

Problematising Hateful Ethno-Political Rhetoric in Facebook and Twitter during 2017 General Elections in Kenya

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ABSTRACT:

The purpose of this study is to examine online hate discourse; with a focus on the construction of online ethno-political rhetoric as a form of hate speech during Kenya's 2017 general election. The study employed a qualitative case study design which entailed an empirical investigation of a particular phenomenon using multiple evidence. Purposive sampling allowed the researcher to observe, collect and analyse only the specific materials that had the characteristics relevant to the objective of this study. Working within Computer-Mediated Discourse Analysis (CMDA) framework, we analyse a purposively selected sample of sixteen posts from FB (ten) and Twitter (six) derived from the initial sample of 360 posts collected through online observation of Facebook groups and hashtags trending in Kenya between July and November 2017. 'The findings point at the shifting hate speech battle fields where ethno-political extremism in form of 'Us against Them' discourse finds easy expression online through dehumanizing epithets and metaphors that de-personalize and de-characterize the target, bringing to salience their perceived negative attributes in order to justify prejudice against them as a tool of political mobilization. These insights are relevant in understanding hate speech in multi-ethnic cultural contexts in society generally and specifically in Kenya. The study recommends that the government of Kenya and other key stakeholders should develop a media literacy policy on the moral responsibility in embracing netiquette and responsible netizenship in online interactions.

Key Terms: Computer-mediated discourse analysis, ethno-political rhetoric, online hate speech, Facebook and twitter.

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INTRODUCTION

The Communication Authority of Kenya (CAK) (2017) observes that as technologies develop in Kenya, new consumer behaviours have emerged. One such behaviour is the apparent tendency for computer mediation to alter traditional conversational norms of politeness, seemingly replacing them with socially removed conversational 'norms' in which otherwise 'inappropriate talk' find easy expression in 'politically correct' hate rhetoric which goes unquestioned and therefore appears fairly tolerated in Kenya despite its injurious force.

This paper focuses on FB and Twitter communication in Kenya to analyze the construction of ethno-political rhetoric as a form of hate speech by examining discursive construction of 'victims and victors'; investigating the ideology underlying such discourse and the implications for the audience as well as the society. This work is located within Computer-Mediated Discourse Analysis (CMDA) which is a multidisciplinary approach characterised by various discourse analysis techniques that deal with communication produced when human beings interact with one another via networked ICT devices.

Drawing from KNCHR (2018) and NCIC Act (2008), we coin the term ethno-political hate rhetoric to describe any speech action in the form of posts or tweets intended to hurt, intimidate, threaten, degrade and embarrass others or promote hatred and violence against groups based on their ethnic and or political affiliations. We argue that although the majority of Facebook and Twitter users employed fairly neutral language, a significant number of users reproduced overtly and covertly targeted identity-based discriminatory and violent content in the form of speech activities whose design and context correspond to the definition of hate speech in Kenya.

LITERATURE REVIEW

As at March 2020, Kenya ranked 4th in Africa after South Africa, Egypt and Ghana in internet growth with overall internet penetration rate placed at 89.7 per cent which translates to 46,870,422 users (World Stat, 2020). Belda Digital (2020) on the other hand reports that out of the total number of internet users in Kenya, approximately 8.8 million Kenyans are active social media users each spending approximately four hours on the internet each day with 92.4 per cent of them being on FB, 5.29 per cent on Twitter while other platforms share a paltry 1.85 per cent. Interestingly, in what denotes a dwindling trend in print media amid growing preference for internet as a source of news, as at March 2020, the circulation of the printed newspapers had declined to a paltry 9.0 per cent down 11.02 per cent in 2017 (CAK, 2020).

