Community radio and peace-building in Kenya

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Abstract

In December 2007, violence broke out after the disputed general election in Kenya, which resulted in the death of 1100 Kenyans and left more than 660,000 displaced. Reports criticised media, especially vernacular media, for inflating the violence by using hate speech and incitement to violence, and suggested that Kenya would benefit from more community media to prevent history from repeating itself. This article focuses on how Koch FM and Pamoja FM, two community radio stations in Nairobi, Kenya, worked during the 2007–08 tumult and 2013 general election. The article is based on observations and interviews with community radio practitioners conducted between 2007 and 2013, and addresses the following questions: How do the community radio stations work during elections – times of increased tensions? How do they discourage ethnic violence in their community? How is participation used in order to bring unity to the community?

Keywords

Community radio, election, post-election violence, unity, peace-building, Kenya

Introduction

After the disputed general election in Kenya in December 2007, ethnic violence erupted and more than 1100 Kenyans were killed and around 660,000 became internally displaced, according to the United Nations (UN) Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA, 2013). The situation was resolved in March 2008, after UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan helped the rival parties to agree on a power-sharing deal that saw a coalition government formed. Although normal life in Kenya resumed, the situation remained unpredictable as the underlying problems – such as unequal distribution of land and wealth, corruption and tribalism – persisted. Many feared that the 2013 general election would once again engulf Kenya in violence; however, although tensions were running high, the process remained peaceful.

Ethnic violence during elections is not an abnormality in Kenya. Rather, ethnicity, constructed as an imagined community, has influenced the political sphere in Kenya since independence. Many Kenyans tend to vote along ethnic lines (Bratton and Kimenyi, 2008: 6) as those in the political elite use ethnicity to manipulate Kenyans belonging to the same ethnic group, especially during election times (Atieno-Odhiambo, 2002: 232). Consequently, widespread distrust exists towards fellow citizens of different ethnicities, and many fear that others will organise 'along exclusive ethnic lines and to govern in discriminatory fashion' (Bratton and Kimenyi, 2008: 6). Discrimination or preference based on ethnic identity is often referred to as 'tribalism' (Spitulnik, 1992: 339). Others prefer the term 'negative ethnicity', as they argue that 'tribalism' has colonial heritage. In everyday life in Kenya, however, the term 'tribalism' is commonly used (Wamwere, 2008).

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Since the inception of multi-party politics in 1991, political violence – state-sponsored or private, often with ethnic undertones – has been common, especially during elections (Lafargue and Katumanga, 2008: 12). Unemployment is high among youth in urban centres in Africa, and the average transition period between school and work in Kenya is five years (Fares and Garcia, 2008: xxviii). Many politicians use the vulnerable situation of the youth and 'employ' them to do their 'dirty work' during elections, which includes everything from dancing and chanting party slogans during campaigns to intimidating opponents and, in some instances, using violence against their rivals (Adar, 2000).

The worst-affected area during the post-election violence (PEV) in 2007–08 was the Rift Valley and the slum areas in Nairobi. Some 60 to 70 per cent of Nairobi's population is estimated to live in slums (APHRC, 2014). Slums like Mathare, Kibera, Kawangware, Korogocho and Kariobangi were all badly affected by riots and violence, which initially were ethnically motivated. In the later phase of the crisis, criminal gangs took advantage of the situation to loot and rape (Lafargue and Katumanga, 2008: 14ff). The experience of the PEV started a discussion about media's role in the conflict, and vernacular radio stations[2] in particular were blamed for reinforcing the turmoil through partisan reporting and airing hate messages and incitements to violence. It was also suggested that Kenya would have benefited from having more community radio stations at the time (Abdi and Dean, 2008).

Since 2006, community radio stations have operated in the slums of Nairobi to counter-balance the negative perception of these areas, but also to promote development by facilitating a platform for community dialogue. Several scholars argue that more research about community media in conflict-resolution and peace-building is needed, as the subject-matter has to date received little academic interest and been subject to little inquiry (Carpentier and Doudaki, 2014; Rodríguez, 2011). This article will therefore focus on the work carried out by two community radio stations, Pamoja FM (Kibera) and Koch FM (Korogocho), in connection with the post-election violence in 2007–08 and the general election in 2013. Due to the close proximity to and influence over the community of community radio stations, it is vital to examine how they work together with the community during elections and other times of heightened tension. This article therefore poses the following questions: How do the community radio stations work during elections – times of increased tensions? How do they discourage ethnic violence in their community? How is participation used in order to bring unity to the community?[3]

Community media

The notion of community radio stresses that the sender and receiver are part of the same social system – the community. The community is the frame of reference for shared interest and interpretation and the radio communicates and collectivises shared experience (Vatikiotis, 2004). The meaning of community can be conceptualised either in a spatial sense or in terms of identity or shared interests (Downing, 2001). It is therefore inevitable that the concept of community also stresses a distinction between we/they: those who belong and do not belong to the community.

