



Lecturer in journalism and discourse studies

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Abstract

This paper studies from a linguistic-pragmatic perspective the construction of possibly ideological meanings and journalistic choice-making in the contexts of local and foreign news reporting. In particular, it examines the discourse of hard news reports about Kenya's post-election crisis in the national newspapers *Daily Nation* and *The Standard* as compared to thematically-related reports from *The Independent* and *The Times*, *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post*. By means of a combined methodology, comprising a quantitative content analysis, a qualitative discourse analysis and ethnographic fieldwork, two frames of meaning are identified: a tribal and a socio-political frame. American and British newspapers primarily ethnicized the events, while they tended to be politicized in the Kenyan press. The differences in language use can be partly explained by contextual (political, social and pragmatic) factors. Thus the interpretive discourse-analytical results can be supported, refined or nuanced by information from ethnographic fieldwork, which also allows to take journalistic voices into account.

Keywords

Discourse analysis, pragmatics, ethnography, journalism ethics, Kenya, ethnicity, newspapers

Tribal politics, tribal press, plural contexts?

Ethnographic support to the analysis of (inter)national news discourse on Kenya's crisis

Introduction: Journalism as an ideological choice-making practice

In 1922 the American journalist Walter Lippmann compared the press to "a beam of a searchlight that moves restlessly about, bringing one episode and then another, out of darkness into vision" (1922: 364). A selective choice of events in the world, processed by journalists and interpreted from a limited number of perspectives, so that only a few aspects are illuminated, while other aspects are left in the dark, presupposes an ideological practice. When newsworthy events, such as the political and societal crisis that erupted in Kenya after the corrupted December 2007 presidential elections, are turned into news texts, different frames of interpretation arise depending on the choices made by the newswriters. In other words, the idea of "news as a representation of the world in language" implies a selective construction and the possibility of an alternative representation, yielding a totally different frame of meaning (Fowler 1991: 4). Although some journalists, driven by ideals of objectivity, would claim to have no ideology, they cannot but present a partial account of always complex realities, so that news is inevitably ideological in a broad sense (Van Ginneken 1998, Verschueren 1996).

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A superficial comparative analysis of headlines already shows that different stories are written about the same events, especially when a local, *e.g.* Kenyan, news item is picked up by foreign, *in casu* American and British, news markets. While on 3 January 2008 *The Washington Post* ran a story titled 'Tribal rage tears at diverse Kenyan city', *The Independent* focused on 'Hopes pinned on African Union head to defuse poll violence'. The headlines of the front pages of the two biggest Kenyan newspapers on the corresponding day read: 'Suspicion, mistrust as PNU and ODM dig in' in *The Standard* and 'Save our beloved country' in the *Daily Nation*. Whereas the foreign media seemed to focus on the violent and tribal aspects of the conflicts in Kenya, the local press narrowed the news down to politics and the promotion of peace, concentrating on the struggle for power between the incumbent president Mwai Kibaki, leader of the Party of National Unity (PNU), and Raila Odinga, the principal opposition candidate from the Orange Democratic Movement (ODM).

This observation will be explored by means of a mixed methods approach combining discourse analysis with information from ethnographic fieldwork. Consequently, the journalistic language use under study is not just scrutinized and criticized, as is *bon ton* in classical Critical Discourse Analysis (cf. Fairclough 1995, Ngonyani 2000, Van Dijk 1988), but the analyses are put into perspective, nuanced and refined by taking into account different contextual factors and lending voice to the news producers. The theoretical framework derives from linguistic pragmatics, as defined by Verschueren (1999) as the social, cultural, and cognitive study of language in use. The main research question is twofold: (i) What kind of discourse is produced about Kenya's post-election crisis in international as opposed to national newspapers, *i.e.* which frames of meaning are used?; (ii) How can differences in language use be explained by means of factors of the news (production) context? Additionally, I will reflect on how journalists can deal with multifactorial conflicts in plural contexts with multicultural audiences. Thus, this research is situated in a tradition of socio-linguistic approaches to journalism (*e.g.* Bell 1991, Conboy 2010, Cotter 2010, Johnson & Ensslin 2007, Mazrui 2009). Moreover, it attempts to complement content analyses of the press coverage of Kenya's crisis (*e.g.* Onyebadi & Oyedele 2011, Somerville 2009).