This exponential expansion of the internet has led to the growth of public journalism phenomenon in Kenyan online environment which is largely devoid of the strict editorial bureaucracy in content production, thus making Facebook and Twitter some of the most preferred channels of expressing sentiments and hot button topics such as hate speech. However, in their report on 2007/2008 Post Election Violence (PEV) which left more than 1300 Kenyans dead and 3000 others internally displaced, both the KNCHR (2008) and the CIPEV (2008) largely blamed the vernacular media stations while no attention was given to the role of social media especially FB and Twitter despite their growing popularity in Kenya. Additionally, Kenya has had no legal framework tailored specifically to address the online hate discourse formation that differs the substantially from offline hate speech, thus rendering the existing laws ineffective. Nevertheless, Kenya has recently witnessed amendments to the online platforms user policies and enactment of legislation to bar the posting of hate speech content.

One of these laws is the Kenya Information and Communication Act 2019 section 2 which establishes a register of online bloggers and expands the definition of 'a blogger' to include ordinary content producers in social media networks. CA (2017) Guidelines for Prevention of Dissemination of Undesirable Political Messages and Social Media Content which set out a raft of guidelines including a mandatory requirement that social media groups have administrators who approve new members and content shared in their groups.

This law also requires that all political messages bear the name of the disseminating individual or group, be free of offensive, threatening, insulting language, misinformation, incitement and obscenity. Other strategic hate speech laws in Kenya include the Code of Conduct for Practice of Journalism and the Cyber Laws Act (NCLR, 2015; 2018) and the Media Council Act of 2013. These laws have borne only a modest success in fighting hate speech as evident in the numerous claims of increasing online hate speech. The online survey by Umati (2013) established a shocking repository of prima facie online hate messages which despite yielding interpretation as hateful, producers cleverly create meaning contestation in a bid to avoid making up the required threshold for hate speech in the strict terms of Kenya's Evidence Act Cap 80 of 2014.

Being a signatory to the international treaties such as the United Nations Human Right Council (UNHRC); International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) and Universal Declaration of Human Right (UDHR), Kenya advocates against hate speech and all forms of discriminatory language. The Constitution of Kenya establishes the National Cohesion and Integration Commission (NCIC) and the Kenya National Commission on Human Rights (KNCHR) to monitor early signs of conflict. NCIC Act (2008) defines hate speech as any use of

threatening, abusive, insulting words or communicative actions like displaying, publishing or distributing written materials; presenting, directing, providing or producing a program intended to incite ethnic hatred or having regard to all circumstances where ethnic hatred is likely to be stirred. KNCHR (2008) on the other hand offers a more encapsulating definition of hate speech as any form of speech that is intended to hurt, intimidate, degrade, embarrass others or promote hatred and encourage violence against a group based on race, colour, religion, ethnicity, national origin, gender, sexual orientation, disability or other personal characteristics.

Generally, the definitions above share a confluence in characterising hate speech as primarily a negatively motivated language activity with group target where individuals are only targeted for being perceived as belonging to the hated group. From a discourse practice perspective hate speech has been characterised as essentially verbal conduct that uses symbolic communicative action (Tiersma, & Solarn, 2012; Simpson, 2013); discriminatory slurs and epithets or attitudes which Brink (2001) says are embedded in selective vocabulary and symbols that express repressed hostility and negative thinking about those who are not 'Us'.

Debates surrounding the online hate speech phenomenon in the Kenyan context reveal a tension line between the rights to express one's freedom and the responsibility of maintaining the rights of others as enshrined in the Constitution of Kenya. Although legislations are keen to nurture the freedom of speech, they spell out what constitutes unacceptable speech albeit without much clarity and precision. The freedom of expression is contained in article 33 (1) of the Constitution of Kenya (2010) but article 33, (2), goes on to clarify that the freedom of expression does not extend to; (a) propagation of war; (b) incitement to violence; (c) hate speech and (d)

advocacy of hatred. Article 33 (3) further concludes by asserting that in exercising the right to freedom of expression, every person has a role of respecting the rights and reputation of others. In other words, there is nothing like absolute freedom.