Community radio stations, which are often small and operating on low budgets, are involved in civic education and raising awareness about people's rights, but their obligations are also characterised by the ownership of the people, access by the people, people's participation and their non-commercial and non-state dependence (Alumuku, 2006: 135). In some countries, community media are perceived as the third media type, different from both public service and commercial media (Carpentier and Doudaki, 2014: 416).

The participatory communication model from which community media originate is influenced by the Brazilian pedagogue and scholar Paulo Freire, who contested the distinction

between student and teacher, and advocated co-learning based on dialogue, whereby 'people serve as their own examples in the struggle for and conquest of improved life chances' (Huesca, 2008: 182). Participation is therefore a central aspect of community media, as it has the potential to create a sense of belonging to the community, allowing the communication process itself to become an agent for social change and democratisation (Alumuku, 2006; Plansak and Volcic, 2010; Ufuoma, 2012: 198; Vatikiotis, 2004).

It is necessary to distinguish between participation in and through the media (Bailey, Cammaerts and Carpentier, 2008). One way of discussing community participation is thus community members' involvement in the media production and decision-making process. Community media provide people with the opportunity to voice their needs and take control over the distribution of their own ideologies and representations. These types of participation are perceived to allow the individuals to 'be active in one of the many micro-spheres relevant to daily life and put into practice their right to communicate' (Bailey, Cammaerts and Carpentier, 2008: 11). In return, the participation on a micro level is believed to enhance people's macro-participation – that is, participating in democratic processes in the wider society – by empowering them and offering practice in democratic and civic activities (Bailey, Cammaerts and Carpentier, 2008). In order to ensure community participation, it is common to involve volunteers from within the community (Bosch, 2010: 145), which is also believed to increase the credibility of the radio stations (Myers, 2000: 95).

Participation through the media refers to community members' participation in public debates, and is closely related to the idea of the public sphere (Bailey, Cammaerts and Carpentier, 2008) – for example, radio shows that encourage call-ins (Bosch, 2010: 145). The majority of community radio stations in Africa are not owned by the community itself, but rather by NGOs and churches (Myers, 2000), yet participation is argued to create a sense of community ownership (AMARC, 1998).

Community radio during conflicts

Due to the negative role played by the media in the Rwandan genocide, several media initiatives have emerged that promote peace and help the reconciliation process in war-torn areas in Africa (Brisset-Foucault, 2011: 205). Community media are often perceived to be vital avenues for peace initiatives, due to their close connection with the community (Brisset-Foucault, 2011: 205; Bonde, 2006: 345), the participatory elements and their cultural sensitivity (Curtis, 2000: 146), and their ability to foster diversity, intercultural dialogue and tolerance (Carpentier and Doudaki, 2014: 415).

Four media initiatives that promote peace and reconciliation can be identified:

1   activities that improve the general media environment to facilitate peace building[4] – for example, by tackling hate speech and hate media

2   local media projects that are used in order to disseminate information and educational material connected to peace-building activities

3   media that proactively work for reconciliation by aiming to foster a culture of mutual understanding and peaceful coexistence, and

4   activities that train journalists and support the development of inclusive communication policies (Curtis, 2000: 148).

For media that work proactively to promote a culture of peace and inter-ethnic harmony, and aim to change the attitudes of and perceptions between different groups (Curtis, 2000: 151), it is important that the language use and the news and information they disseminate further promote the overall aim (Brisset-Foucault, 2011). This facilitates a focus on positive stories that demonstrates successful inter-group cooperation (Curtis, 2000: 151) and tones down stories that

display animosity between different groups (Adam and Holguin, 2003: 4; Brisset-Foucault, 2011). The danger with these practices is that such media can easily be criticised for being biased and non-reliable (Curtis, 2000: 150). Some would also argue that it is beyond the task and capability of media to promote peace, yet one way to increase the potential success is to establish partnerships with experts in conflict resolution and NGOs that work for a similar cause (Adam and Holguin, 2003: 8). Moreover, community and peace media are often described as 'non-political'. This is connected to the negative definition of politics promoted by development agencies in order to favour development that is argued to be more 'useful' and relevant to poor people. The widespread negative perception of party politics in developing countries reinforces this thinking, and so does the overall aim to make reconciliation processes stretch beyond political affiliations (Brisset-Foucault, 2011: 216).