Corpus and context: Newspapers and politics

Description of dataset: Corpus of national and international news reports

The dataset comprises 467 news reports about the Kenyan post-election crisis culled from six quality newspapers: *The Independent* (IN) and *The Times* (TI) from the UK, the *New York Times* (NYT) and *The Washington Post* (WP) from the US, henceforth called the international newspapers or the foreign press to distinguish them from the Kenyan newspapers *The (Daily) Nation* (DN) and *The Standard* (ST). See table 1 for a division of newspaper reports and an indication of the average article length by word count.



Newspaper	IN	TI	NYT	WP	DN	ST	Total
Number of articles	41	41	42	43	157	143	467
Subtotal	167			300			
Average article length	654	565	919	712	753	666	633
Subtotal	607			709			

Table 1: General numerical overview of the corpus of newspaper reports.

For this paper only so-called factual hard news reports were sampled. Here two comments are in order. First, the choice of focus on hard news reports does not mean that other subgenres of news, such as opinion articles, commentaries, analyses or letters-to-the editor would not be interesting. On the contrary, those genres should be taken into account for a thorough understanding of the news discourse. However, it would lead me too far to include them here (*cf.* Coesemans 2012 for a comprehensive account). Second, the label of 'hard news' cannot be taken for granted. Because existing definitions were either inadequate or ambiguous, the classifications of the newspapers themselves were used to differentiate between news texts with 'hard news' being those reports published on the front page or in the 'World News' section of the international papers or on the 'National News' pages of the Kenyan papers.

Note that all of these newspapers have a diverse, indeed multicultural, readership. Reader reactions reveal that *The Washington Post*, for instance, is also read and commented upon by readers from outside of the US. In fact, when the Kenyan government issued a media ban on 31 December 2007 a lot of Kenyans turned to foreign media for information about the crisis. Moreover, census results and demographic trends show that American as well as British newspapers arguably need to cater for 'African minorities'.² Comparatively, Kenyan newspapers have to take a plurality of audiences into account, as the country hosts more than 42 ethnic groups, while these newspapers can also be read abroad thanks to various information and communication technologies.

To get a quantitative view of the data, a computer-assisted content analysis was carried out. Not only traditional tools of corpus linguistics were used, but also experiments with text mining techniques were performed (see Pollak *et al.* 2011 for details). Thematically, the quantitative content analysis on the basis of explicit vocabulary revealed that the news of the crisis falls into four categories: the political impasse, physical violence, mediation and peace. In the whole corpus 63% of the press coverage was about the political problems, 71% about violence, 31% about mediation and the search for peace was covered in 40% of the articles. Table 2 shows how much attention is paid to these four themes in the different newspapers.

² See *e.g.* recent census reports at <http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/taxonomy/index.html?nscl=People+and+Places> [22/12/2012] and <http://www.census.gov/people/> [22/12/2012] or studies, such as Coleman 2010 or Shresta & Heisler 2011.



	Political impasse	Violence	Mediation	Peace
Independent	70	82	26	29
Times	52	82	17	31
New York Times	80	88	17	44
Washington Post	72	82	21	25
Nation	63	73	35	46
Standard	60	62	36	43

Table 2: Topical overview of the major themes covered (in %).

This table shows that violence was the most prominent theme overall, but there is a marked difference between the Kenyan newspapers and the foreign press. The British and American newspapers gave more attention to violence than the local newspapers did, which focused markedly more on the topics of mediation and peace.

Socio-political context of the news events

Since interpretation relies on context (Gumperz 1982), a brief socio-political sketch of the reported events is useful. In spite of its reputation as a tourist safe haven, Kenya faces multiple problems including poverty, unemployment, drought through climate change and unequal distribution of economic and natural resources. Such problems regularly cause tensions between individuals or whole communities. At election times tensions tend to rise, because Kenyan society is easily polarized by politics. Politics is lucrative business in Kenya, where the state dominates the distribution of power and resources. Consequently, political parties are seldom based on ideology, rather on social cleavages, as numerous politicians “are not motivated by party principles or constructive policy commitments”, but instead “are more concerned with the quest for raw power, perceived as attainable by relying on the ethnic card” (Oloo 2007: 111).