Despite anecdotal empirical research directly linking online utterances to the offline acts of violence in Kenya, Human Rights Commission (KHRC) (2015), United Nations Educational and Scientific Organization UNESCO (2015) found out that clashes related to inflammatory utterances attributed to political leaders often surge during elections hence this study focuses on 2017 elections. Nevertheless, judicial proceedings in Kenya insist on establishing the connection between various acts of violence to specific expressions of hate speech online which poses a challenge for prosecution. However, the effect of hate speech generally continues to be felt and witnessed in Kenya. This lacuna may partly explain the high number of hate speech cases that go through courts without securing any convictions since the inception of NCIC in 2008.

Regarding the effects of hate speech, Nemes (2002) and Sindoni (2018) observe that hate speech provoke fear discouraging the target from participation in communal life and expressing their collective identity for fear of being humiliated. This, according to Nielson (2002), is a form of ideological silencing of the victim. Allport (1979) conceptualises hostile prejudice in terms of five-point stages including (1) Antilocution stage: - which corresponds to the linguistic violence stage (Posset, 2017) where people generally talk about the target group dismissively using light jokes and negative stereotype within a humorous frame of reference that appears to negatively label the victim in widely acceptable discourses whose flipside implicitly carry spiteful innuendos about the target individual or group. The second of Allport's stages is 'avoidance stage' in which members of the target group

are avoided. 'Discrimination stage' is the third and here all forms of discrimination and prejudice are actualised with the target group being denied essential services, privileges and opportunity enjoyed by others.

The fourth stage involves 'targeted violence' where psychological torture and physical attacks and general aggression are directed to the marked individuals and groups. The fifth of Allport stages is 'extermination' which is characterised by systemic plans and attempts to eradicate members of the target group (Allport, 1979) through genocide-like attacks and massive evictions of the target such as the ones experienced in Kenya during 2007 and 2008 PEV. Allport's scale under-privileges hate speech criteria that only depends on the actual commission of criminal acts to identify content as hateful since the expression of hate (stage 1) is seen as the precursor of the actualised discrimination (stage 4) and the eventual full-blown violence (stage 5) which most legal definitions seem to rely on in judgment of expressions as hateful.

Although Kenya has recently legislated several laws such as the Code of Conduct for Practice of Journalism and the Cyber Laws Act (NCLR, 2015; 2018) among others, overt and covert forms of hate rhetoric still abound in Facebook and Twitter with over 90 Percent of the dangerous speech occurring in FB while Twitter and other SNSs together accounted for 10 Percent Umati (2013). Umati's findings do not yield insight into the pertinent questions such as; who is producing hate speech; who are the targets of online ethno-political hate speech and finally, what ideological issues underlay the production of online ethno-political narrative of hate in Kenya which are key concerns of this paper. According to NCIC Hate Speech Manual (2017) for law enforcers, police who are key in enforcement cite difficulties in distinguishing fair reporting from hate speech; determining speech intention in the absence of the actual violence and finally determining the injurious

potential of hate words. In addition, although the NCIC manual which overemphasises on press and electronic media such as TV and radio cites the linguists as key experts in interpreting linguistic background and how some hate words and cultural innuendos can be understood as hateful by a specific audience, this initiative is not anchored in the existing hate speech laws thus leaving interpretation of intricate linguistic contexts of online hate speech which is principally a language crime to unskilled police officers and lay witnesses which hampers successful prosecution thus encouraging the culture of online hate speech Kenya.

Spaces of technology, just like other linguistic landscapes, do not always offer a neutral environment but rather spaces full of multiple semiotic ensembles from which participants deliberately choose those that suit their purpose. Fairclough (1995) maintains that whenever people speak, read, write or listen; they do so in ways that are determined socially and have a social effect. Posset (2017) and Van Dijk (1993) argue that assertions and micro speech acts evident in the contributions made to national debates by those in authority can serve to confirm and legitimize certain constructed realities, since as Austin (1962) asserts, Some utterances perform actions which have a broad range of symbolic violence with overt and or

covert consequences on the audience (Posset, 2017). Gibson (1977) opines that various technical affordances of a digital medium such as Facebook and Twitter can also be used to perform potential actions which constitute social practice as well. How ideological out-groups are created, re-defined and depicted as worthy of discrimination is a form of social action achieved through persuasion and rhetoric means that are best understood by qualitative analysis of linguistic acts.