The 'non-political' character of community and peace media could be connected to the overall discussions about how liberal democracy is becoming increasingly 'non-political'. Mouffe (2005: 9), for example, criticises the liberal consensus model for trying to conceal conflicting interests in present-day societies. The politics of consensus suggests that collective identities in terms of we/they no longer exist, and that those who oppose this consensus are fundamentalists or traditionalists. Moreover, by linking politics to morality and exchanging the right and left parameters of the old adversarial politics with right and wrong, the adversaries are turned into enemies who should be excluded from the democratic debate. One example of how this practice is articulated is the 'war on terror' (Mouffe, 2005: 48ff). Rodríguez (2011), on the other hand, stresses that the strength of community media lies in their ability to reflect the everyday life of the community rather than focusing on the conflict (Rodríguez, 2011: 241) and that they can transform collective imaginaries by providing alternative stories, images and visions of 'who we are' that help the community to cope and heal when continuously being affected by conflict (Rodríguez, 2011: 75).

Methodology

This study is based on ethnographic research conducted between 2007 and 2013. Ethnographic approaches, including semi-structured interviews, have been used by Rodríguez (2011) to understand how community media work in order to facilitate reconciliation. It is a methodological perspective that is useful when seeking knowledge about humans and social groups in the context in which they live or work (Öhlander, 1999) – in this case, how community radio practitioners are working in times of heightened tension. Semi-structured interviews generate in-depth knowledge and allow interviewees to express their viewpoints, feelings and experiences in their own words and influence the direction of the interview (Kvale, 1997). Observations generate insights into people's daily routines that can be difficult to articulate during interviews (Öhlander, 1999; Spradley, 1979). By combining these methods, it is possible to compare what people say and what they in fact do, and thus attain a greater and more nuanced understanding of the work carried out by community radio practitioners to create unity within the community.

The majority of the data was collected between 2007 and 2010, and this dataset was enhanced with additional interviews and observations conducted between January and March 2013, in connection with the election. Between 2007 and 2010, several months were spent at the respective community radio stations, and participatory observations and semi-structured interviews were conducted to better understand how the community radio stations work in and with the community to advocate change and promote development. This article, however, is more concerned with their efforts to promote peaceful coexistence in the ethnically diverse slums. The idea to explore the stations' work during the election and how stations tried to unite their respective community when tensions are high, came out of the original 2007–10 data, as it

became apparent that one of the radio stations' greatest contributions to the community was to try to promote belonging and an identity that transcended ethnical identities (Gustafsson 2012, 2013). The rather small follow-up study in 2013 should be evaluated in the light of the deep understanding of the work of radio stations gathered throughout the years.

The interview transcripts have been structured thematically, and the themes that are relevant to the questions that this article seeks to address have been analysed systematically. The names of the interviewees have been changed in order to better protect their identity. The quotes in the analysis are selected as they illustrate different aspects of the themes, together demonstrating the complexity of the subject discussed.

The two community radio stations on which this article focuses are Koch FM and Pamoja FM, both operating from slums in Nairobi, Kenya. Koch FM, a local youth initiative, started broadcasting in 2006 in Korogocho, Nairobi's fourth largest slum, with approximately 150,000 residents. With some help from a Norwegian friend, a home-built transmitter and a shipping container to house the studio, they started broadcasting illegally on a 'free' frequency. Since Koch FM was the first community radio station to operate from a slum in East Africa, its setup was featured on prime-time news on Kenyan television, which consequently led to a visit from the Ministry of Information and Communication. Due to lack of permit, the station was closed down. For six months, Koch FM, supported by the mainstream media and Kenya Community Media Network (KCOMNET), struggled with the authorities until it received the documents needed to operate legally. This opened up the possibility of other slums starting their own radio stations, and in 2007 Pamoja FM (Kibera) and Ghetto FM (Majengo) took to the airwaves. Ghetto FM was off air in 2013, so this article focuses on the two community radio stations that were broadcasting in the slums of Nairobi at the time.