In the build-up to the General Election of 27 December 2007 the Kenyan electorate was ethnically polarized. This can partly be explained by developments previous to the elections. Mwai Kibaki, who belongs to the Kikuyu ethnic group, won the elections in 2002 thanks to support of Raila Odinga, who became his main challenger in the 2007 election. When the president reneged on his promise to make him prime minister and neglected the constitutional reform process, Odinga left the government in 2005 to found the Orange Democratic Movement. Through the subsequent reshuffle the cabinet, which had already been weakened by major corruption scandals, lost its ethnic diversity. Consequently it came to be perceived as an organ of cronyism (Ogola 2009). While ODM presented itself as a coalition of minority tribes and promised an equal distribution of wealth by an ethnically-mixed, corruption-free government in a federal state, Kibaki not only personally installed five new judges to the Court of Appeal, but also appointed 19 of the 22 commissioners of the Electoral Commission of Kenya (ECK), which was interpreted as “a means through which he would use state institutions to stay in power” (Ogola 2009: 61).

Election day saw a voter turnout of 72%. Official reports describe the largely peaceful voting process as free, fair and transparent.³ Contrary to the civic and parliamentary

³ Among others, the final report of the European Union Election Observer Mission, the report of the fact-finding mission by the United Nations High Commissioner of Human Rights and the final report from the



results, which indicated that the people had opted for change by voting for novices or underdogs, irrespective of their party or ethnicity, the presidential results kept everyone waiting. As the ECK lost control of the tallying process, anxiety grew and rumours of rigging spread. Odinga seemed to be winning, but his lead suddenly vanished overnight, so that protests and conflicts broke out between party members and ECK officials. Most disputes revolved around a fraudulent augmentation of votes (see the research reports mentioned in footnote 2). Despite an incomplete vote tally, ECK chairman Samuel Kivuitu declared on Sunday 30 December 2007 that Mwai Kibaki of PNU had won the presidential election with 4,584,000 votes against Raila Odinga of ODM, who would have obtained 4,352,000 votes. Different domestic and international observer groups branded the presidential elections as deeply flawed. The election observers of the European Union concluded that these elections “leave a legacy of uncertainty as to who was actually elected as President by the Kenyan people”, resulting in “an unprecedented situation in the country characterised by deep ethnic rifts and civil unrest as well as a political stand-off” (EU EOM 2008: 37). This outcome immediately triggered mass demonstrations by opposition supporters, but also rioting by degenerated youths, looting by criminal gangs and excessive use of force by the police in response. Most outrages took place in and around the slums or settlement schemes with plural populations. This already hints at the importance of the specific locality and the socio-economic aspects of the various forms of violence during the crisis.

Eventually, it took a lot of (inter)national pressure and mediation to resolve the political stalemate and end the societal crisis. On 28 February 2008 chief mediator Kofi Annan brokered a power-sharing deal, resulting in a government of National Unity. A total of 40 ministers, equally taken from ODM and PNU, were sworn in on 17 April 2008, when president Mwai Kibaki’s cabinet finally became operative with Raila Odinga as prime minister. Up to 1,200 Kenyans died as a direct consequence of the post-election crisis and more than 300,000 were ‘internally displaced’.

Theory cum methodology: discourse analysis and ethnography

News as discourse from a linguistic-pragmatic perspective

Linguistic pragmatics can be generally defined as the study of how language is used to generate meanings and fulfill specific functions in concrete contexts (*e.g.* Cummings 2005, Huang 2007, Levinson 1983). Simply put, it is “the study of meaning in relation to the context in which a person is speaking or writing” (Paltridge 2006: 53). In this research, linguistic pragmatics is conceptualized as a way of looking at language and meaning in relation to social, cognitive and cultural aspects of the communicative context in order to gain insights into how language functions in society.

From this perspective news is regarded as discourse and discourse can be defined in terms of language use. Discourse as language use is understood as:

“a process of interactive meaning generation employing as its tool a set of production and interpretation choices from a variable and varying range of options, made in a negotiable manner, inter-adapting with communicative needs, and making full use of the reflexivity of the human mind” (Verschuere 2008: 14).



This implies that the use of language, for instance to create a newspaper article, is a kind of social practice that is interactively achieved between producer and interpreter. The interactivity also pertains to the purposiveness and direction of discourse. News discourse is always produced with an audience in mind to achieve certain effects.

