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The Discursive Construction of Ethnicity: The Case of the 2007 Kenyan General Election

Felicia A. Yieke
Egerton University, Kenya



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Youssef G. G. G.

Introduction

Kenya is a multi-ethnic society and has more than 40 ethnic communities that have lived side by side for a long time. The most dominant ethnic communities in this linguistic and ethnic landscape are the Kikuyus, the Luyha, the Luo, the Kalenjins, the Kamba, and the Kisii. There are however many other smaller ethnic communities in Kenya. Since the onset of colonialism, power in Kenya has been associated with a particular ethnic group. Kenya was initially a protectorate and later colony of the United Kingdom. From self-rule in 1963 until the death of the first president Jomo Kenyatta in 1978, political and economic power was increasingly vested in his trusted circle of fellow Kikuyu (Decalo 1998: 177). After Daniel arap Moi assumed the presidency, political power became concentrated in the hands of Kalenjin élites. In all three periods, the ruling group sought to use the resources of the state for the special benefit of its own ethnic community and its allies.

The year 1991 was significant in Kenya in that this was the advent of multiparty politics. Kenya had earlier been under a one party political system. As the campaign for multiparty democracy gained strength during this period, and then developed into a full election campaign, violence broke out between different ethnic groups, particularly in the Rift Valley, parts of Western and Nyanza provinces. These eventually spread rapidly to neighbouring districts. These disturbances were first referred to as tribal clashes. The first cases of Internally Displaced Persons (IDP) were then witnessed at this time when perceived 'outsiders' had to leave the Rift Valley province, neighbouring districts in Nyanza and Western provinces. Lives were threatened and property damaged for those who resisted this displacement. The majority of the displaced came from the ethnic groups associated with the political opposition (e.g. Luo, Luhya, and Kikuyu). Competing land claims were used to inflame violence among certain ethnic groups. People were thus displaced as armed 'Kalenjin warriors' attacked Luo, Luhya, and Kikuyu farms. Most attacks, it was alleged, was carried out by organised groups. In total, it was reported that over 1,500 people were killed in these skirmishes, and at least 300,000 became displaced from their homes (Human Rights Watch/Africa Watch (1993).

It is often suggested that land scarcity and its distribution, which was aggravated by other factors such as a high rate of population growth and environmental degradation, has contributed to the violent ethnic clashes in Kenya. Since the 1920s, political and economic factors have encouraged the movement of populations within Kenya's national borders, often to zones where they constitute ethnic minorities.¹ Nonetheless, these population movements into ethnically distinct areas did not cause any large-scale violent attacks prior to 1991. Historically, members of Kenya's 40- plus ethnic groups have co-existed, traded and intermarried, often in a symbiotic relationship between pastoralist and agricultural communities (Lonsdale 1992; 19). Moreover, ethnicity was, prior to the mid-twentieth century, a more fluid concept than commonly supposed (Ogot 1996).

Large-scale inter-ethnic violence is a new phenomenon in Kenya. The proximate causes of violence are intrinsically related to democratization and the electoral cycle; its roots are to be found in recent times and are politically instigated, not primordial. As the move to multi-partyism became increasingly probable, senior politicians in many political rallies, issued inflammatory statements and utterances, asking for people to go back to their ancestral lands or they be forced out. The advent of the violent ethnic clashes closely followed these rallies (Human Rights Watch/Africa Watch 1993). As new political parties emerged, a clear, enduring pattern of ethno-regional interests appeared (Adar 1999). The violence in Kenya appears to be an ethnicised expression of political conflict. Ethnicity then in this case, was the medium of political violence, not its cause. However, the system, once in place, became self-perpetuating: it increased the likelihood of future conflict by sharpening ethnic identity and chauvinism, as well as promoting the doctrine that specific regions of the country 'belonged' to the groups that 'originally' occupied them. This has led to terms coming up such as 'outsiders', 'foreigners', 'strangers' or

¹ The British divided the Kenyan territory along ethnic lines into eight provinces, creating a different majority in each; each province was subdivided into districts, often according to ethnic groups and subgroups. For example, the Luo are based mainly in Nyanza (though it is also the home to the Kisii, who have their own district); the Luhya, in Western Province; the Kikuyu, in Central Province; the Somali, in North-Eastern Province; and the Mijikenda, in the Coastal Province. The Rift Valley is dominated by the Kalenjin, but also contains Maasai, Turkana and Samburu districts. The Kamba share Eastern Province with Embu and Meru, among others. Nairobi is the most cosmopolitan province, with the Kikuyu forming a plurality.

‘aliens’, and this is regardless of the legal ownership of land and the constitutional right of all Kenyans to live anywhere of their choosing within their country (Ndegwa 1997).

The general election of 2007 was the 4th multiparty elections Kenya was going through. The 2002 general election saw the defeat of the party of Kenya African National Union (KANU) that had ruled the country since independence, and National Rainbow Coalition (NARC), which was a conglomeration of parties came to power. Very soon, the NARC dream was no more and the country once more witnessed the emergence of many different parties and continuous shifting of alliances. Unfortunately these seemed to work along ethnic lines. Just before the general elections of 2007, the most visible and active political parties were Party of National Unity (PNU), Orange Democratic Party (ODM) and Orange Democratic Party of Kenya (ODM- K). These came to be the main players within the political arena, both before the general elections and also during the political crisis that Kenya experienced after the elections. The presidential candidate for PNU was Emilio Mwai Kibaki, for ODM was Raila Amolo Odinga and ODM –K was Stephen Kalonzo Musyoka.