Koch FM and Pamoja FM broadcast in Kiswahili, East Africa's lingua franca, and use 'edutainment' as they aim to entertain while educating their communities on human rights, health and environmental issues. They were not begun primarily as peace projects; however, both Korogocho and Kibera are ethnically diverse and were badly affected by the PEV (Lafargue and Katumanga, 2008: 14).

Analysis of findings: The work of community radio during elections

This analysis aims to shed light on the work carried out by Koch FM and Pamoja FM carried out as a response to the violence in 2007–08 and in connection to the general election in 2013, and is organised under the following themes: the experience of the post-election violence; civic education; peace-building on and off air; preventing hate speech; and handling rumours.

The experience of the post-election violence

When the 2007 general election took place and turned into what is now commonly referred to as the post-election violence (PEV), Koch FM and Pamoja FM had existed for less than a year. Despite the fact that Kenya has a history of ethnic tensions during elections, no one seemed to be fully prepared or to know how to handle the situation. At this time, insecurity in Korogocho and Kibera was very high, and some members of the staff could not even come to work. One of the staff members who managed to work throughout the tension described it as the 'worst part of my career' but 'the best I could have done for my community, Kibera'. When violence broke out, the community radio stations' main objective shifted to fighting the tribalism that was tearing their community apart. The radio became a tool to encourage peaceful coexistence, and one way of doing this was to set an example to the community, both on and off air:

> *Abraham, news journalist, Pamoja FM:* We had a Kikuyu presenter and a Luo who was the news editor. We put a Kikuyu and a Luo together and they were like discussing and addressing the people …

> *Kennedy, radio worker, Koch FM:* That time we made some jingles to promote peace. We also made some jingles about members of the community talking about peace. It is not about who won: we have been living here in harmony, so why fight today? To a point even where some of us went to the battlefield not fighting but asking why are you fighting? We were trying to bring peace.

In the slums of Nairobi, it was mainly the Luo and the Kikuyu communities that were fighting each other. They supported the two rivalry presidential candidates, and when the election result was disputed with neither of the two candidates admitting defeat, these two ethnic communities squared off against each other, despite the fact that they had been living as neighbours for years. In this context, the radio stations talked straight to the affected ethnic communities and reminded their listeners that the Luos and the Kikuyus could coexist and intermingle. Pamoja FM demonstrated that these two different ethnic communities worked together at the radio station. By doing this, the radio station not only set a positive example, but was also able to reach out to its respective ethnic communities. Similarly, Koch FM used its position within the community to advocate for peace. The station utilised ordinary community members as voices of peace. This action stressed that peace was for the common good – regardless of ethnicity. The radio staff also physically promoted peace by confronting those who were fighting, and questioned their motives, which indicates the position Koch FM had within the community. Koch FM not only promoted peace during this turbulent time, but also initiated and organised help for the victims:

> *Ben, radio presenter, Koch FM:* We talked to the community and said we have some people who have been displaced, they need food and clothes and any well-wisher can bring anything for these people. I can tell you the community really responded because the whole of our reception was full of food and clothing to give the people who were camping here.

Organising relief for those community members who had lost their homes encouraged the community to come together and participate in this joint action. The radio station thereby managed to strengthen the feeling of togetherness and this signalled that Korogocho did not need help from the outside – despite the fact that it was being torn apart by tensions and violence, the community could help the victims and fellow community members. In this sense, the reconciliation process started when the community took responsibility for helping the victims of the crisis. Another important step in this process was to use the radio as an avenue for reconciliation. Both Koch FM and Pamoja FM facilitated a space where the communities could deal with their experience, and where community members from the different ethnic groups could use the radio station to apologise to those affected and to come to a mutual understanding. When the community radio workers were asked when they started preparing for the 2013 election, many of them said that that the preparation started as soon as the violence ended in 2008.

Despite the fact that these community radio stations did their outmost to intervene and stop the violence in 2007–08, and that the BBC World Service report suggests Kenya would have benefited by having more community radio stations at the time (Abdi and Deane, 2008), the community media practitioners are self-critical when looking back on their work:

> *Alex, radio presenter, Pamoja FM:* For sure we managed to quell down the violence but then in general it got many journalists unaware, not knowing what kind of reports they had to give.

> *Eric, radio presenter, Koch FM:* Actually it was really new in 2007 – many people didn't know what to do and as I told you in 2007, many people were too unaware, many people didn't prepare for this, even me personally I didn't know what hate speech was because I was just still a young guy from school.