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To link these theoretical points to the view of news as the result of choice-making, expressed in the introduction, journalists as well as their readers constantly make choices (consciously and unconsciously) in the recursive processes of discourse production and interpretation, which are characterized by *variability*, *negotiability* and *adaptability* (Verschueren 1999: 59-61). Variability refers to the wide range of possibilities to capture real-life events in discourse. From various options, the journalist of the article 'Tribal rage tears at diverse Kenyan city' chose to describe the events in Nairobi's slums as *tribal rage*. Possible alternatives could have been *poll violence* or *political violence*, as in the corresponding reports in IN and ST (cf. Introduction). Whether she intended to express that 'tribe' was the driving force behind the violence or that some people whose primary identification is tribal membership were enraged with each other, the meanings invoked in the article are negotiated between writer and reader. Some readers can be offended, while others will take the label of tribal rage for granted. Indeed, a reader nicknamed 'forjarigirlonly' heavily reacted: "PLEASE, STOP CALLING IT TRIBAL WAR, TRIBAL RAGE, because it is not", whereas another reader, designated as 'the stormy present', disagreed concluding that "the "frame" that this is tribal violence is not inaccurate".⁴ Meanings are neither stable nor fixed, *i.e.* neither production nor interpretation choices are made mechanically according to fixed form-function relationships. The word *tribe* does not automatically and invariably have a pejorative connotation. In fact, for many Kenyans it is part of their identity and several of my informants told me that this word is mainly used in newspapers in positive contexts (*e.g.* cultural festivities, see 5.2). Ultimately journalists adapt their language use to the (idealized) reader by rooting their writings into a presumably shared, accessible frame of interpretation.

As said in the introduction, the making of news as a discursive construction of social reality can be considered an ideological practice. Ideology is an intricate concept. In critical social theory it is often defined as meaning in the service of power (Crossley 2005, Thompson 1995). Similarly, several critical discourse analysts assume that "representations in media texts [...] function ideologically in so far as they contribute to reproducing social relations of domination and exploitation" (Fairclough 1995: 44). However, ideology is not restricted to asymmetrical power relations, it applies to all relations in the public sphere. In journalism, ideology pertains to how events in the world are entextualized and interpreted. Hence, I prefer a broad definition of ideology as "any constellation of fundamental or commonsensical, and often normative, beliefs and ideas related to some aspect(s) of (social) 'reality'" (Verschueren 1999: 238). In this research, ideology is associated with underlying patterns of meaning, frames of interpretation and worldviews. It is about journalists making sense of complex situations and offering interpretations to the readers. Note that my notion of interpretive frame or frame of meaning is close to Entman's (2010) view of news frames.

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See

http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2008/01/02/AR2008010202971_Comments.html [28/06/2010].



Ethnographically-supported discourse analysis

To study *what* meanings were constructed in the newspaper discourse and *why* certain linguistic expressions were used, a combined methodology is employed.⁵ It involves three basic actions: a quantitative study of the news content (*cf.* 2.1), a qualitative analysis of the news discourse and ethnographic fieldwork. In linguistic terms, the research focused on three levels: a lexical level of keywords, a discursive level of representational strategies and a pragmatic level of contextualization.

The discourse analysis is for the purposes of this paper restricted to an analysis of the representation of the main social actors in the news, *viz.* the political leaders Kibaki and Odinga as well as perpetrators and victims of violence. From Van Leeuwen's (2008) toolkit a set of analytical categories was selected (see figure 2).

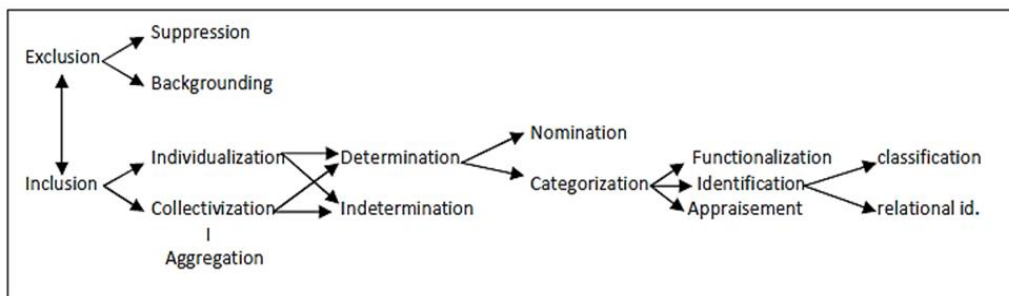


Figure 2: Analytical categories for the representation of social actors.