The general election 2007 seemed to be a replay of the Kenya elections 1992, in terms of the ethnic violence that was experienced before and after. It is only that this kind of violence was really large scale this time round. The hypothesis of this paper is that any assessment of conflict involving ethnicity or ethnic identity requires an investigation into the language used. This is because language often plays an enormous role in ethnic conflicts. Language helps in defining one’s national identity, nationality, ethnicity or ethnic identity. We therefore examine the link there is in Language, ethnicity and power, and how this might have led to the voting patterns in the 2007 general elections and further led to the post-election violence that was observed in Kenya for close to two months. This paper is influenced by Habermas’ claim that ‘Language is also a medium of domination and social force. It serves to legitimise relations of organised power. In so far as the legitimations of power relation ... are not articulated,... language is also then ideological’ (Habermas 1977: 259). Oral narratives of life stories by people who were affected during the post election violence/conflicts were collected and analysed. These were done alongside utterances which were made by politicians and the political elite, and were recorded in

the media (both print and audio). Analysis and interpreted adopted the critical discourse analysis (CDA) approach. CDA in this case aims to investigate critically, ethnicity, power and consequently social inequality as it is expressed, signalled, constituted and legitimised by language use (Wodak and Meyer 2001: 2).

Ethnicity: A Bane or Blessing?

Ethnicity is as old as humankind. People in every part of our modern world, just as in ancient times, belong to some kind of ethnic or tribal group that reinforces their sense of belonging, nationalism, patriotism, social values, political progress, and development. The languages we speak, the customs and traditions we cherish, the food we crave, and the clothing we adore all have some linkages to our ethnicities, whether as Blacks, Europeans, Asians, Icelanders, (Kukubor 2006) or even as Kenyans. In this way, ethnicity reinforces our very beings as persons and nations in charting our destinies in this world in regard to national unity and progress. Ethnicity should therefore not be a hindrance to national unity and progress, or the source of the continuing violence and instability in African states, unless Africans, out of misguided individual egos used ethnicity for mischief, bordering on corruption, mismanagement, and greed for power. We do not categorically state that ethnicity is the cause of conflicts in Africa. However, ethnicity has been a resource in the hands of frivolous ‘political entrepreneurs’ who because of corruption, mismanagement, and greed for power have manipulated ethnicity and use it to achieve their personal agenda (Kukubor 2006).

Members of ethnic groups routinely speak with, or about, members of other groups. Such intercultural discourse is a taken for granted form of every day interaction and cooperation. Each group may have its own norms, values, language as well as way of speaking, but in order to understand each other and work together, people tend to mutually adapt themselves, more or less, to the others. They often learn each other’s languages and alter each other’s special habits, and up to a point accept and respect each others’ cultural identities. This is the good news.

The bad news is that often multiculturalism, mutual respect and tolerance between different ethnic or ‘racial’ groups is merely a social political or moral idea that people often pay lip service to. In

the real world, as we know from either personal experience or reading it from the paper or seeing it on TV, how cultural misunderstanding, ethnic conflict, prejudice, xenophobia, ethnocentrism, anti-Semitism and racism frequently characterize relations between groups that are somewhat different from each other (Van Dijk 1993). This is especially the case when one group holds more power, has more privileges or more resources and uses the difference (e.g. colour, language or religion) as a legitimation to dominate or marginalize others.

Saro-Wiwa (1989) indicates that the lack of competent personnel, the canalization of all energies into the struggle for power, debilitating corruption and other social evils have arisen because many nations have ignored the ethnic nature of our society, choosing to pretend that the ethnic groups do not exist and stubbornly refusing to build our house on the strong fundamentals of ethnicity (Saro-wiwa 1989). This may sound rather perverse because it has always been argued that our strength lies in unity and that ethnicity is the bane of our nation. This brings us immediately to the difference between ethnicity and ethnocentrism. Ethnicity is a noun from a Greek word 'ethnikos' meaning 'heathen', implicitly meaning the origin of a person. Ethnicity is the fact of the ethnic group. It poses no danger to the nation. Ethnocentrism on the other hand, is the danger; it is the misuse of the ethnic group, of ethnic sentiments against other ethnic groups (Manyasa 2005; Kulumba 2005). Ethnocentrism may refer to any action or attitude, conscious or unconscious, which subordinates an individual or a group based on origin (language, ethnic origin, culture etc.). This action can be enacted individually or institutionally. This attitude or behaviour is based on ones extreme viewpoint or loyalty to a tribe/ethnic or social group, ignorance, excessive pride in one's ethnicity, and/or intent to suppress and dominate. Ethnocentrism is what Kenyans have been referring to as negative ethnicity (Wa Wamwere 2008). The way we see it then, ethnocentrism can be combated, whereas ethnicity is permanent (Saro-wiwa 1989).