Many of the journalists working for the community radio stations lack formal education in journalism, and this was particularly the case when it came to reporting conflict. They did not have sufficient training to fall back on or to guide them in their work. Instead, they had to follow common sense and be guided by the overall aim of the stations to serve the community. Since their inception (before the 2007–08 PEV), the content of community radio stations in the slums of Nairobi has been ethnically sensitive and has encouraged peaceful coexistence, and posited that listeners should perceive themselves as Kenyans rather than identifying along ethnic lines (Gustafsson, 2012, 2013). Nonetheless, it is possible that the radio stations were taken off guard by the magnitude of the violence.

Civic education

One major role for these community radio stations during elections is to engage in civic education. In 2013, this was more important than ever, since the new constitution had introduced three new positions to elect. Therefore, it was imperative that people knew the differences between these positions. The independent Election and Boundaries Commission (IEBC) provided all Kenyan media with information kits and then each media house decided how to use them. At Pamoja FM, it was decided to devote a week to each position. As the following quote illustrates, interaction and participation were central to the process:

> *Alex, Pamoja FM:* First of all let me start whereby you are in a class as a teacher you are teaching and you don't see anybody wanting to ask any question, you may even doubt 'Did they get what I said?' I mean have they perceived, did they not get anything … you don't actually know whether they have got it or they have not. That is one. Number two if you have a class that is much participation, if some students participate it encourages others to participate and its is through participating that you can get to understand exactly what you need to do, through the discussion. Somebody said iron sharpens another iron.

In this context, participation and interaction played several roles. First, they became a way for the presenter and experts in the studio to get an idea about whether or not their message was being received and understood. Second, by articulating a question and directing it to those in the studio, the audience took a big step in the learning process, by identifying what they did not understand and then receiving an answer to that specific question. Third, other members of the audience might also benefit from the answer and be encouraged to articulate and post their own questions. Apart from shedding light on the new positions, these discussions were also concerned with subject-matter such as the importance of rejecting ethnic voting and vote buying.

Koch FM invited guests to the studio who explained and discussed the different positions on air together with the audience. Moreover, the radio station also conducted civic education on the ground, through its community outreach department, which normally works with the community to raise awareness about constituency development funds and local governance. The radio station partnered with different stakeholders on the ground and held civic education forums in the community. Community members were encouraged to share thoughts and experiences, and post questions about the upcoming election, and experts in the field assisted the process so that the community would understand the election process. This is an example of how Koch FM used its status within the community to engage in community work off air and of how these discussions could later feed into the discussions on air, enabling the two to reinforce each other.

Peace-building on and off air

According to the community radio practitioners, their most crucial function during election times is to 'preach peace' within the community. For this purpose, some programming focused

purely on discussing peace and the importance of coexisting. All programs at both Koch FM and Pamoja FM had to include at least some time dedicated to peace. Even the news bulletins at the radio stations ended with a message reminding the listeners to embrace peace. Koch FM also encouraged the community to participate:

> *Rose, news journalist, Koch FM:* We are requesting all the presenters in every show there is three minutes you dedicate to reading peace messages, and peace quotes. We have been running peace quotes competitions in some of the programs where some would send peace quotes and whoever has the best peace quote is given something.

Organising a peace competition stimulates participation, as the community members themselves are encouraged to formulate their own peace messages based on their individual experience. Together, these individually composed messages become an impressive collection of expressions of community spirit and togetherness. In addition to airing peace messages, the stations invited and gave airtime to local NGOs involved in different peace initiatives. Opening up the studio to different groups – be they church leaders or NGO representatives – is a strategy to reach as many people as possible within the community and to increase the potential success of assuring peace by accessing expertise that the radio presenters may lack (Adam and Holguin, 2003: 8).

The cooperation with different local stakeholders was not restricted to the studio. Both Koch FM and Pamoja FM collaborated as organisations off air. Since the PEV in 2007–08, Pamoja FM has partnered with local organisations to regularly organise football tournaments for the youth in the community in order to promote harmony between different ethnicities in Kibera. To create a platform where young people from different ethnic groups can come together and play football is a simple way to allow these groups to meet under friendly conditions, and thereby strengthen a sense of a common identity and togetherness. Koch FM organised the peace event 'Linda Amani' in collaboration with the National Council of Churches of Kenya and Norwegian Church Aid. The event showcased local talent, which strengthened the sense of belonging by making people feel proud of where they came from, and therefore perhaps making it less likely for the community to be torn apart by violence. In addition, by partnering with local celebrities such as artists and organising sporting tournaments, the stations reached the most vulnerable and crucial segment of the audience: the youth. It often is this cohort that is involved in violence in connection with the elections, primarily as a result of manipulation by politicians (Adar, 2000; Njogu, 2011: xi).