We view the complexity of choices made by Facebook and Twitter users as a discursive practice that is meant to achieve given discursive effects not only on its target but also the non-targeted members of the audience who are often called to act in discriminative ways. For this reason, the discursive activities at play in the process of ethno-political text production as well as the implication this may have to the text consumers and the Kenyan society as a whole needs to be understood in the light of the new media. However, not much research work known by the researchers has focussed on how Twitter and Facebook communication practices produce, propagate and shape the online hate discourses in the Kenyan context where hate speech persists despite being a proscribed misdemeanour.

RESULTS

Social and Situational Factors that Shape Online Hate Discourse

Code	Category/Factor	Aspect of influence
S1	Participant structure	- Involved mostly anonymous online personae on a one-to-many structure in online public forums characterised by a high number of participants and frequent but highly imbalanced participation turns
S2	Participants characteristics	Participants of mixed ethnicity, demography, gender, and occupations who claimed or displayed knowledge of each other's' ethno-political associations, ideological values, attitudes and beliefs, political and social

		inclinations
S3	Purpose of the group vs goal of specific communicative events	Groups involved were political forums. The goal of interactions appeared to range from negotiation of personal and or group identity, mobilization of political support, seeking consensus on controversial issues, propaganda and fostering ethno-political agenda
S4	Topic/ theme of the group	Generally invasive topics, elections, ethnic discrimination, secession, war, insecurity etc.
S5	Tone of participation	The dominant tone was humorous, aggressive, offensive, contentious, sarcastic, negatively cooperative, etc.
S6	Activity	The main activity was flaming that involved, negatively describing, exchanging insults, declaring, threatening, quoting, directing
S7	Norms	No strict moderation or administrative protocols, no apparent norms of social appropriateness, devoted to flaming, norms of online language such as acronyms, emoticons and abbreviation(Mwithi 2016) applied
S8	Code/ mode	Textual messages: used formal and informal English, code-mixing and code-switching involving Kiswahili and vernacular languages.

Table adopted with modification from Herring (2007): A Faceted Classification Scheme for Computer-Mediated Discourse. Findings reveal that Facebook and twitter communication mostly involved a high number of anonymous participants of mixed ethno-political affiliations engaged in highly emotive and imbalanced negotiation of personal and or group identity as well as mobilization of political support for their preferred political candidates. Participants used a one-to-many participation structure devoid of strict moderation protocols exhibited in typical offline conversations and lacking in principles of social appropriateness.

The key activity was internet flaming involving; describing, insulting, declaring, threatening, quoting, and instructing with the dominant tone alternating from being humorous, aggressive, offensive and contentious. A substantial overlap and intricate interconnectedness were noted between negative ethnicity, which ranked the highest form of hate speech constituting 22.3 per cent and political

intolerance constituting 16.3% of total hate posts and tweets. This suggests the central role of ethnicity in the Kenyan political discourse in which the bulk of ethnic hatred observed was constructed from a political intolerance perspective along with the major political factions of 2017; the *Jubilee Party (ruling Party)* and *Nasa Coalition (United Opposition)* using various discursive strategies.

Discourse Features of Ethno-Political Rhetoric

Findings show a systematic use of diction and speech tone in ways that seem intended to establish a logical reasoning that evokes emotions of hatred, fear and anxiety and convey deliberate appeals for collective discriminatory mass actions on the discursive targets.