The concept of 'Tribe' was derogatorily developed in the 19th century by racist western scholars, and journalists to designate alien 'non-white' people as inferior or less civilized, and as having not yet evolved from a primal state. A lot of times, tribalism and ethnocentrism have been used interchangeably to convey the same thoughts and opinions (Kukobor 2006). As our society

become ever more multi-ethnic and members of perceived minority groups reach positions of power and influence, tribalism is becoming the predominant form of subtle oppression of 'ethnic minority in Africa generally (Kukobor 2006). Kukobor further says that one can be ethnocentric, regardless of ones religion, intelligence, social status, and benevolence. We are usually faced with two types of ethnocentricism: individual/group tribalism/ethnocentric and institutional tribalism/ethnocentric.

Tribal and ethnic issues are so fundamental in Kenyan society that they seem almost an integral component. This seems to have come up even more clearly in the run up to the 2007 general election. And even though we know that tribalism has always been there, the level to which the Kenyan community had fallen prey to tribalism was and is still amazing. It is becoming a common phenomenon for some myopic thinking Kenyans to behave as if ethnic differences produce inherent superiority in people of some specific ethnic group. In fact, such individuals respond to other Kenyans differently merely because of ethnicity. Individual tribalism occurs in our day-to-day activities at informal level. This tendency is exhibited in daily conversations, jokes, and how we routinely relate to one another. At this level, the tribal behaviour may be conscious or unconscious. The idea however, is to demean or lower one ethnic group in order to raise the profile of the one the ethnocentric belong. An ethnocentric tendency at this level is implicit in behaviour and can be identified by certain behavioural signs. This often is done in very subtle ways. For example, the belief that some ethnic groups are more adept in particular jobs or tasks, and the belief in differences in intelligence among certain ethnic groups (what we call stereotypes).

Ethnocentric shows condescending attitudes towards members of other ethnic groups. They exhibit this by attacking members of an ethnic group, which 'cause them most offence'. They even employ members of an ethnic group they perceive as enemies and use them to attack members of that ethnic group. They show favour by treating the people they have employed as members of 'superior' ethnic group. These 'employees' openly condemn the culture of their ethnic group as backward and shower praises on the members of the other ethnic group.

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

Language as an Ethnic Distinction

In order to investigate into the relationship between language and ethnic identity, or ethnicity, one has to first understand how the concept of ethnicity is indeed planted among an ethnic group. Historically, the discussion of ethnicity diverges into two different opinions, namely the primordial and the instrumental perspectives. Traditionally the primordial view regards ethnicity as 'constituting' a fundamental feature of society and that ethnic identity is natural and unalienable (Christ 2003: 27). In other words, the ethnicity of a group is defined by its cultural and biological heritage, and is territorially rooted. It is thus grounded by the group's primordial ties and bound by the ancestors' values, myths, languages, etc.

On the other hand, instrumentalists argue that the primordial approach emphasizes too much on the objective nature of ethnicity, which stresses that ethnicity is a 'given' and one is born with it. They criticize the fact that the primordial approach cannot explain the evolution of ethnic groups over time. Instead of admitting solely to primordial ties, instrumentalists emphasize that ethnicity of a group should be understood in terms of its relationship to other groups. This simply means that the members of an ethnic group identify themselves subjectively in relation to other groups in order to maximize their social interest. Worsley (1984) says that cultural traits are not absolute or simply intellectual categories, but are invoked to provide [ethnic] identities which legitimize claims to rights. They are strategies or weapons in competitions over scarce social goods. Adopting the instrumental approach to ethnicity, the relationship between language and ethnic identity will be much more transparent to us.

The instrumental view holds that ethnicity is a subjective way of interpreting a group's identity, often in the hope of maximizing the members' interest. However, in order to identify a group's separate and unique ethnicity, the members often have to in some way find themselves certain features which can distinguish them from the other ethnic groups. For instance, biological heritage, religious divergence and language difference are commonly cited as proofs of ethnicity. Theoretically, biological heritage seems to be a reasonable argument which sets an ethnic group apart from the others. Yet in reality, such claims often lack the support of historical records and are sometimes subject to interpretation. What is more important is that, claims on historical and socio-political reasons are not immediate indicators of ethnicity, meaning that the differences from the other groups are not immediately visible and must be traced and confirmed by additional effort.

It is however safe to say that the very majority of our social life depends on the use of language, and the use of different languages naturally separates people into different groups, each not being able to understand the others. Lacking channels of communication, we typically identify others as being 'different' from us. This is what makes language such a prominent objective factor in defining ethnicity. To say language is to say society (Duranti 1997). Thus if you speak one particular language, you belong to that particular society.

The idea of language itself is however sometimes not an objective fact, but a matter of subjective interpretation and is often employed purposefully as an ethnic distinction. Linguistically, every regional dialect is more or less different from the neighbouring dialects. Even though we may normally regard these dialects as dialects of the same language, it is so easy to take this difference as the evidence of independent ethnicity once the speakers find this parallel to their interest. Consequently, this flexibility (or otherwise ambiguity) in defining 'language' creates its link to ethnic identity. Similar examples are numerous. For instance, Serbian and Croatian, despite the slight divergence in the choices of vocabularies, are almost linguistically equivalent (Katzner 2002: 91-93). More examples are Flemish and Dutch, Macedonian and Bulgarian, Romanian and Moldovan, Swedish, Danish and Norwegian. All these pairs and triplet are examples of very similar dialects being identified as different languages (McWhorter 2001: 68-

69). Their separate identities are not linguistically based, but only due to the subjective will of the speakers.