Another way to minimise manipulation from politicians is to target them directly. Koch FM organised a public event where local politicians were urged to sign an agreement to maintain the peace. The event stressed that keeping peace was in everyone's interest, and used politicians as role models. Moreover, it potentially made it harder for these same politicians to mobilise the youth for violent purposes.

Preventing hate speech

Media – especially vernacular media – were accused of inflaming tensions after the disputed election in December 2007, through the use of hate speech and incitements (Abdi and Deane, 2008). Hate speech is illegal in Kenya, and is perceived as dangerous – especially during elections, as it can spark underlying ethnic tensions (iHUb research, 2013). Before the 2013 election, all media houses were sensitised about the use of hate speech and the government came out firmly stating that it would prosecute people who engaged in hate speech. As a consequence, Koch FM did a feature on hate speech in order to gain a better overview of the situation in Korogocho:

> *Rose, news journalist, Koch FM:* I did a feature concerning hate speech and that feature, what came out with that feature is that though youth are saying that hate speech is

> evident in Korogocho … To them they feel like a local citizen cannot be sued, it's only a politician that can be sued and maybe the media personalities and stuff like that.

Given that many in Korogocho seemed to be unaware of the laws regulating hate speech, Koch FM invited Millie Odongo, the Vice Chair of the National Cohesion and Integration Commission, to the studio to discuss the issue with the community live on air. Members of the community were allowed to post questions and share their experiences, and Millie Odongo made it clear that anyone could be liable and sued for hate speech. The stations have also developed strategies to minimise the risk of airing hateful messages from the audience while live on air:

> *Eric, radio presenter, Koch FM:* So when someone just calls me and talks nonsense I would remind him on air, when I was starting the show I said if you think you have a negative attitude you can keep it to yourself. So I dedicated the whole of five years to positive thinking, to positive participation.
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> *Alex, radio presenter, Pamoja FM:* You choose a topic but you narrow it down to specifically what you want to achieve … If we open wide, because we don't have delay effect machine in the studio, then you may end up now doing something which is not good for the society.

If the two strategies described above failed, the only remaining option was to cut the call, and when discussions were getting heated, the radio stations encouraged listeners to send SMS messages rather than phone in to the studio so that the presenters could select which messages were suitable to read live on air. In other words, the evidence from the data suggests community radio stations were using three different but similar strategies to minimise hate speech and hateful statements. First, they encouraged 'positive participation'; second, they chose and therefore controlled and limited the subject-matter; and finally, they regulated who and what was allowed to be expressed.

It is clear that caution was exercised, with the community's best interests in mind. At the end of the day, the community radio stations are there to serve the community (Bailey, Cammaerts and Carpentier, 2008: 7). Participation is believed to be positive, as it allows the community members to participate in discussions that concern them and that include issues of peace (Curtis, 2000). However, it is clear that in order for the participation to be perceived as useful, the discussions needed to be positive and seen to benefit the community. Negative statements that might stir up tension within the community were not accepted. Consequently, some opinions, and therefore some individuals, were not included in unity of the community, as these individuals and their opinions were perceived to be threats to unity.

Media organisations that proactively promote peace tend to downgrade stories and discussions that reveal animosity between different groups in favour of positive stories (Adam and Holguin, 2003; Brisset-Foucault, 2011). However, the fact that people feel animosity towards other ethnic groups will not disappear just because their voices are discouraged from participating. Ethnic tensions exist in Kenya based on historical injustices connected to land, power and wealth (Lafargue and Katumanga, 2008), and they are therefore the outcome of political decisions. Moreover, sometimes it is hard to distinguish between political speech and hate speech (Benesch, 2012), especially in a country where politics and ethnicity are connected so closely. It is therefore a risk that, by trying to avoid airing hate speech and negative comments, the community radio stations also end up avoiding political discussions. We might also consider, however, that since tribalism in Kenya is such a deep-rooted problem, in order for it to be solved, public discussions of the issues such as land are not enough; they have to be addressed politically. It is important to underline that the community radio stations proactively work to combat tribalism – for example, by fostering identities that transcend ethnic belonging (Gustafsson, 2012) and scrutinising politicians. A few weeks prior to the election, when tensions

were high and the situation was sensitive, their focus was to preach peace to minimise the risk of ethnic clashes.