Use of Dehumanising Epithets and Derogatory Metaphors

Carefully selected dehumanising epithets and metaphors were consistently used to de-personalise and de-characterise the target, bringing to salience their perceived

negative attributes to encourage and justify prejudice against them. Throughout the data, Kikuyu and the Luo communities seemingly acted as the nucleus around which the two major rival political conglomerates of 2017 general elections (Jubilee and National Super Alliance (NASA) were constructed. Specific communities or clusters of other ethnic groups were targeted due to their perceived support or lack thereof.

Text F1

<>... in my opinion, Mt.Kenya ethnic group must be very careful what they do becoz [because] like bacteria they are everywhere in Kenya. They shouldn't start what they can't end

Text F1 occurred in response to an earlier post in a Pro-NASA FB group called ODM Youth claiming that Kikuyu militias in police uniform had been moving house to house at Githurai in Nairobi killing the perceived NASA loyalists, including Luos, Kambas and Luhyas who were key partners in the NASA coalition. Figuratively equating the Kikuyu community to the bacteria constitutes a form of symbolic communicative action (Tiersm, & Solarn, 2012) using selective discriminatory vocabulary (Brink, 2001) to justify negative thinking and symbolic violence (Posset, 2017) about those who are not 'Us'. Popular perceptions abound corroborated by the census data (KNBS, 2019) that Kikuyu community are many and are settled in many parts of Kenya which are attributed to their entrepreneurial prowess and historically skewed settlement schemes perceived to have been engineered by the past regimes to systemically favour the Kikuyu (CIPEV, 2008).

The latter was widely cited as the root cause of sporadic ethnic clashes experienced in parts of the Rift Valley with the worst being 2007/2008 PEV where 1300 people were killed and another 3000 displaced (KNCHR, 2008). CIPEV (2008) documents how the Kikuyu residents in some parts of Rift valley who were perceived as supporters of the

ruling Party of National Unity (PNU) which had allegedly rigged in the sitting president for a second term were figuratively labelled by the natives using terms such as, *madoadoa* (spots), *bunyot* (enemy), *maharagwe* (beans) and *makwekwe* (wild grass) often followed by additional appeals such as *ng'oa* (uproot). By invoking the mental frame of the bacteria, the author of text F1 dehumanizes the target and appears to suggest that revenging the alleged attacks would be easy since they are found nearly in all the neighbourhoods. The same narrative carries on in Text F2 which narrates the vices perpetrated by the sitting president and which cannot be tolerated by others except by his ethno-political backyard discursively referred to as 'Central Republic'; an out-group who are perceived as not caring about the problems facing Kenya as long as the perpetrator is one of their own, thus;

F2<>Let (Uhuru Kenyatta) steal from (Kikuyus), kill Kikuyus, rape Kikuyus, Beat Kikuyus, lie to Kikuyus, con Kikuyus and use 54% win 44% loose [lose] algorithm to steal the election in the Central Republic of Kenya. The union has disagreed to work 54 years down the line. Acha tugawe hii shamba (let's divide this farm)...

The writer captures his frustration using the analogy of a marriage that has refused to work after a union of 54 years hence the inevitable dissolution expressed in yet another metaphorical appeal 'Acha tugawe hii shamba' (let's divide this farm) which is essentially an obfuscated incitement of the in-group that makes up the NASA coalition to agitate for subdivision of the nation metaphorically referred to as *shamba*, further alluding to land-sharing which is often a very emotive subject in Kenya. This amounts to incitement and threat to public order and the integrity of Kenya as one nation.

Re-Definition of Common Terminology

Ethno-political hate rhetoric was further achieved through deliberate alteration; re-definition and or re-contextualization of well-known referential terms in order to give them purposeful meaning shift with discriminatory intention to include in-group members together while simultaneously expunging the perceived out-group members as shown in text F3.

