

SMS Africa – Kenya – August 2015_1

This report highlights three topics that were widely shared on social media. Other than the question of what qualifies as ‘security’, I wonder whether I should continue to only focus on ‘trending’ topics or also capture individual alerts that I happen to come across. For instance the following tweet by @Steveowino9 appeared on my feed on August 13th, 2015:

“@kot crime is getting worse in Dandora. Polisi ni corrupt (Police are corrupt). #eacc (Ethics and Anti-Corruption Commission) wakuotea walk”.

Another example from *Facebook*—Nicholas Kagia’s posted on 9 August 2015:

Beware there is a car around South C Reg. KBW 610W, a black Prado 2006/7 model robbing people at gunpoint. If you see this vehicle don’t stop. Please circulate.

Should I include one-off posts that do not generate discourse around them?

The Global Entrepreneurship Summit

President Barrack Obama was in town from the 24th – 26th of July as co-host the annual *Global Entrepreneurship Summit*. Much of the social media discussion around this event was light-hearted. It centred on the preparations for the visit (#Obamacare) including the security apparatus that was being put in place. That is, until the brouhaha sparked by *CNN*’s reportage on the visit. In their coverage, *CNN* referred to Kenya as a “terror hotbed”, both in the television broadcast and online. The comments associated with the subsequent *Twitter* hashtag #SomeoneTellCNN provided insight into Kenyans’ sensitivity about the security narrative as generated by external news agencies. The KOT, who are often strongly critical of the government on the subject of security, strongly objected to an external party characterising the country as a “terror hotbed”. In this instance, they referred to themselves as KOTDF, Kenyans on Twitter Defence Force. The prevailing sentiment was that Kenya has been a victim and survivor of terrorist attacks, not a perpetrator, nor did they feel that the normal state of affairs had degenerated to “hotbed of terror” of status. This article offers a summary of events and sentiments: <http://mg.co.za/article/2015-07-30-kenyans-let-their-fingers-do-the-talking>

In the aftermath, the Kenya Tourism Board cancelled an advertising deal with *CNN*. They noted the irrationality in promoting Kenya as a tourist destination during the commercial

breaks while the news broadcast did the exact opposite. The arrival of Tony Maddox, Global Executive Vice President and Managing Director of *CNN International*, from Atlanta on 13th August, 2015 suggests that the cancelled contract was lucrative. He met with President Uhuru Kenyatta at State House and stated that he had come to apologise in person. The ensuing digital gloating under #UhuruTellsCNN demonstrated that the KOT has been emboldened and not made humble by what they read as a clear victory.

Arrest Pastor Ng'ang'a

On July 26th, Mercy Njeri was killed in a car accident on the Naivasha-Nairobi road. A Simon Kuria was charged with careless driving, even as eye witnesses reported to the media that they had identified a Pastor Ng'ang'a as the driver. The alleged conspiracy to keep Pastor Ng'ang'a out of jail was investigated by the mainstream media. The revelations were discussed on social media where a concerted campaign #ArrestPastorNganga gained and maintained traction. One never knows what will get and keep the attention of the twitterati. Corruption is a popular topic in general, though it does not often lead to this kind of campaign. Perhaps this was one case in which the evidence seemed clear, there were no political constituency and the KOT felt empowered to exert influence. Also, perhaps the idea of a corrupt pastor was difficult to stomach. The KOT kept up the pressure on the Inspector General of Police to indict Pastor Ng'ang'a, alleging police corruption and general underhanded dealings. There was no let up and the delay led to accusations that the IG had been bought off by the pastor:

“@JBoinett Kenyans will never forgive you for going to bed with the ‘devil’ – Ng'ang'a
#ArrestPastorNganga”

Pastor Ng'ang'a was eventually called in to make a statement and was charged with reckless driving. Three traffic policemen are also, allegedly, facing corruption charges.

Mollis

An audio recording of a disturbing sexual encounter began to make the rounds on *Whatsapp* in the first week of August. It became quite popular and generated ‘Mollis’ memes which were shared and discussed on social media. Mollis refers to the mispronunciation of ‘Morris’, which is the name of the individual with whom the woman on the audio can be heard pleading. In the memes, he is cast as one with prowess and stamina. Take for instance, referring to him as “Chuck Mollis”. Most of the commenters were amused—the lady speaks in broken English, which is often a source of amusement.

Another segment of social media users was horrified by what they interpreted as sexual assault and began to scold the jokers. The result was a social media battle between the two groups. The flippant crowd did not appreciate being made to feel ‘guilty’ by the other group.

Kevonce: “You don’t even need to listen to the Mollis audio clip twice to know its rape. But tell that to retweet fingers, you will be buried alive”.

I noted that this divide tended to follow both a class and a gender rift. The #EndRapeCulture hashtag that emerged in response to the hijinks was representative of a group that was aware of a discourse which has primarily taken place in North America. While those who seemed perplexed by the notion that the Mollis audio clip was ‘wrong’ did not seem to have engaged with this discourse. Further, by and large the #EndRapeCulture comments were often written in outraged English while those defending their amusement often retorted in sheng or Swahili.