The representational strategies schematized in figure 2 can be explained by means of the comparable newspaper extracts (1) and (2):

Kenya is one of the most developed countries in Africa, but this election has exposed its ugly tribal underbelly. Mr. Odinga is a Luo, a big tribe in Kenya that feels marginalized from the country's Kikuyu elite that has dominated business and politics since independence in 1963. Mr. Kibaki is a Kikuyu, and the voting so far has split straight down tribal lines, with each candidate winning big in his tribal homeland. On Saturday, the first signs of a tribal war flared up in Nairobi, with Luo gangs sweeping into a shantytown called Mathare and stoning several Kikuyu residents. In Kibera, another huge slum, supporters of Mr. Odinga burnt down kiosks that they said belonged to Kikuyu businessmen.

(NYT_Riots batter Kenya as rivals declare victory_30/12/2007)

In another development, tension gripped most parts of Nairobi's Kamukunji and Embakasi constituencies as youths lit bonfires and engaged police in running battles. The skirmishes at Kayole and Makongeni started in the evening as the youths demanded an immediate release of the presidential poll results. The youths who chanted slogans in praise of ODM presidential candidate Raila Odinga, blew whistles and removed people from their houses, claiming that they were enraged by what they termed the Electoral Commission's failure to release the results.[...] Two people were killed, several others wounded and property worth millions of shillings destroyed during violent protests across the country over delay in release of presidential poll results.

⁵ A more elaborate version of the methodology and more research results can be found in Coesemans (2012).



(DN_Death and injuries as outcome anxiety takes its toll across the country_30/12/2007)

To begin with, social actors can be included or excluded. When they are *excluded*, they are either *suppressed*, which means that they are fully absent from the news text, or they are *backgrounded*, *i.e.* they are not mentioned but can be inferred from text, context or background knowledge. In (1) two of Kenya's communities are mentioned, Luo and Kikuyu, while the others are suppressed (though several of them played a role in the conflicts). The different ethnic communities are backgrounded in (2) through the deliberate avoidance of explicit references to ethnicity, but they can be inferred by most Kenyan readers from the toponyms and their world knowledge.

When the social actors are *included*, they can be represented as distinct individuals or they can be referred to as groups and this can be done in an unspecified, anonymous manner or by means of specific reference. Hence the contrasting categories of *individualization versus collectivization* and *indetermination versus determination*. In (1) Odinga and Kibaki are individualized and determinate. The *Luo gangs* or *Kikuyu businessmen* are examples of collectivizations, which are specified, thus determinate, while the *youths* or the *people* removed from their houses in (2) are indeterminate collectivizations. A special case of collectivization is *aggregation* when social actors are quantified as in *two people* in (2).

In the case of determination a further distinction can be drawn between *nomination* and *categorization*. Social actors can be represented in terms of their unique identity or in terms of identities and functions they share with others. Nomination is typically realized by proper names. Van Leeuwen (2008) distinguishes three kinds of categorization: *functionalization*, *appraisement* and *identification*. The latter is subdivided into *classification* and *relational identification*. Functionalization refers to the representation of social actors in terms of something they do, an occupation or role in society, exemplified by Odinga's representation as *ODM presidential candidate* in (2). When the social actors are represented in evaluative terms, this is called appraisement. In (1), for instance, *gangs* has a negative connotation, while *residents* has a neutral to positive connotation. Identification means that the social actors are defined by what they more or less permanently or unavoidably are. The representations of Odinga as *a Luo* and Kibaki as *a Kikuyu* are examples of (ethnic) classification. That is the representation of social actors in terms of the categories by which a society differentiates between groups of people, such as age, gender, ethnicity, and so on. Identification based on personal, kinship or work relations is termed relational identification. The phrase *supporters of Mr. Odinga* in (1) is an example. It is clear that the same linguistic expression can have different representational functions.

Such qualitative analyses do not suffice to understand the news discourse. In order to investigate why different representational strategies were used, an ethnographic component was incorporated into the research. Here ethnography is not understood as "the scientific description of nations or races of men, with their customs, habits, and points of difference" (*Oxford English Dictionary*), rather:

"Ethnography means recording the life of a particular group and thus entails sustained participation and observation in their milieu, community, or social world. It means more than participant observation alone because an ethnographic study covers the round of life occurring within the given milieu(x) and often includes supplementary



data from documents, diagrams, maps, photographs, and, occasionally, formal interviews and questionnaires” (Charmaz 2006: 21).

