

## Chapter 34

# Using Media to Resolve Media Engendered Ethnic Conflicts in Multiracial Societies: The Case of Somalis of Kenyan Origin

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### ABSTRACT

*Due to varied reasons, all nations host people of diverse cultural backgrounds. Kenya, a nation of 40 million people with over 40 tribes, is not exempt. Further, Kenya, like any other nation, suffers ethnic conflicts. The most pronounced ethnic conflicts have been the 2007-2008 Post Election Violence and the 1990s land clashes. These clashes were visible to the local and international community because people were killed, displaced and properties destroyed. However, there is a covert ethnic conflict in Kenya. This is the subtle plight of the Somalis of Kenya origin who find themselves in constant conflict with the “other” Kenyans. Based on 2014 research findings, this chapter exposes the ethnic conflicts Somalis of Kenyan origin endure. From the findings, it is apparent that the ethnic plights of Somalis of Kenyan origin are media engendered and can, to a great extent, be resolved by media.*

### INTRODUCTION

There is not one nation that is of just one race. The reasons for the multiracial existence are numerous. These include, but not limited to, historical or colonialism factors, migrations, slave trade, intermarriages, academic and job opportunities. Kenya, a nation of 40 million people is not exempt. In addition to the over 40 tribes, Kenya also hosts people of different races due to the diverse reasons already mentioned. Further, Kenya, like any other nation, suffers ethnic conflicts. The most pronounced ethnic conflicts have been the 2007-2008 Post Election Violence (cf. Gifford, 2009); the subtle 2013 Post Election Violence (Lando, 2014), and the land clashes between the Kikuyus and Kalenjins: in Meteitei farm (1991), and

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in Ainabkoi; Burnt Forest in the years 1992, 1994 and 2007 (Gifford, 2009). These clashes were visible to the local and international community because in all the instances, people were killed or displaced and properties destroyed.

However, there is a covert ethnic and/or racial conflict that seems generated and perpetuated by the media. This is the subtle plight of the Somalis of Kenya. Somali (the tribe) or Somalis (the people of Somali tribe), are Kenyans by birth. The media mostly refers to them as Somalis of Kenyan origin. These people – Somalis of Kenyan origin – have had constant conflict with the “other” Kenyans. The problems range from police harassment, discrimination, fear of the Somalis, fear of Muslims (most Somalis are Muslims or associated with Islam), extortion, home invasions, physical violence, hate speech, segregation and suspicion that they are either accomplices or sympathizers of terrorist groups. On the other hand, and as a result of such reporting, the Somalis of Kenyan origin perceive themselves as lesser Kenyans and not part of the rest of the Kenyans. The focus of this paper is on the fact that the media play a pivotal role in engendering and escalating the conflict between Kenyans and Somalis of Kenyan origin. This is because, whereas Kenya has a number of similar tribes in other parts of the African countries – such as the Luos of Kenya and Luos of Uganda and Tanzania, the Maasais of Kenya and Maasais of Tanzania, the Bukusus of Kenya and Bukusus of Uganda, the Teso of Kenya and Teso of Uganda... and the Somalis of Kenya and Somalis of Somalia, the media, while covering local, national and international news, never refer to the rest of the tribes as, for example, the Luos of Kenya or the Teso of Kenya or the Masaai of Kenya but only to Somalis of Kenyan origin. If they are Somalis of Kenyan origin, why refer to them as such? Are they not simply Kenyans? Can a Somali of Kenyan origin be simply, a Kenyan? And why not refer to the rest of the tribes as this or that tribe of Kenyan origin. The same argument applies to people of other races. For example, Kenya has Indians, British, Americans or even Canadians of Kenyan origin, but they are not referred to as such, except the Somalis.

This chapter therefore argues that the tension between the Kenyans and Somalis of Kenyan origin is media engendered, and that the same media can be used to resolve the conflict by desisting from framing or labeling races or tribes in distinctively negative forms. Using survey findings of a research conducted in 2014-2015, this chapter examines how the Kenyan and international media present Somalis of Kenyan origin living in Kenya and how the same has generated and heightened the ethnic conflict between the Somalis of Kenyan origin and the rest of Kenyans. Through convenience sampling, the study conducted a survey to establish the effect of media’s approach to consistent reporting on Somalis of Kenyan origin. The chapter argues for objective and non-labeling reporting about the Somalis of Kenyan origin as a step towards resolving the media generated ethnic conflict between the Somalis of Kenyan origin and the rest of the Kenyans. There are instances, for example drawing from the Rwandan 1994 genocide and post genocide healing, where media have played both roles of creating and resolving ethnic tension. And in Kenya, the media diffused the 2013 Post Election tension by choosing to preach peace, encouraging Kenyans to unite, and calling on everyone not to take laws into their hands but to go to court if they felt aggrieved. This was contrary to the allegations that media played a role in fuelling the 2007-2008 Post Election Violence by the manner of their reporting (cf. Lando, 2014; Lando & Mwangi, 2014). Thus, this chapter supposes that if Kenyan and international media apply what has effectively worked in the past, such as utilizing media for the construction of ethnic cohesiveness and conflict resolution, then the subtle ethnic conflict between Kenyans and Somalis of Kenyan origin can be minimized.

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