From the above examples, we see that in reality, both ethnicity and language are not objectively defined ideas. Ethnicity is often subjectively interpreted by a group, and is thus a tool to fight for the social interest of the group members. Meanwhile, the very features of language serve a very good role in defining a group's independent identity. On the one hand, language plays a very important role in the social life, and limits speakers of different languages into different social circles. On the other hand, the ambiguity in defining a 'language' makes it handy to claim linguistic independence once the need is there. These factors are favourable to the claim of independent ethnicity, and therefore make language closely related to ethnic and national identity.

The Discursive Construction of Ethnicity

As already said, any group is defined through differences from others. The constitution of society comes within the articulation of differences, which receive generalised, symbolic meanings and are produced through and only within different symbolic systems. Society as a social and cultural phenomenon exists and is reproduced by means of symbolic communications (Lotman 1994). In other words, social groups are constituted within discursive practices. So any society is, first of all, a symbolic construction, that determines its mental, imagined character (Anderson 1983). And in this logic, Anderson's definition of a nation as an imagined political community is applied to an ethnic group. In this sense, ethnicity can be seen as a discursive construction of collective identity.

In the field of Cultural Studies, Stuart Hall offers an understanding of ethnicity as a *new politics of representations*, and defines it as a historical, cultural and political construction. For him, the term 'ethnicity' acknowledges the place of history, language and culture in the construction of subjectivity and identity, as well as the fact that all discourse is placed, positioned, situated, and all knowledge is contextual (Hall 1996a: 446). From this perspective then, history, language and culture define ethnicity as discourse. Ethnicity is produced by the context in which identity and

subjectivity are constituted. This approach to ethnicity comes from the reconceptualisation of identity as a process of identification. Identity is not absolutely stable, but changes in historical context. The dynamic moment of identification process is the recognition of the Self through relationship with the 'Other'. As Hall notes, people have most of their identities not because of something deep inside them, but because of how others have recognized them (Hall 1996b: 344). Identity is defined as a dialogic relationship to the 'Other', who is outside as well as inside the 'Self', because an individual can identify oneself only through an understanding of who the 'Other' is. This means that one knows the differences of him/herself from other. But this process is ambivalent: we identify ourselves as different from others because others recognize our differences.

If identity is a dynamic process, the only place where identity receives its stability is the representation of self-identity or narrative of the self. Identity is 'the story we tell about the self in order to know who we are' (Hall 1996b: 346). This tendency to stability in the narrative of identity is close to Bourdieu's notions about the illusion of constancy of one's identity in biography (Bourdieu 2000). Identity may thus be a plot of a story (Wodak, de Cillia, Reisigl, Liebhart 1999: 11–15). Thus, dialectically, identity, which is a dynamic process of identification, is represented within narratives or discourses, but it receives stability and constancy in narratives. This stability of ethnic identity in narratives becomes the issue of political representation in claims of militants about ethnicity as a collective identity for a group. Politicians use ethnicity as a mobilising factor of modern political movements. In fact, this political utilisation of ethnic identity is no more than the realisation of power upon representations of identities.

Hall notes that the discursive construction of ethnicity as well as national identity lays stress on the imagined homogeneity of an ethnic group (the same as nation or race), and avoids discussions about cultural differences and the diversity of the individual experiences of people, who share one ethnicity (Hall 1996a: 443). He adds that 'the construction of a social identity is an act of power', and argues that the unities or homogeneities proclaimed by identities 'are constructed within the play of power and exclusion, and are a result ... of the naturalized, over determined process of closure' (Hall 2000: 5).

We examine how cultural and ethnic identities, differences, conflicts and inequalities are expressed and reproduced by talk and text. Prejudice, ethnicity and racism may be reproduced in discourse with as well as about the others. And the ways members of one ethnic group speak among each other are of course related to their position in society, and how they are spoken to and spoken about by dominant group members. Like all group relations in society, ethnic group relations are also partly managed by text and talk. We see how group members culturally produce and reproduce their own identity, and hence their group by using the group's own language variety and special discourse forms, and how intergroup relations are enacted by talking to people of other ethnic groups. These group relations are also established and maintained by writing or talking about such relations, and about the others (van Dijk et al. 1997). It is in this way that in-groups express and acquire knowledge and attitudes about the out-groups, about ethnic relations, and about ethnic affairs in general.

Discourse plays a crucial role in the enactment as well as in the reproduction of this system. Thus ethnic and racist talk and text themselves are discriminatory practices, which at the same time influence the acquisition and confirmation of ethnic and racist prejudices and ideologies. This is especially the case for political elite groups and institutions, such as politics, the media, scholarship and corporate business, whose prestige, power and influence have played a prominent role in the pre formulation of racism [and even ethnicity] at large (van Dijk 1993). At this point, we may ask what role the news media, the television stations, the radio stations, the corporate world and academia played in the political crisis before and after the general election in Kenya? Analysis of ethnic discourse within these institutions reveals the every day communication practices of dominant groups in multicultural societies, while at the same time show how ethnic beliefs are strategically expressed, acquired and distributed throughout the dominant group; that is as part of managing ethnic affairs and reproducing elite power and group dominance.