In my view, ethnography is not just participant observation, but also conversation and rich information gathering via all kinds of documents from the field (*cf.* Knoblauch’s 2005 notion of ‘focused ethnography’). Furthermore, ethnography “is not a method of writing in which the observer assumes *one* perspective – whether ‘distant’ or ‘near’ – but a style in which the researcher establishes a dialogue between different viewpoints and voices” (Duranti 1997: 87). That is why ethnographic information can be used to triangulate analytical results.

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In the context of journalism studies Philo (2007) rightly remarked that purely text-based analyses cannot fully explain the content of news nor journalists’ discursive practice. Ethnographic fieldwork is useful for discourse analysis, because “[e]thnography sets out to learn meaning and contexts which lie outside the concepts and habits of prior experience, to construct and test representations of new knowledge” (Agar 1995: 583). My ethnographic work consisted of visits to editorial offices, observations at newsrooms, the collection and study of policy documents or editorial guidelines, and interviews with Kenyan journalists as well as foreign correspondents based in Nairobi. This information was used to gain an insight into the contexts of news production, to include newswriters’ perspectives and so to support, refine or reject certain discourse-analytical interpretations.

Analyses and discussion: Representation, meaning and contextual factors

Representation of social actors and frames of meaning

There is a striking difference in how the crisis and the violence is covered in the international as opposed to the national press. Both the American/British and the Kenyan newspapers frame the crisis alternately as a (post-)election crisis, a political crisis or a humanitarian crisis. However, the foreign press usually links these framings to a framing of Kenya’s crisis as a crisis of social integration and communal coexistence, *i.e.* “a crisis that has pitted ethnic groups against one another” (NYT_Kenyan opposition calls for new rally and sanctions_12/01/2008) in a country where the people “transformed so quickly from ethnically integrated neighbors into tribal warriors” (WP_Tribal rage tears at diverse Kenyan city_03/01/2008), or as a crisis that could “spread into a larger ethnic conflict between Luo, who generally support Mr Odinga, and the Kikuyu tribe of Mr Kibaki” (TI_135 dead in election bloodbath_01/01/2008). The American and British newspapers wrote substantially more about *ethnic fighting*, *tribal war* or even *genocide*, as compared to the Kenyan press which spoke of *poll-related violence*, *political violence* or used euphemistic labels, such as *skirmishes* or *protests*.

That different frames of interpretation are employed also follows from the analysis of the representation of the main social actors. The two politicians, Kibaki and Odinga, share nomination and individualization as basic representation. But their representation differs when it comes to functionalization and classification. In the Kenyan press, both politicians are frequently functionalized by means of their current political occupation (*e.g.* Odinga as ODM presidential candidate, ODM leader or Prime Minister designate; Kibaki as incumbent president, PNU candidate or head of state). They are never explicitly classified by means of their ethnicity. See examples (3) and (4):



ODM Presidential candidate Mr Raila Odinga called a press conference on Sunday morning demanding the ECK to conduct a national audit and recount of the votes. Raila said the process of releasing results so far was a “fraud” and ECK had “doctored the results” in favour of incumbent president and Party of National Unity candidate, Mwai Kibaki.
(ST_Raila calls for vote recount_31/12/2007)

Others on hand to receive the Head of State were Vice-President Kalonzo Musyoka and ODM leader and Prime Minister designate Raila Odinga.
(DN_Leaders unite as they usher in 10th House_07/03/2008)

In contrast, the American and British newspapers tend to introduce Kibaki and Odinga by reference to their ethnicity. Compare examples (3) and (4) to (5) and (6):

The contest pits the incumbent, Mwai Kibaki, a man who has a reputation as a courtly gentleman and economics whiz but also as a tribal politician, against Raila Odinga, a rich, flamboyant businessman who rides around in a bright red \$100,000 Hummer and is running as a champion of the poor.
(NYT_Kenyans Vote in Test of Democracy_28/12/2007)

In the capital, ethnic tensions flared in some areas. In the sprawling warren of tin shacks and dirt paths called Kibera, an Odinga stronghold, a cluster of young men from Kibaki's ethnic group, the Kikuyu, guarded a road with machetes. The men demanded to see the national identity cards of those passing, searching each one for names from Odinga's ethnic group, the Luo, according to witnesses.
(WP_Delays in Kenya's vote count touch off unrest nationwide_30/12/2007)

In the international press ethnic classification is the most common representational strategy. When the political actors are functionalized, they are represented by means of past or other-than-political occupations (*e.g.* economics whiz referring to Kibaki's studies and previous posts as Minister of Finance; or businessman for Odinga).