Handling rumours

During elections, it is common for rumours and misinformation to circulate; these can intensify tensions between groups. Prior to the 2013 election, Koch FM organised regular peace forums with the local youth to obtain information about what was happening on the ground. Through these meetings, the staff were able to identify early rumours and misinformation circulating in the community. If it was clearly a mere rumour, it would be denied on air. Yet sometimes it was important to consult other people in the community to confirm the information first. If the rumours had any substance, the station involved the local police to investigate the case. Another strategy was inviting experts to the studio to address the rumour's underlying subject-matter:

> *Rose, news journalist, Koch FM:* A caller called and told us there are some politicians that are dishing out a lot of money and they are having midnight meetings where there is no press. And in those meeting there are chances that he might incite some of the youth … First we took it off air because we don't want to name the caller because it's someone from the ground, then later on we had different stakeholders and we even had some guest from Kituo Cha Sheria – it is a non-governmental organisation of lawyers – to come to talk to the people [on air] about what IEBC are saying concerning politicians and giving money and having meetings of inciting people. So just letting people know this is wrong, this is right.

It is a known fact that politicians in Kenya often pay youth not only to vote for them, but to support them during their rallies, influence other youth, intimidate opponents and, in the worst cases, act as catalysts for violence against opponents and their supporters (Adar, 2000: 105). Vote buying, which is a form of clientelism, is also common in Kenya (Kramon, 2009; Onoma, 2008). To distribute t-shirts, food and money or other gifts is a major campaign tool, especially during the last week before the election (Kramon, 2009: 3). In Kenya, the practice is referred to as *kitu kidogo*, meaning petty bribe (Adar, 2000: 105). Poor individuals are more likely to be approached by politicians and the less education a person has, the greater the risk that the bribes will influence how they vote (Kramon, 2009). It was therefore important that the community radio stations in the slums discussed these practices and condemned them, as these practices represent significant threats to democratic development.

> *George, news journalist, Pamoja FM:* In that scenario if it's in a particular village we will get that village elder or the local chief who will come on air and address that particular issue on air like through an interview, and people call in and share but we don't just like do it like as it is happening because at that time we don't spark more speculation and say 'in Laini Saba people are fighting about these issues'.

The narrative suggests that Pamoja FM was very careful when reporting on tension in the community and did not report it as news, but more as a topic to be discussed, involving both the village elder and community members. Yet some issues were too sensitive to report. Before the election in 2013, people in both Korogocho and Kibera moved due to fear of a repeat of the PEV, yet the radio stations chose not to report this since it was believed that it would increase tensions. Instead, they focused on preaching their message of peace and reminding the community that, while ordinary community members were fighting and killing each other in 2007–08, the politicians were safe and unaffected. In other words, they downplayed stories displaying tensions in favour of stories and discussions that could enhance the community spirit and sense of unity (Adam and Holguin, 2003; Brisset-Foucault, 2011; Curtis, 2000).

Conclusion

According to the radio stations, the two most important tasks during elections are civic education and discouraging tensions and violence. In that sense, the work carried out by

the community radio stations during the 2013 election did not differ much from their ordinary work – indeed, it could be argued that it simply intensified (Gustafsson, 2012). Indeed, arguably the radio stations would not have been able to carry out the work they did during both the 2007–08 unrest and the 2013 elections without continuously working in and with the community. It is their consistency in serving the community that makes them respected and accepted as the voice of their community. Prior to the 2013 general election, the radio stations' presence in the community increased, as did collaboration with other actors within the community. The cooperation has symbolic value, as it demonstrates that different groups within the community can join hands for a common cause. Adam and Holguin (2003) argue media that promote peace are more likely to succeed when they collaborate with experts in the field of peace and reconciliation.

The increased cooperation was also reflected inside the studio, as the number of guests during the election period increased. In the studio, the journalists and presenters used their position as role models within the community to discuss the importance of selecting good leaders and embracing peace, whether or not a preferred candidate won. The stations also organised and participated in different forums. Through these, the stations created an opportunity to interact with different groups, potentially reaching a wider and more varied audience. This also strengthened the interaction between the stations and the community members, allowing people who would not normally phone in to the studio to have a voice and to air their views, questions and concerns. Moreover, these forums were unique occasions for the radio stations to scan the atmosphere on the ground and be informed about increased tensions.