The early works of Foucault (1977, 1971) deal with historical systems of institutional and discursive practices, and with the way he regards discourse not as groups of signs, but as 'practices' that systematically form the objects of which they speak (Yieke 2002: 67). CDA may

be seen basically as concerned with analysing opaque as well as transparent structural relationships of dominance, discrimination, power and control as manifested in language. CDA thus aims to investigate critically, social inequality as it is expressed, signalled, constituted and legitimised by language use (Wodak and Meyer 2001; 2). These supports Habermas' claim that *Language is also a medium of domination and social force. It serves to legitimise relations of organised power. In so far as the legitimations of power relation ... are not articulated ... language is also ideological* (Habermas 1977: 259).

As far as Political legitimacy is concerned, the right to rule is fundamentally constituting the core of political organizations and affecting all political activities. This is especially so in the modern state, which while claiming supreme and comprehensive authority within the territory under its jurisdiction, seeks to regulate the vital interests and actions of its citizens through binding commands, rules and regulations backed force. As Weber argues (cited in Alagappa 1995), the basis on which legitimacy is claimed will influence the structure of domination; 'The type of obedience, the kind of administrative staff developed to guarantee it the mode of exercising authority', all depend on the kind of legitimacy claimed.

Apart from influencing the structure of domination, legitimacy also frames the discourses among strategic groups, and also between these groups and the public in their endeavour to control the use of state power. As the 'language of legitimacy' often defines what is and what is not legitimate political activity, it provides a reference framework for articulating and mobilising resistance against the incumbent government. Thus political legitimacy is crucial to understanding the politics of any country.

In examining the relationship between power and domination; we look at situations where power is used in such a way that it militates against the interests of certain organisational groups, and in favour of others (Mumby 1988). Despite having situations in which we have the African ruling elite trying to legitimise their exercise of power, we also have situations in which power functions in a hegemonic fashion to structure the system of interests in an organisation (Yieke 2002: 30). Hegemony does not refer simply to the domination of one group by another, but

indicates the process by which one group actively supports the goals and aspirations of another dominant group, even though those goals may not be in the subordinate group's best interests. Hegemony, which was best articulated by Gramsci (1971), is frequently misconstrued as the ideological domination of one class, or grouping of class fractions of another. Hegemony instead involves 'the ability of one class to articulate the interests of other social groups to its own' (Mouffe 1979; 183). In this sense, hegemony is a question of leadership rather than of domination and control. It is achieved via 'the colonisation of popular consciousness or common sense, through the articulation of specific social practices and positions within ideological codes' (Grossberg 1984; 412). Far from being based upon coercion and domination, ideology therefore functions through active consent rather than through the passive acceptance of already articulated social reforms.

Bourdieu (1984), Foucault (1977), and Van Dijk (1989), all interpret social power as ways of discursive control. In other words, who has access to the various types of discourse, who can talk to whom, in what situations, about what, and who cannot? The more powerful the people, the larger their verbal possibilities in discourse.

The Politics of Inclusion and Exclusion in Rhetoric and Political Speeches

Power is conceptualized in terms of unequal capacity to control how texts are produced, distributed and consumed (and hence the shapes of texts) in particular socio-cultural context (Fairclough 1995: 1). A range of properties of texts is regarded as potentially ideological, including features of vocabulary and metaphors, grammar, presuppositions and implicatures, politeness conventions, speech exchanges (turn taking) systems, generic structure and style. The power to control discourse is seen as the power to sustain particular discursive practices with particular ideological investments in dominance over other alternative (including oppositional) practices. Ideology is seen as 'located' in both structures (discourse conventions) and events. On the one hand, the conventions drawn upon in actual discursive events, which are structured together within 'orders of discourse' (Wodak 1996) associated with institutions are ideologically invested in particular ways. On the other hand, ideologies are generated and transformed in actual discursive events (Fairclough 1995: 25). In common sense, ideologies become naturalized or

automatised. For Gramsci (1971), ideology is tied to action and ideologies are judged in terms of their social effects rather than by their truth values.

Before and after the general election in Kenya, there was a lot of hate speech in both the private and public domain. In most cases, this was meant to incite people against members of the 'Other' ethnic community, or to intimidate members of an ethnic community. What we saw basically in Kenya is this whole idea of 'Them' vs. 'Us', 'in-group' or 'out-group', or the politics of Inclusion vs. the Politics of Exclusion. These discourses of hate, which bordered on ethnicity eventually contributed to the political crisis that Kenya witnessed. Hate speech is defined as any written or spoken material, or any other representation of ideas or theories intended to degrade, intimidate, or incite violence or prejudicial action against a person or group of people based on their race, gender, age, ethnicity, nationality, religion, sexual orientation, gender identity, disability, language ability, moral or political views, socioeconomic class, occupation or appearance (such as height, weight, and hair colour), mental capacity and any other distinction-liability. The term covers written as well as oral communication and some forms of behaviour in a public setting. Use of hate speech is outlawed in national and international human rights law since such speech contributes to intolerance, discrimination, xenophobia and violence (Kenya National Commission on Human Rights 2007). Despite all these, the use of hate speech in campaign rallies, continued unabated. Unfortunately, as witnessed in the last general election, Kenyans continue to condone and cheer hate speech and have themselves become active agents of proliferation of hate campaign against politicians and fellow Kenyans.