Obviously, the international press mentions the politicians' ethnicity, since politics in Kenya is often an ethnic affair and most American or British readers do not know (nor can they infer) ethnic affiliation. However, it becomes problematic when ethnic classifications of Kibaki and Odinga are automatically projected to their supporters and by extension to the victims and perpetrators of violence. In that case a limited tribal frame is created and different pockets of violence with multiple factors are lumped together. Then unwarranted simplification or generalization comes about. Extracts (7) and (8) are exemplary:

With the president, Mwai Kibaki, a Kikuyu and Mr. Odinga, a Luo, the election seems to have tapped into an atavistic vein of tribal tension that always lay beneath the surface in Kenya but until now had not provoked widespread mayhem.
(NYT_Disputed vote plunges Kenya into bloodshed_31/12/2007)

Kenya edged closer to tribal warfare last night [...]. More than 200 people, mainly Kikuyus, the same tribe as President Mwai Kibaki, were sheltering for safety in the Kenya Assemblies of God church five miles outside Eldoret in the Rift Valley. An armed gang of young men drawn from the Kalenjin, Luhya and Luo tribes which backed the beaten presidential candidate Raila Odinga stormed the church compound yesterday morning and set it alight.



(IN_80 children massacred in Kenyan church_02/01/2008)

Even in conflicts, as described in (8) where ethnic aspects clearly played a role, the Kenyan press avoided references to ethnicity. They did not specify victims or perpetrators of violence, but used strategies of aggregation (e.g. 35 people) or indeterminate collectivization (e.g. women and children, more than 200 youths). See (9):

At least 35 people, most of them women and children, died yesterday in Eldoret in the most bizarre killing yet in the ongoing post-election violence. They were killed when more than 200 youths burnt down a church where residents of two villages in Eldoret South constituency had sought refuge.
(DN_Raid on church leaves 35 dead as chaos spreads_02/01/2008)

Instead of focusing on the ethnic aspects of the violence, the Kenyan newspapers frequently pointed to other underlying factors, such as unemployment, poverty, economic competition or land issues as in (10):

Many North Rift residents say the protests against the presidential results were just a cover up as the key underlying factor was the land issue.
(DN_The land factor in violence that has rocked North Rift_05/01/2008)

Thus, two general frames of meaning can be distinguished: an ethnic frame in the international media and a socio-political frame in the local press.

Journalistic voices and contextual explanations

With respect to the above frames of meaning it is important to note that they are dynamic and that they are dominant, though not exclusive. That means that the Kenyan media also occasionally wrote about ethnic conflicts, while some foreign press reports touch upon socio-economic factors of Kenya's crisis. Gradually, when the events unfolded and journalists learned more, they came loose from their default descriptions and started to illuminate different perspectives.

One final question with an ethical flavour remains: Why did foreign correspondents often focus on tribalism, while the Kenyan reporters shied away from explicit references to ethnicity? That is, how can the discovered differences of language use be accounted for? Ethnographic fieldwork, and in particular conversations with the news producers, offer a few partial explanations. Three explanations will be concisely rendered here: political, social-moral, and pragmatic.

A first contextual factor concerns the editorial policy. The Kenyan media are cautious with ethnic labels. The *Nation Stylebook*, for instance, stipulates: "Do not describe a person's race, tribe or ethnicity unless it is relevant to the story". However, the same general guideline holds for the international newspapers. *New York Times* standards editor Corbett says that journalists can "mention race or ethnicity if and only if it's pertinent to the story". Yet, in volatile times of elections, the Kenyan media are stricter. As *The Nation's* chief news editor Shimoli told me the policy was not to write about tribes in contexts of conflict and politics.⁶ Nevertheless, Kenyan journalists did clearly locate the conflicts, so that people could infer. As *The Standard's* chief news editor Agina confirmed, "if you say a certain region, it's automatic to Kenyans to know that those guys who live in that area are such and such".⁷ Such inferences

⁶ Personal interview on 6 May 2011.

⁷ Personal interview on 22 November 2008.



cannot be expected from readers in the UK or the US, so that the foreign correspondents had to be more explicit on that matter. Another political factor is governmental politics. When the Kenyan government imposed a ban on the media to cover events that might destabilize the nation, a lot of Kenyan journalists applied self-censorship. The foreign correspondents were less politically restricted.

