.

74. Ona ndimu na marimau no matunda! Chungwa Moja, maisha bora! Have to go and have a beer!

75. The jamaas who looted tvs from ukwala supermarket are depressed. When put on, TV reads WELCOME TO UKWALA. No password to activate channels! (response: may they get haunted even more by the things they stole)

76. Urgently: a cargo handler, able to move utensils and other items from state house to Othaya. Five years experience, Contact Lucy on: lucykibaki@othayaxpress.com

Acronyms

77. PNU means : a) Ponyoka Na Uhuru, b) Porojo Na Uongo, c) Panua Na Uingie, d) Pumbavu Na Ukabila, e) Pora

Na Utoroke, f) Party of No Understanding

78. ODM means: a) One Dangerous Man b) ODM means One Daring Man, c) (play on *Vijana Tugutuke*) O-ne, D-angerous, M-an is what he is. We can not trust him with our country. Wakenya tuguke, Tunasema Kibaki Arudi Tena. Pass it on to at least 5 Kenyans. PNU!

Intermediality between SMS and other modes (rumor, newspapers, radio):

79. Kenyans be on the lookout. The NAIVASHA PRISON break was stage managed to release murder convicts to carry out special assignments for PNU. They want to hit between thur and wed next week. Two have since been sighted with STANLEY LIVONDO at Hse with black gate no. 46B in Kyuna Drive.

80. a) Citi Hoppa buses ferrying unmarked ballot papers from Embakasi now: KBA 993B, KAY 101L, KAZ 178R, KAY 005A, KAY 003A. Alert other democrats.... Peugeot GK A279M, Toyota KAK 5202 and Landrover GK 570M R AT THIS moment loading marked

ballot papers @ Embakasi. Their destinations are not yet known. Sambaza. (some of these reg.nos later appeared in The Standard)

b) The APs have been trained to rig the elections by spoiling between 10 and 20 votes per polling center that is cast in favor of Raila. With close to 30,000 centers all over the country they hope to deny Raila close to 500,000 votes. They will target mainly the illiterate by volunteering to assist them. Please ensure everyone is informed that they should not accept any assistance from strangers...4ward to ODM Democrats.

c) Kivuitu has been summoned 2 state hse. Kibaki has refused defeat. Besides rigging he plans 2b sworn in early.

81.Voter turnout[today's Nation] Sigor 115%, Eldoret North 116%,Mosop 97%,Emgwen 103%, Baringo North 92%,Narok South 120%, Bondo 102%, Kisumu Rural 102%, Karachuonyo 94%, Rangwe 92%,Ndiwa 93%,Nyatike 95%,Mbita 95%, Highest in Central Province OTHAYA 90% (understandable) Highest in Meru Region Nithi 80%.Who then stole the vote? For once can't honesty, decency & commonsense prevail? ODM propaganda seems to have even fooled the int'l community who are broadcasting of "stolen votes" thereby fueling genocide & ethnic cleansing & leave Kenya, Rwanda-style! Send to Kenyans, Diplomats, and Media Houses both int'l & local.

Total sms texts: 2007/08—111

Appendix II Rumor texts

1. If Kibaki does not resign and hand over power to Raila, both the US and Britain would send in troops to overthrow him in a manner akin to what happened to Saddam Hussein in Iraq in 2003.
2. The government had ferried Mungiki to cause mayhem in Nakuru and hence residents had started arming themselves in anticipation of this.
3. In the wake of violence when ODM wanted hold a rally at Uhuru Park to swear in Raila as the people's President it was rumoured that members of the Pentagon had been arrested.
4. Martha Karua (a Kikuyu) was viewed as being the stumbling block in the mediation process. The US, Canada, and other EU countries threatened not to issue a visa to anyone viewed in this light. When she did not travel to travel to Austria, it was rumoured that she had been denied a visa on that basis. But she came out on the defence and even showed the media a copy of the visa saying that she only chose not to travel in order to nurse her stresses in the country and that she had sent her Permanent secretary to represent her. This

was just a few days after the peace deal had been signed between Kibaki and Raila. This caused a lot of excitement within the ODM zones as she was “hated” overzealously due to her strong support for Kibaki and also for being a Kikuyu who almost voted for Kibaki to the last man and that she kept on telling the ODM to go to court if they felt that the election had been rigged in favour of Kibaki amidst ongoing peace talks.