Text F3

*Nyinyi Jaluo,,,niwajinga sana,,mnafikirianga hii nchi ni yamama zenu?? Kenya iko na wenyewe tulizeni(*****). Hamjawahi ata jiliza maana ya GK ni nini?? Inamanisha Kikuyu na Kalenjini...shinden mukiendanga kotini (****) nyinyi maumbwa (You Luos are very foolish,,you think this country belongs to your mothers? Kenya has the owners. So, calm down (*****). You have never even bothered to ask what GK means. It means Gikuyu and Kalenjini... so keep going to the courts you dogs.*

The speaker in text F3 above hurls direct incivility and goes on to shift the meaning of a well-known phrase 'Government of Kenya' (GK) to represent two Kenyan ethnic groups; (Gikuyu and Kalenjin) which had produced the winning co-runners; president (a Kikuyu) and the Deputy President (a Kalenjin) respectively. The user tactfully applies a phonological variation of the initial sound /k/ of the word Kikuyu substituting it with the voiced sound /g/ in the new synonymous term Gikuyu.

This phonological change effectively fits in the Kikuyu community into the newly defined initials 'GK'. Within Kenya's ethno-political discourse, there is often an overwhelming sense of ownership of the government by the members of the community that the sitting president, deputy president and other senior government officials hail from thus perceptually excluding other communities not represented at the helm of national political leaders who

often express resentments and feel ostracized and discriminated against hence the perceived poor development of the areas that have never produced the president. Alluding to the contested presidential election of 2017 where the NASA coalition had filed an election petition at the Supreme Court, the Facebook user goes on to declare to his target group the futility of pursuing the court process for justice, a narrative also extended in a visual message board bearing a pun in Kikuyu language thus,

Text F4



F4 is a multimodal text combining verbal and visual elements complementarily to enhance the rhetoric effect. Each of the two homophonic words *uthamaki* (presidency) and *thamaki* (fish) are punctuated with a picture of its referent, namely the kingly crown and a fish. the multimodal ensemble is designed to create rhetoric effect and humour, which is enhanced by smiling emoticons serving to ridicule the target.

Gibson (1977) opines that various technical affordances of a digital medium can be used to perform potential actions which constitute a social practice. For example, the proposition of the multimodal ensemble above appears to glorify Kikuyus as the deserving tribe of leaders thus *uthamaki ni witu* (the presidency belongs to 'us') [kikuyus] while demeaning the Luo community as undeserving of such high profile leadership derogatorily relegating them to fish which is mere food, thus, *nacio thamaki nicio* (and fish belong to 'them') [Luos']. The stereotypical association

of the Luos with fish has to do with their close proximity with Lake Victoria which is hailed for good quality fish.

According to Van Dijk (1993), assertions and micro speech act evident in the contributions made to national debates can serve to confirm and legitimize certain constructed realities. Both texts F3 and F4 above are pragmatically intended to dismember the Luo community compromising their sense of belonging (NCIC, 2017); dismiss their constitutional right to lead Kenya and discredit their faith in Kenya's justice system for redress of perceived injustice. This representation serves to provoke anger and encouraging lawlessness evident in mass actions that broadly defined the 2017 post-election period in which over thirty NASA supporters were allegedly shot dead by the police (KHRC, 2018).

'Fear talk' as a form of ideological silencing

The polarized representation of ethno-political identities was given more injurious force by addition of speech acts that overtly call for the extermination of the already identified 'Other' to instil fear on the target as illustrated by text T5 T6 and F7

Text T5

<>'nishabuy panga na marungu (I have bought panga and clubs). I will surely kill some of these Okuyus (Kikuyus)'

Text T6

<>From street to street, building to building fight and Kill all Jubilee supporters, use their skulls[skulls] to fill the portholes...lit demo fires and pave our roads with the remainder from (aaaa)

<> 'Just like every Israeli is a Sharon who kills (aaaa) treat every Jubilee voter as Uhuru and Matian'gi who butcher (aaaa) every day

Text T5 was collected from a pro- NASA hashtag #luolivesmatter around the events after the alleged poll

rigging which was immediately followed by street demonstrations by perceived NASA supporters amid claims of brutality by the police who the victims believe were Kikuyu-based militia group (Mungiki) in police uniform. The text bears an explicit self-declaration of the author's readiness to kill members of the Kikuyu out-group; Okuyus, the common reference for Kikuyus used by online participants of the Luo origin.