Participation is considered crucial to community radio, as it democratises the communication process, allowing different voices to be heard, and also strengthens a sense of community ownership (Alumuku, 2006: 39; Bailey, Cammaerts and Carpentier, 2008: 11). At both Koch FM and Pamoja FM, the majority of the volunteers come from within the local slums, and ordinary community members are able to participate both off air, as mentioned above, and on air, as the presenters encourage the community to take part in the on-air discussions by posting questions to invited guests, participating in discussions – for example on how to maintain peace – and compete in competitions by submitting peace messages and quotes.

The participation fulfilled several purposes. During the PEV, community participation was perceived to have a healing effect and played a crucial role in the reconciliation process that worked to reunite the community. Koch FM organised relief to those community members who had lost their homes by urging community members to donate food and clothes. Later, the radio stations became important arenas where the experience of this horrific event could be shared and discussed, and involved parties could apologise to each other; this helped to strengthen mutual understanding and recognition. Alumuku (2006: 39) stresses that participation can lay the foundation for collective action. When community members join with the stations to collect clothes to help the victims of the PEV, and together put pressure on local politicians to sign contracts promising to maintain peace, it is not only a symbol of togetherness but also the outcome of joint action.

As Freire's work suggests (Huesca, 2008), participation is an essential part of learning – something the community radio practitioners expressed in relation to civic education. In order for listeners to fully grasp the election process, it is not enough to just listen; rather, it is by formulating their own questions and sharing their own experience that the invited experts' knowledge becomes meaningful to them. However, participation can also be perceived as a threat. Hate speech and incitements to violence aired on radio contributed to the chaos in 2007–08 (Abdi and Deane, 2008). The community radio stations were therefore cautious in 2013, and urged listeners to only participate positively – in other words, not to share negative

statements or thoughts. The radio stations developed strategies to avoid these kinds of negative statements and when someone expressed negative thoughts live on air, the stations cut the call. This is a form of censorship, even though the decisions were taken with the communities' best interests at heart, as no one would benefit from a repeat of the PEV.

On the other hand, in the quest to minimise the spread of hateful thoughts, there is a risk that political discussions were avoided. Banning hateful messages does not equate with restricting critic and negative opinions, yet it is obvious that the community radio stations preferred positive stories and comments from the audience. Curtis (2000) argues that this is a common trait among media that advocate peace. This is further reflected by the practice of preaching peace and the verb 'preach', both of which sound fairly non-dialogic and are thus not compatible with the participatory ideal of community radio. The data collected for this research, however, demonstrates that the practice did in fact include participatory elements. More problematic is the insinuation that the concept of peace takes on a sacred aura, and therefore becomes unquestionable. Anyone or anything that might challenge this is therefore perceived as a threat, and those voices are consequently muted.

The ethnic clashes that Kenya has experienced since the introduction of multi-party politics are rooted in historical injustices over power and resources (Lafargue and Katumanga, 2008), and the risk when one puts peace above everything else is that these issues are not addressed. In other words, the community radio stations risk failing to address the real political issues of injustice for the sake of preaching peace, and consequently become 'non-political' (Brisset-Foucault, 2011), which reflects the liberal consensus model that aims to conceal conflicting interests in society and labels all challengers as enemies who should be excluded from the public debate (Mouffe, 2005).

Since its inception, community radio in the slums of Nairobi has worked consistently to create harmony within the communities and combat 'tribalism'. The difference between 2007–08 and 2013 is that in 2007–08 the stations reacted and in 2013 they worked in a more 'preventative' manner, more aware and careful due to experience. The election in 2013 was not followed by violence; however, ethnic tensions and land disputes still remain, and so does the work of the community radio stations. Reflecting on how community media can simultaneously promote peaceful coexistence and discuss the underlying problems, such as inequalities, is therefore a task to be addressed by future research as well as the community radio stations themselves.

Notes

[1]   All survey respondents were given a unique number to protect their identity, and all statements have been taken from the survey verbatim.

[2]   Vernacular radio stations target different ethnic communities by broadcasting in vernacular languages and playing music that comes from within that ethnic community to promote and strengthen that specific culture.

[3]   Unity is here referred to as community identity, the formation of a 'we' that transcends inter-ethnic animosity.

[4]   Peace-building refers to a broad range of activities and programs that aim to strengthen the prospects of peace and decrease the likelihood of violent conflict in society.

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