

SMS Africa – Kenya – November 2015_1

Corruption and economic crimes continue to be the main topic of discussion on and offline. A domino effect of revelations continue to come to light. Previous reports have made direct links between corrupt practices and impacts on security. For instance, associations between the porosity of the border with Somalia and bribery of border security.

Imagine working in Mandera with a Net pay of 7k. That's [sic] why our cops along the border are bribed easily by Alshabaab (Moderncorps, 2015)

Stories also abound about police who are criminals by night or who rent out their weapons to robbers. Apart from these obvious links, I have wondered about the extent to which the view that the country is inherently corrupt and that the judicial process is broken, engenders a nihilistic sense that anything goes and translates into an increase in criminality at all levels. The question is how one would go about developing a methodology that can draw legitimate correlations and conclusions around that notion. I can report that there is a general palpable sense of despair and outrage about the levels of corruption (see Jeffrey Gettleman's take on local sentiments: http://www.nytimes.com/2015/11/05/world/africa/kenya-government-corruption.html?_r=0) and that there are those in the establishment who do believe that this discontent can threaten the ability to govern.

Actors on social media do place economic mismanagement and physical crimes as part of a gamut of related problems that ail the society, filed under: lawlessness. Aleya Kassam shares her personal experiences and feelings in a series of tweets:

2 family members in last 2 months robbed in same way. Seems to be a trend. Both were forced off the road (1. Ngong rd 2. Thika rd) & taken (Aleyakassam, 2015)

Into appartments (sic) by the thugs. Beaten up severely. And forced to transfer money via mpesa up to 150k before they are let go (Aleyakassam, 2015)

Son two months ago on ngong road and father today on thika road. Seems to be a thing. (Aleyakassam, 2015)

Kenya. I'm fucking tired. (Aleyakassam, 2015)

I'm tired. I'm tired of being scared. Of feeling helpless at my tax money being stolen. Of hearing people's life savings gone in bank fraud. (Aleyakassam, 2015)

The Case of the Ministry of the Interior: Informant/Leak versus Government Proxy

The next ministry to receive scrutiny for opaque spending practices was the Ministry of the Interior. In a *Daily Nation* article dated November 4, 2015 John Ngirachu listed companies

that together received a total of Ksh. 3.8 billion for a variety of goods and services procured by the Ministry. *The Star*, which is quickly developing a reputation for good journalism, also carried the story. The fact that all the payments were made “on one day”, June 30, 2015 was reported in a manner that suggested that this was sinister. Although, the date is after all, the end of the month and the end of the fiscal year when books tend to be reconciled. What is interesting is that since the articles seemed to make a big deal of this fact, it became the refrain on social media as well. The articles indicated that the Auditor General was the one raising the questions and did so in a meeting between the MoI and the Public Accounts Committee (PAC), which for many Kenyans was enough proof that something unscrupulous was going on.

#Waiguru was right! Serious corruption elsewhere! CS Nkaisery spent Sh3.8 billion in one day! #SomeoneTellChumo (COFEK, 2015)

Cabinet Secretary Nkaisery was not amused, he called for a press conference and summarised his thoughts in a press release in which he indicated that he considered the article a security breach, since the information must have been obtained from a closed-door meeting (InteriorKE^a, 2015). Furthermore, it was irresponsible and did not take into account the public good. In his opinion, it fostered unhealthy feelings of mistrust towards government and specifically towards the security administration (InteriorKE^a, 2015). Nkaisery demanded that the journalist reveal his source (InteriorKE^a, 2015). When Ngirachu failed comply, he was arrested. This prompted the #FreeNgirachu *Twitter* movement, whose proponents saw the issue within the context of a campaign for press freedom. Opponents supported Nkaisery’s outlook that it was a contravention of security protocols.

If you had any doubts that the Jubilee govt = KANU, now you know. Repression of Free Media + Massive Corruption + Impunity #FreeNgirachu (Waithash, 2015)

#FreeNgirachu freedom of the media is freedom of a nation. #FreeNgirachu (Sarahkimani, 2015)

@sarahkimani @wfayzah spreading propaganda is incitement. #chargetheguy (Xerxesseer, 2015)

With respect to the initial musings at the start of this report; Nkaisery seems convinced that the perception of anarchy, real or imagined, can precipitate real threats to stability (InteriorKE^b, 2015). In a later press release after Ngirachu’s arrest, the Cabinet Secretary went as far as to allege a deliberate and systematic plot to destabilise the government through a campaign to diminish public confidence. According to him, these ongoing allegations of graft, greed and general incompetence within the halls of government were political ploys

and machinations (InteriorKE^b, 2015). The response of the Kenyan twittersphere was one of incredulity:

Ngirachu's arrest "symptomatic of a regime lashing out at imagined enemies when under scrutiny for its own failings" (Ahmedkadar1, 2015)

#Nkaisserry of @InteriorKE accuses anyone highlighting corruption in Kenya of economic sabotage and even treason! (Mentalacrobatic, 2015)