In this section, we look at hate speech as it relates to ethnicity and the political crisis that followed. Most of these hate speeches were in the public domain. Some I was given by my informants who narrated the life experiences they went through during this time. Some of the hate speeches were actually on the news media on television, radio and also the print media. I do not however look at hate speech that was used in short message text (SMS) and email, although this was also massive.

Cultural Issues, Social-economic Class and Ethnicity

After the political crisis in Kenya was over, there were calls from all over the country to burn the FM vernacular radio stations in Kenya. Many Kenyans said that as much as the vernacular FM radio stations were good in helping Kenyans re-examine their cultural practices and trace their roots, they were also to blame because of the hate messages they spread that led to ethnic communities rising up against each other. It is said that through their call-in programmes, they incited their listeners against the 'Others' who did not belong to their communities, and asked them to arm themselves and protect themselves. Some stations, it is alleged, enabled individuals to make unregulated hateful statements, and sometimes these FM stations aired highly emotional and distraught victims of the violence. These in essence incited the listeners to respond by exhibiting violent behaviour. One radio station made reference to:

1 The beast from the West

This was in reference to the Party leader of ODM, who was also a presidential candidate and came from western Kenya. Others, both in the Radio stations, and also in political rallies said that:

2. We can not be led by a child.

This was in reference to the same political leader who came from a community where circumcision is not part of its cultural practice. In fact, some were bold enough to say that:

3 We can not be led by an uncircumcised man.

Suddenly circumcision was an important issue to be deliberated about within the political landscape of the country. Reading beneath the lines, this was really not a cultural concern but an ethnic concern, which had become an issue during the election campaigns. In fact, it was common to hear this:

4. A Luo is an unelectable person as a president in this country.

The above utterance brought a big debate in the country across the political divide. In fact immediately after the election results were announced and violence broke out, quite a number of youths from the Luo community in some of the slums in Nairobi were forcefully circumcised, in what pitted one ethnic community against the other. This same act of violence also happened in Nakuru, another town in Kenya where violence broke out and many people from different ethnic communities were killed [slaughtered]. In fact, it was reported that a particular musician from a different ethnic community composed a derogatory song insinuating that Raila Odinga, who was a presidential candidate was a *murderer and power hungry*. The musician also made reference to Raila's ethnic community as *very lazy people*. It was said that this song was played in various local language stations which had a huge following from an antagonistic ethnic community. On the ethnic stereotype of some communities being *lazier* than others, the presidential candidate was asked to:

5. *Go and develop your regions first before trying to govern the country.*

In fact he was told that His people were very poor and also very lazy. But more than that, he was asked how come:

6. *You want to be president and yet your constituency has the biggest slum in Africa*

Land Issues and Ethnicity

At the centre of the political crisis, which culminated into ethnic hatred was the question of land. Land has been quite a thorny issue in Kenya, and people like linking it to the historical injustices that the country has experienced since independence. Due to this, after the elections, over 1200 people were killed, and over 500,000 people were displaced from their original homes. For the first time, we had a situation of Internally Displaced Person, what Kenyan now refer to as IDPs ². The following are political utterances which are related to ethnicity and the land crisis. Many of these utterances were meant to incite the 'locals' against the 'foreigners' who were meant to flee the land and ultimately leave it to the indigenous people of the land.

7. *All the investors in Kericho and in the estates will be either Kalenjins or Indians.*

² The writer herself and family also became IDPs in Kenya during the political crisis

This statement was supposed to have been made by a local politician to his supporters, and this was meant to have given the youth of the local community motivation to attack all other tribes especially Kisiis and Kikuyus. He is said to have been explaining to people who attended a meeting in the area that no one can take what belongs to the Kalenjins, especially land. As said earlier, land was almost at the centre of all the crisis witnessed. In fact, the Kikuyus were told that they will be chased out of the land in Rift Valley province and be returned to Central province, which was their ancestral land. This utterance was very common amongst people:

8. *We are going to Lesotho you.*

What the above in essence meant was that the Kikuyus were going to be driven back to central province and be isolated there as one [or two provinces] against the other 6 provinces. This is in reference to the Country Lesotho, which has been surrounded by South Africa. This was supposed to show the people how precarious their situation was if all other communities isolated them. On the news media, different politicians were recorded to have said that they really did not mind if there was secession and central province became one country different from the rest of the provinces in Kenya.

Many derogatory words were used to refer to the ‘outsiders’ to make them ‘Them’ as different from ‘Us’ further defining the politics of exclusion vs. inclusion. Below are some of those derogatory utterances:

9. *All the ‘Madoadoa’ will be removed from this region*

(All the stains and spots will be removed from this region)

The above utterance by a politician was further to incite the locals against the foreigners to leave the specific area since they were staining the area. Other words like *Ng’ogi* [dogs] were used to refer to the same community, which were used to refer to the ‘Other’. Yet another politician was alleged to have made similar utterance as shown below:

10. *We will uproot the ‘sangari’, shake off the soil, gather it together, and burn it.*

The above utterance was with reference to the ‘outsider’ communities, who were not a part of the local ethnic community. *Sangari* is a weed. Since weeds are problematic and usually choke the healthy plants, they are usually uprooted by farmers. The soil is however useful, so all you do is shake off the soil from the weed and then burn the weed. This is a reflection of what happened. Homes were burned as the unwanted ethnic communities fled the regions since they were perceived to choke the growth and the development of the local community who would otherwise remain stunted.