5. The marking of presidential ballot papers at Nginyo Towers in Nairobi in favour of Kibaki led to the storming of the building by the police and ODM operatives. (This rumour was spread through phone texts).
6. When Kalonzo “ran away” with ODM-Kenya it was rumored that he had been paid millions of shillings to divide the party so that PNU could win. Again when he quickly accepted the VP position it was rumored that he had been paid to give legitimacy to an allegedly flawed electoral process, which he observed so. (both of these appeared as text messages)
7. Kivuitu paid millions to announce Kibaki as the winner of the poll.
The Majimbo debate: the most spread rumor spread about this was that people will need passports to travel from one province to another. This was spread by PNU supporters.
8. The army was going to take over power if violence persists. This was a rumor spread mostly by ODM supporters who never contemplated being led by a Kikuyu for another five years. They found satisfaction in the army ruling rather than a Kikuyu. What had Kibaki done that warranted this hatred? (promoted tribalism and ethnicity in resource distribution and employment into senior government positions, no new constitution as promised etc)
9. Lucy Kibaki had shot her son, Jimmy on the hand [some versions say he was shot in the groin] when he allegedly requested his father to leave the presidency to Raila. On her long absence from public view after the elections it was rumored that she had become manic depressive after ‘shooting’ her son and she had to be hospitalized abroad under the care of Dr. David Silverstein, the former president’s physician.
10. Appointing of novice commissioners to the ECK, appointing of judges towards the election period and increasing of salaries of civil servants were rumored to be incentives to induce them to work in favour of the incumbent president.
11. Raila had gone to South Africa to consult a Sangoma. He failed to win the elections because he didn’t follow to the letter the Sangoma’s prescription: import expensive new furniture for use at State House. Once the PNU people learnt about this, they instructed

the Customs people at Mombasa not to clear the ship carrying the consignment into the port.

12. The Nation newspaper is never bought in Kisumu because the Luo were instructed not to buy it since it is owned by rich Kikuyu.
13. The commissioner of police and the chief of the General Staff had resigned as they believed the polls had been rigged.
14. Kibaki was sworn in hurriedly because Oburu Odinga had already organized a one million man march on State House and invited “the Russians” to guard the swearing in of his brother as president.
15. Uganda PDF soldiers/UPDF were burning down buildings in Kisumu and killing people in Nyanza.
16. A city preacher had prophesied about the death of 5 mps—four from ODM and one from PNU. Cf. DN article “We need prayers”, June 23, 2008 p13.col.6, ‘letters to the editor’ by Mercy Chebet.
18. Raila has promised the Luo that if he becomes president they will no longer pay rent.
19. If the ODM came to power, all professional Luo men would be given a grant of Ksh 200,000 to enable them marry beautiful hardworking Kikuyu women, even if the latter were married. These women would be transported to Luo Nyanza to hybridize Luoland with their genes. Professional Kikuyu men like Prof. Ndung’u of CBK, Michael Waweru of KRA, education PS Prof. Karega Mutahi and Finance PS would be transferred to work in Nyanza to show the locals how to put up and manage economic enterprises in the region.

Appendix III: List of e-mail texts

1. KIMENYITHIA!!! KIMENYITHIA!!!!(An obituary for ODM). August 22, 2007.
2. This is getting personal. A pro-Raila/ODM. September 27, 2007.
3. BEFORE YOU VOTE. An anti-Raila. October 16, 2007.
4. PNU Campaign FW: PNU Campaign. Anti-ODM/Raila. October 2, 2007.
5. Prediction for 2007 presidential election. Pro-Kibaki. October 23, 2007.
6. WHY KENYANS WILL NOT VOTE FOR RAILA. JUDGE FOR YOURSELF. Share this with your friends. October 28, 2007.
7. Raila Odinga Parallels Idi Amin: LETS SHUN TRIBALISM, WHETHER ANTI KIKUYU OR ANTI JALUO. October 29, 2007.
8. THE CHILLING SECRET. (On the alleged MOU between Raila and a section of Kenyan Muslims).October 30, 2007.

9. NINE REASONS WHY I WILL NOT VOTE FOR RAILA ODINGA. October 30, 2007.
10. BEWARE! FAKE PENTA-GOON ORANGE JUICE. November 19, 2007.
11. {Disarmed} THE RIGGING STORY AND KALENJIN WARRIORS. January 11, 2008.
12. THE RIGGING STORY AND KALENJIN WARRIORS Friday, January 11, 2008
13. The Haunting Demons. January 19 2008.(Maurice Amutabi *et al*)
14. Historicising Self-Determination. January 26, 2008. (John Mulaa).
15. GOTAB KALENJIN, Ladies and Gentlemen (Bigap Kutit), (an anti-Kikuyu e-mail allegedly circulating amongst the Kalenjin). January 24, 2008.
16. Please save our Great Nation. Anti-Raila. February 7, 2008.
17. KCSE POST- ELECTION MID TERM EXAM – PAPER 1. A humorous look at politicians’ shenanigans and government absurdities after the elections. February 21.
18. Witness Reports-The Creation of the Kenyan Genocide: Recruitment, Training, Indoctrination and Operations of Kalenjin Ethnic Cleansing Terror Gangs. February 12, 2008.
19. ODM strategy: Executive brief on the position and marketing of the Orange Democratic Movement & “The People’s President”—Hon. Raila A. Odinga (Received sometimes in February, 2008).