Text T6, on the other hand, is an image screenshot from a pro-NASA Facebook group. The post takes the form of highly emotive poetic imperative clauses whose pragmatic force is explicitly threatening and calling out for total elimination ('from street to street, building to building') of the Jubilee party supporter. Just like text T5, the message in T6 sounds retaliatory not only against the killings orchestrated by Uhuru (the president) and Matiang'i (the state Cabinet Secretary in-charge of internal security) but also against the perceived discrimination in the development of road infrastructure in pro-NASA regions especially the area occupied by the group the writer speaks to as captured in these words *...use their skulls [skulls] to fill the portholes...lit demo fires and pave our roads with the remainder...*, the mention of human skulls provokes the violent and frightening memories of 2007/2008 PEV in Kenya which adversely affected the target community. Regionally, this representation stirs up the chilling memories of the dire consequences of Rwanda genocide whose evidence is preserved at Rwanda's Murambi Genocide Museum of human skulls.

Text F7

<>For Kikuyus to respect you they must be slaughtered to the ground, for Raila to be the president, a particular tribe must b [be] multiplied by zero... this time round, leave alone kiambaa massacre, we are ready to slash all Kikuyus

Text F7 occurs in a pro-NASA Facebook group and makes reference to the Kiambaa church inferno incident; one of the deadliest massacres epitomizing the 2008 PEV in Kenya. The topic (S4) was generally an aggressive electioneering talk where the producer is contributing in a conversation on how best one can deal with the perceived impediment against their preferred NASA candidate winning the presidential election; in this case the Kikuyu community. The participants employ threatening and negatively describing speech activity which, according to Austin (1962) constitutes assertions and utterances that perform discriminatory actions in and of them.

Text F7 above are explicit hate speech messages either committing to hurt or instructing agents Searle (1983) to cause harm to a named social group. Glowinski (2015) characterises hate speech as a phenomenon in which the considered object of hate speech must be destroyed, the sooner, the better. The author of Text F7, for example, refers to a historic attack on the target (Kikuyu community) when a church they had taken shelter in after forceful eviction from their homes was barricaded and set on fire killing all the occupants mostly women and children. The text producer warns that next time it would be total elimination of the entire community, which is arithmetically represented as being multiplied by zero. According to NCIC (2017), such sentiments as embodied in F7 are tantamount to stirring up the feelings of ethnic hatred meant to cause fear, anxiety and despondency on the part of the target thus influencing their democratic right to support and elect a leader of their choice which is a form of ideological silencing Thompson (1997).

Separatist ideology as a coercive strategy for social-political change

The ethno-political discourse systematically involved discursive construction of an out-group that is impossible to coexist with. This representation was followed by

incessant calls for secession depicting Kenya in a sort of a competitive match between two factions; *Wakenya* and *Walanyama* 'teams', where the reader is expected to take sides given the context at the time.

Text T9

Nasa petition is about Kenyans vs impunity. Nasa can not sit and watch the suffering of the masses. #NasaPetition



T9 clearly shows the entities at war as 'the people/*Wakenya* (Kenyans) versus those in power/*walanyama* (those eating the meat) also characterised as lords of impunity since they are perceived to have rigged their way back into government. The term *walanyama* that emanates from the popular metaphor '*kukula*' (to eat), which is a euphemistic baptism of the much-abhorred corruption found its way into the Kenyan politics way before the 2017 campaigns. It was used by Uhuru Kenyatta during his first term as President to hit out at the opposition describing himself and others in government as eating meat (enjoying national resources) while describing those in opposition as *Wameza mate* (literally some are salivating) which means (empty-handed) who were hungrily watching with covetousness.