The informants further said that the youth of the area were actually organized and financed by the same politicians, who transported more youth as reinforcement to ensure that the ‘foreigners’ were driven out of the land even if this was through violent means. One politician was quoted to have said that:

11. They will beat up the Kikuyus until they leave the area.

However, what was interesting was that even as the so called foreigners attempted to leave their homes which were at the time being burnt and some of their kin had already been killed, huge road blocks were also placed on major roads leading out of the areas. It was alleged that one politician said the following:

12. When we tell you to block, make sure you block the road, and when we tell you remove them, you must ensure that you remove them.

This was to ensure that they (foreigners) would not escape alive. In fact in clash torn areas, there was no mode of transport, whether this was public road transport or private road transport. Some people who had money resorted to using air transport. Others had to wait at the police stations and at the churches for refuge until an organized transport with full security was arranged. Eventually when public transport started to resume, most vehicles had to be adorned with twigs as a sign of peace, and the owners of the vehicles needed to put on the windscreens huge posters showing their party of choice which was supposed to be in consonance with the popular party in that area including their preferred presidential candidate who they insisted had been robbed of victory.

Voting Patterns and Ethnicity

A local politician in the rift valley province is said to have asked his people before the elections to chase away the outsiders from his constituency. The reason he gave was that these foreigners would neither vote for him and also his party, so there was no need of having them around. After the election results were announced, there was a lot of violence and burning down of houses in that area. In much earlier years and way back in 1992 when multi party politics became a reality in Kenya, it was said that this politician had complained that there were too many foreigners in his constituency thus his constituents were denied the chance to lead their lives in the way they know best. His advice to the foreigners was that:

13. *They were to lie low like envelopes.*

Yet another politician in Western province told his constituents during a campaign rally that he was not interested in votes from the foreigners in that area. He is also alleged to have said that it was those foreigners that were barring the local people from developing and improving themselves. In areas where there was a mixture of 2 ethnic communities, members of one community were evicted so that they do not vote for one of their own. At the same time, by not voting for a member from the other ethnic community, they would be reducing the dominance of the community perceived to be 'outsiders'.

Business and Ethnicity

During a campaign rally in Nyanza province, a local politician is alleged to have said that:

14. *That 'visitors' had taken away the businesses of local people.*

He named the said 'visitors' as *Oria*. *Oria* is supposed to refer to Somalis. But here the politician meant all the prominent businessmen who had settled there and were not the local ethnic community. This politician is alleged to have vowed that if he won the constituency seat in the general elections, he would remove the visitors and make local ethnic community own the businesses. In relation to this, one informer who was living in Central province and doing transport business, but was perceived to be an outsider since he did not speak the local language,

almost had his lorry burnt. When the violence was at its height, some young men were heard to utter the following:

*15. Iko wapi gari ya mjaluo? Hawezi fanya kazi hapa na Raila yao ana tusumbuwa.
Lazima aende awo tutachoma hiyo lorry.*

(Where is that vehicle belonging to a Luo? He can not work here and yet their Raila is disturbing us. He must leave, or else we will burn his lorry).

Having earlier been informed by some friends, although from the perceived antagonistic community, this respondent had to hide his lorry for over two days, some 50 kilometres away where there was a perceived neutral ethnic community. Meanwhile he and his family fled to the city where they perceived to be safe and more neutral. In any case, hate leaflets had been dropped and the ‘outsiders’ were informed that:

16. Kama mtu yenu hata behave by Tuesday, mtaona!

(If your man does not behave by Tuesday, you will see).

This informer and his family had to remain in the city for 10 days until some relative calm came back to the country. But even as they were fleeing, public transport was not an option for most ‘outsiders’. The ‘Us’ vs ‘Them’ phenomenon was exhibited when members of one particular community were denied entry into most public transport systems, and in a taunting way asked to:

17. Tell your ‘captain’ to bring buses from Nyanza province to ferry them home.

To date in Nyanza province, when operating public road transport, the operators usually wait until the vehicles belonging to the locals all fill up before they line up vehicles from the ‘outsiders’ to be filled up. They, in a taunting way, ask the foreigners to take their vehicles to central province because in any case, a person from Nyanza would not be allowed to operate his/her business vehicle in central province.

Violence and Ethnicity

A politician in Central province was said to have incited his constituents to violence. He allegedly asked Mungiki³ to arm themselves to defend the Kikuyu in Diaspora in the Rift Valley. Meanwhile, the ‘outsiders’ in central province were supposed to be evicted. They were particularly unhappy with one ethnic community because one presidential candidate belonged to that community. As a result, there were IDP camps at the police stations, prisons and the armed forces quarters. Landlords were asked to evict all their tenants who were from a particular ethnic community, and they were asked to:

18. Go and build your own houses in the capital city of Kisumu and stop being parasites on other people's sweat.

Others were heard to utter the following:

19. We will see where they will live. They are only used to living in houses that we build and instead of building or buying homes, they are busy living high lives.