Its (sic) is now a crime to question on Corruption. There is a group of detectives already monitoring what you say. #KOT Beware (Moderncorps, 2015)

Moderncorps often seems well informed, so if he believes that detectives are monitoring the KOT I am inclined to not dismiss it out of hand. Earlier in the month, the avid sharer of information sent out some tangential tweets that are perhaps linked to the monitoring allegation (?):

Poachers of men want to kill me coz of revealing the truth. The good thing is that I'm not afraid to die but afraid to live until death (Moderncorps, 2015)

The same guys hav (sic) been fighting for their rights want to eliminate me. Somebody just tell I'm not afraid to die bt (sic) afraid to live until death (Moderncorps, 2015)

After making his statement to the CID, which apparently did not reveal his source, Ngirachu was released.

Police have dropped probe against journalists John Ngirachu, Shiundu & James Ambaka who had exposed illegal spending in Interior Ministry (Moderncorps, 2015)

The next day the *Nation* newspaper detailed a three hour interrogation (or recording of a statement, depending on who you ask). #KOT viewed this as one of their victories. In my opinion the real promise would lie in knowing that due process had prevailed—it would mean that we have not, despite fears to the contrary, returned to the Moi era. This seems to be completely dismissed in favour of a narrative around the power of public pressure, which is good, but for me just institutions that withstand any kind of pressure would be better. It also implies that the Media Bill and/or Security Bill either do not have the kind of teeth that Nkaissery could have relied on or that yes, the voice of the public did rule the day. (I think there is more to the story; I will try to find out from Denis).

Now that the general sentiment on social media was that Team Nkaissery had capitulated, I wonder whether or not this matters to the Interior Ministry and affects how it conducts itself. Local and world events do have me ruminating over the value and the effect of waging imaging/propaganda wars in this internet age. And, how institutions (should) act now that the

court of public opinion is both instantly reactive and easily distracted. If Nkaissery is right and public sentiment can be (mis)managed is the answer more transparency or more PR? The following tweet indicates that there are those who do feel the need to not to have their images tarnished:

Detectives claim they didnt (sic) arrest Ngirachu for exposing corruption but for airing a confidential National security info. #FreeJohnNgirachu (Moderncorps, 2015)

The Case of KDF: Legitimised Informant versus “Neutral”, Heroic Institution

Next in line for scrutiny was the KDF. However, this story played out quite differently. The accusation was that (members of) the KDF was involved in charcoal and sugar smuggling in Somalia. These products are known to be sources of revenue for the Al Shabaab. This time the press release and communiques from the KDF, which expressed hurt and indignation were well received as evidenced by the hashtag #IStandWithKDF.

What will Nkaissery¹ say about KDF taxing makaa [charcoal] and sugar with Al Shabaab Bigger scandal than NYS² @kwamchetsi @WanjikuRevolt @gathara @EAukot (Gabrieldolan, 2015)

Official statement from KDF HQs. #IStandWithKDF (Voodoo Monk1, 2015)

#KDF We left behind wives, children, relatives & friends [sic] because we love our Kenya #IStandWithKDF (CTNSIS, 2015)

Individuals within KDF may be but to accuse the force of institutionalised corruption & doing business with the enemy is 2 be irresponsible (Wehliyemohamed, 2015)

Heartbreaking to see someone condemn Kdf when our soldiers are sacrificing all their all in #somalia to keep 254³ safe #IStandWithKDF (Pehjay2, 2015)

Those spreading propaganda about #KDF should think of the sacrifices those sons, husbands, uncles and Dads are doing to us WTF #IStandWithKDF (GroundhawkKE, 2015)

The allegations stemmed from a report by an outfit known as *Journalists for Justice in Somalia*, not a mystery informant but an NGO. Yet here was Moderncorps with

¹ Considering that there is a Ministry of Defence, it is odd that the Ministry of the Interior is most associated with defence in many people's minds

² The NYS (National Youth Service) scandal is associated with Ministry of Devolution and Planning and its Cabinet Secretary, Anne Waiguo

³ Kenya telephone country code

counterevidence in defence of the KDF and no suspicions about the source as being complicit in the smuggling:

Jubaland President denies reports that KDF are involved in charcoal & sugar smuggling; says KDF doing sterling job and was unfairly accused (Moderncorps, 2015).

Nkaissery et al. must have looked at each other and wondered what it took to nurture and maintain such good will amongst the populace. Perhaps the KDF is seen as a neutral actor that does not embody the political partisanship that is ascribed to ministries and other government organs. Although, in the main, the anti-corruption frenzy seems to have been whipped up across the political divide. Non-partisan status still does not quite explain why the KDF are seen as trustworthy, as it is possible for them to be unaffiliated and yet corrupt. It could be that the view of them as heroes cannot coexist with the notion of corruption in many people's minds. Well, these musings are starting to feel as though they are crossing into the realm of pop-psychology so I shall cease my speculation.

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