The terms *wakenya* and *walanyama* appear to be used in both the limited and the extended senses respectively. For example, 'The people' and '*wakenya*' are semantically reduced and only used by the in-group of those who

perceive themselves as victims of discrimination and historical injustices. 'Those in power' and 'walanyama', on the other hand, undergoes semantic expansion to include not only the ruling class but also their associated ethno-political backyards who out of their proprietary fame believe that the election of their preferred candidate marks the beginning of their 'turn to eat', in other words to benefit more in resource allocation.

The calls for revolution, therefore come against the backdrop of a country already polarized into two; *wakenya/the people* versus the powerful/*walanyama*. Christoforou (2014) contends that internets and especially social media affords the previously silenced minority groups a rare chance for self-expression and participation in socio-political issues hitherto dominated by the political elite and majority groups. This is true for Kenya where netizen journalism make public mobilization for socio-political agitation much easier than before. In texts T10, users leverage the popular and often emotive quotes and slogans that appear to explicitly incite their addressee to support secessionist revolution as the only way to achieve the much-desired but often denied justice.

Text T10

<>When Jews were being brutalised in Poland, there came a time they couldn't take it anymore, and they decided to fight back. KENYANS WILL

The author of text T10 who is an individual participant, make declarations of willingness on behalf of the likeminded to pursue the secession course citing a familiar country that was in a similar pursuit. This in Thompson's (1997) terms is a form of rationalisation which entails the construction of a chain of reasoning based on the legality of rules, correctness and sanctity of practices in order in defending or justifying a set of social inclination. The text contains a commissive speech act of predicting by use of

the phrase 'KENYA WILL' which commit to a future secession and appeal to citizens to arise to this reality.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusion: Owing to gaps in the implementation of online user policies and apparently ineffectual legal framework in Kenya amid growing public journalism, the internet is opening up a new war front in the online spaces. Facebook and Twitter served as battlefields in the service of aggressive ideology whose impact in influencing attitudes, opinions and actions of the masses is often underrated. These platforms persistently displayed overtly directed aggressive speech activities whose illocutionary force entailed differentiating, isolating, labelling, threatening and calling for prejudice against individuals and group entities (victims) based on their ethno-political affiliations. Apparently, Kenyans are moving violence online to circumvent offline surveillance.

Although 2013 and 2017 elections in Kenya witnessed a reduction in actual physical violence, the flipside has been increased online hate speech which not only echoes but also draws from and brings to the fore the underlying repressed hostility in real offline life partly motivated by the perceived unresolved historical injustices and negative stereotype. Substantial overlap and intricate interconnectedness noted between negative ethnicity and political intolerance point at the deep ethnicization of Kenyan political landscape which is detrimental to a multi-ethnic society such as Kenya. Negative ethnicity was leveraged both as an instrument of discriminative political mobilization and manipulative tool for ideological silencing, thus maintaining discriminative ethno-political hegemony in Kenya. This raises pertinent moral and legal questions for the Kenyan society, which has had tendencies for an upsurge of online hate speech around electioneering period, often leading to recurrent hate speech related conflicts.

Recommendations: Kenya's legislation should clearly and objectively contextualize and demarcate between common hate speech and free speech. Further, the government of Kenya through NCIC, CAK, Media Council of Kenya and other key stakeholders should develop a media literacy policy on the moral responsibility in embracing netiquette and responsible netizenship in online interactions and responsible use of the internet since most of hate speech authors seemed ignorant of how their seemingly harmless

tokens of aggressive online content could yield a build-up effect on emotional states of their online audience and their offline connections. The use of highly symbolic idioms and figurative language, as well as visual metaphors, create purposeful obfuscation in order to mask obscenity and hateful intentions thus calling for complementation of current software-based criteria with rigorous context-based human techniques in interpreting online hate content.

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