The interesting thing is that even after the peace accord was signed in Kenya, there are now houses where people from specific communities are not allowed to be tenants, and that situation has gone on up to now. One respondent who was looking for a house in an area that she perceived to be safe saw a newly constructed block of flats, with a sign ‘house to let’. When she made enquiries, she was told that any other Kenyan who could afford could live in that block of flats apart from members of two communities (read Luo and Kalenjin) in Kenya, who they perceived to be their worst enemies.

Some politicians and inciters were heard asking why despite the violence, some houses belonging to ‘outsiders’ and people sympathetic to the outsiders were still standing ‘unburnt’ in the rift valley province. In Nyanza province, one person asked:

20. To od Tuju to uwe nango?

(But why have you left Tuju's house?)

³ A Proscribed group in Kenya

Tuju was a former member of parliament for the area, but he was perceived to be a traitor who had gone against the 'tribe' and joined hands with the '*ong'er*', which was a Luo term meaning monkey, and was used to refer to the 'outsiders'. The man referred to as *ong'er* is supposed to have no rights at all, and so has to resort to stealing in order to survive. The Swahili equivalent of this is *nugu*.

Religion and Ethnicity

A pastor is alleged to have told his flock to arm themselves the way he is armed with the bible. Men of cloth were actually witnessed calling on to their worshippers to defend themselves even if it meant through violent means. In one church just before the elections, one priest at the pulpit and during his sermon referred to one of the presidential candidate as the *devil* himself. He wondered how such a person could lead the country and yet he did not even have a Christian name. The priest insinuated that the people had to vote for one of their own. Even if it was through corrupt means, they would ensure that they got their man as president, after all, where was there no corruption in Kenya?

21. Jina yake ya ukristo ni nane? Huyo ni mtu ana weza kuwa president ya jamhuri ya Kenya kweli na hata si mkristo? Vote for one of your own! Kwani wapi hakuna corruption?

(What is his Christian name? Is this is the man who can be Kenya's president and yet he is not even a Christian? Where is there corruption?)

A few members of the congregation walked out after these statements. Some of these members left the church for good after that, although it is now reported that some church members have started streaming back.

One politician who lost his constituency seat remarked on national television as follows:

22. Kwanza ana sura mbaya kama ya shetani. Nyeusi kama shetani mwenyewe.

(First of all, he has an ugly face like the devil. As black as the devil himself).

Another politician on the same utterance asked:

23. Sura mbaya kama huyo anaweza kaa statehouse kweli?

(Can an ugly person like that really be the occupant of State house?)

These kinds of utterances were witnessed across the political divide in churches, in political rallies and even on talk shows and radio call-ins. Although the utterances differed in degrees, they were based on ethnic orientation pitting one ethnic group against the other. In fact in churches, some preachers read parts of the bible to congregations in support of violence against other ethnic communities.

Most schools in Kenya opened late during the political crisis. However, schools in some regions opened early. In one school where students went to school despite the crisis, a young child was taunted by fellow kids and teachers in school. This little child was asked why it is that their community was always rebellious. After this narration, the parent was advised by friends to remove the child from that school to prevent further traumatising of the child. This hate due to ethnicity in schools was also witnessed before the 2007 elections. A girl in a girls' school was taunted throughout since she was perceived to be an 'outsider'. The girl called Laila was being harassed by school mates and teachers because of the community to which she belonged, and she was reminded that she could as well ask Raila, whose name was similar to hers to get her a school in Kisumu. The girl did not of course go back to that school after the general elections. When calm eventually returned to the country, there were massive transfers of students all over the country. Parents were taking their children to areas they perceived to be safe for people of their ethnic origins.

Conclusion

From the forgoing discussion, Kenya has always been a multi-lingual and multi-ethnic community and the different communities have had peaceful co-existence for a long time. The kind of ethnicity experienced had so far been positive and had always added to the kind of diversity that Kenya had. This so far propelled Kenya to enhanced national development, and Kenya could actually be said to have been a kind of melting pot where different ethnic communities and culture lived in relative bliss. This is the good news. The bad news is that with

multiparty politics, which started in 1992, selfish politicians and the political elite have used our diversity in multi-ethnicity to balkanise the country and plunge it into violence and culminating into the kind of political crisis that was witnessed in late 2007 right through to early 2008. This kind of negative ethnicity is what is referred to in this paper as ethnocentrism. This kind of ethnicity, which was overtly exhibited in hate speeches, took centre stage in the voting patterns that were witnessed in the 2007 general elections. Today, most Kenyans know themselves as belonging to this ethnic community and not 'the other'. The whole issue of 'Them' vs. 'Us', or the politics of inclusion and exclusion has now unfortunately become more pronounced and magnified, and even in urban centres, people now identify themselves first as belonging to a specific 'tribal' community before looking at themselves as Kenyans. The whole idea of national identity has been relegated to the rear as ethnic identity takes centre stage. This does not auger well for Kenya and is bound to affect the economy of the country. This has sadly been experienced in the country where inflation rates have gone high since the end of the political crisis after the signing of the peace accord. If Kenya wants to salvage itself and bring back the social fabric, political cohesiveness and economic stability that it had enjoyed for a while, then we have to cast aside ethnicity and selfish interests, and begin to see the positive gains that ethnicity had for us before we started using ethnicity as a means to the kind of violence and destruction of human lives that was witnessed.

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