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This brings us to the next contextual factor. Most Kenyan journalists that I interviewed agreed that they could not openly write about ethnic aspects in fear of inflaming tensions elsewhere in the country. Instead, they often opted for a kind of peace journalism. Mugonyi, a political reporter at *The Nation*, put it this way:⁸

“We try as much as possible not to say this tribe is killing that tribe for the simple reason that...when, for example, you write a story and say Luos yesterday killed 100 Kikuyus, we believe that Kikuyus in different parts of the country, who read this story tomorrow will retaliate and maybe they will want to kill 100 Luos. So we will not be helping the public, we will not be helping solving the problem and that is why we try to be careful, just say maybe 100 people were killed in this place”.

This was also the ethical line of *The Standard*. Political reporter Ndegwa confirmed that it was a rule during the post-election crisis to avoid tribal tags.⁹ The foreign correspondents too felt they had a social responsibility. As *Times* correspondent Clayton explained they had the responsibility to be blatant and revelatory, adding that “it would have been a case of allowing an external politically correct western agenda to influence the reporting of facts on the ground, simply because it is not palatable to hear certain facts”.¹⁰ Most foreign correspondents stressed that they could not but interpret the events as “a cut and dry tribal conflict”, as *New York Times* correspondent Gettleman put it.¹¹ But then a lot of other meaningful aspects of the events are lost.

Several foreign correspondents realize this, yet keep using ethnic vocabulary for pragmatic reasons. Freelance journalist Tristan McConnell clarified:

“The more time you spend here the more difficult it is to ignore the organising role that tribe plays. To ignore it is to do a disservice to your reader. Now, where the problems comes up is: Call it what you like ethnic group bla bla bla, it's tribe we're talking about and the problem is that as soon as you use that word all other nuances are thrown out of the window. So, tribe is one organising principle in society and in the conflicts that arise around here. But it's only one, one of a number of different organising principles that are at play. Others are social status, religion, poverty and the wealth gap.”

McConnell admits that the use of ethnic labels downplays other important aspects, but he adds that *tribe* and its derivatives are useful journalistic words, because they attract the attention of the reader, they allow journalists to capture complex events in just a few words and are readily available in people's frame of reference about conflict in Africa.

⁸ Personal interview on 20 November 2008.

⁹ Personal interview on 18 May 2011.

¹⁰ Personal correspondence in February 2012.

¹¹ Personal interview on 20 May 2011.



Conclusion

Now the debate is open. The ethical question of how journalists should deal with conflicts in plural contexts and multi-ethnic societies with multicultural global audiences deserves critical reflection. In this paper international and national news discourse about Kenya's post-election crisis was analyzed from a linguistic-pragmatic perspective, using a mixed methodology of quantitative content analysis, qualitative discourse analysis and ethnographic fieldwork. News was theorized as a discursive choice-making practice with ideological aspects, as journalists have the power to influence how readers understand events in the world. Two frames of meaning were identified: an ethnic frame in the American and British press; and a socio-political frame in the Kenyan coverage. The discursive differences could be partly explained by contextual factors and insights from the newsrooms. Both the Kenyan journalists and the foreign correspondents that were interviewed offered legitimate reasons for the language they used. The Kenyan newspapers contained few references to ethnicity because of policy, political context and because the newsmakers believed that they would inflame tensions. Foreign correspondents made frequent use of ethnic language, because they deemed it relevant for their audiences and acknowledged the explanatory force of such terms both from a journalistic and reader perspective, although they often only saw what was happening at the surface level. Both local and foreign journalists struggled with ethical issues to uphold social responsibility.

My stance is that *The Independent* and *The Times*, the *New York Times* and *The Washington Post* rightly reported on the ethnic aspects of certain conflicts, although they sometimes fell into the trap of generalization and simplification, lumping together a series of different, multifactorial conflicts, ignoring social, economic and historical factors. *The Nation* and *The Standard* clearly addressed these factors, but they could have been more explicit about certain ethnic issues, because they did not help healing the society by sweeping this factor under the carpet. Instead of leaving the ethnic aspect implicit, the Kenyan press could have stimulated open debate about all of the ills (ethnic, social, political, economic, ...) that were plaguing the country. To end, the research here reported is part of a larger project (see Coesemans 2012). This small-scale paper did not go into the previous history of the coverage and the events, economic explanations of the news discourse or personal (sometimes traumatic) experiences of the journalists, and many other things. So, there is still a lot to investigate and report on.

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