

Dialogue with MRC, MRCIC advises Government

Armed groups are
watching your
action, commi-
tells State

WAMBINGU

what
Integration
advised
with
Council



Reporting Conflict: The Media Coverage of the Mombasa Republican Council

May 2012

Monitoring Report

Published by:

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Acknowledgements

The Media Council of Kenya (MCK) wishes to thank all those, who contributed to this report.

We particularly want to thank Joe Kadhi, Journalism Lecturer at the United States International University, Nairobi, for his in-depth analysis of the print media coverage of the MRC phenomenon.

We also want to acknowledge the work of the MCK monitoring team:

Immaculate Mwendu

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We finally want to thank Isabel Rodde, Technical Adviser GIZ and the German Development Cooperation GIZ / Civil Peace Service / German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development for the supervision and support of this project.

Preface

The Mombasa Republican Council has been one of the highly controversial topics in Kenyan politics in the last few months.

The Media Council of Kenya has been monitoring the coverage of this topic by Kenyan media houses and has also been conducting several training workshops to improve knowledge and skills of journalists while reporting on this sensitive issue. This publication summarizes the findings of the media monitoring activities related to the Mombasa Republican Council. Two monitoring reports analyze the print and radio coverage of the MRC in May 2012, whereas the article by veteran journalist Joe Kadhi provides long-term-observations of the Kenyan reporting on conflict-ridden issues such as the MRC.

By sharing these observations with journalists and the interested public, the Media Council of Kenya wants to encourage a joint debate in order to improve the quality standards of Kenyan journalism.

Mwangi Haron

Chief Executive Officer
Media Council of Kenya

1. Monitoring Report

The MRC-Coverage by Kenyan Newspapers

1.1. Introduction

From May 1 to May 31, 2012, the Media Council of Kenya monitored the coverage of the Mombasa Republican Council (MRC) by Kenyan daily newspapers in order to assess the quality of reporting on this sensitive issue. All articles in the *Daily Nation*, *The Standard*, *The Star* and *The People* which mentioned “Mombasa Republican Council” or “MRC” were analyzed.

The MRC is a group in Kenya’s coast province, which is demanding for secession and mobilizing coastal people to boycott the upcoming general elections. According to police reports the group is recruiting children and engaging in military training¹. Formed in the 1990s, the MRC was dormant until 2008, when it called for the establishment of an independent state. Due to these secessionist demands, the government declared it illegal in 2010, along with 33 other “organised criminal groups”. The MRC has since challenged the ban in court.

1.2. Findings

1.2.1. Scope

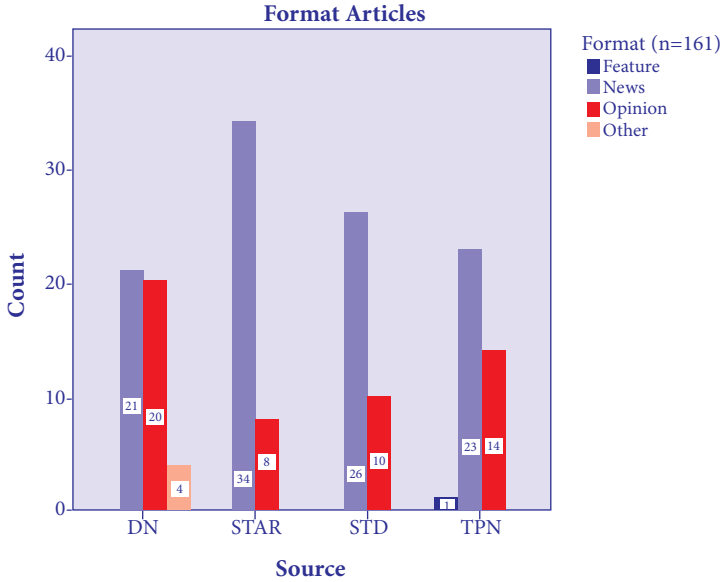
The Mombasa Republican Council was prominently featured in May 2012. A total of 161 articles were monitored, of which two thirds were news reports and one third opinion pieces. 45 articles were published in the *Daily Nation*, 42 in *The Star*, 38 in *The People* and 36 in *The Standard*. The majority of the articles were published under “National News”. The *Daily Nation* ran twice as many opinion pieces as *The Standard* and *The Star* (see chart p.2) .

1.2.2. Focus

The Mombasa Republican Council was mentioned in connection with:

- the conflicts about the newly appointed Kenya Ports Authority (KPA) board members and county commissioners
- the attacks on IEBC facilities on the coast and general security threats in the coastal region
- MRC’s request for a referendum on secession as well as the court case between the Independent Electoral and Boundaries Commission (IEBC) and the MRC
- the political rallies of the presidential candidates Raila Odinga, Musalia Mudavadi, William Ruto and Martha Karua in the coast area and their rivaling initiatives in parliament in order to establish a committee to address coastal grievances.

¹ Institute for Security Studies (Tshwane/Pretoria), Kenya: Mombasa Republican Council - Liberators or Nascent Radical Fanatics?, 27.06.2012, <http://allafrica.com/stories/printable/201206270319.html>



The majority of news reports featured prominent politicians and institutions calling for dialogue with the MRC in order to prevent increased violence ahead of the elections.

The dominant perspective, covered by both opinion pieces and news reports, rejected the secession demands by MRC but acknowledged the marginalization of the coastal population and the urgent need to address their grievances. Most of the articles mentioned fundamental positions of the Government and/or the MRC, such as the secession demand and its rejection as well as the accusations of neglect and unfair land distribution. However, background articles providing in-depth analysis of the roots of historical injustices as well as political options to solve them, were an exception². Investigative pieces about structure, funding and activities of MRC were also lacking³. Opinion pieces published in all newspapers after the major political rallies on the coast analyzed critically the exploitation of MRC as a political match ball in order to secure coastal votes⁴.

² Background articles were published in The People on May 7, p.47 and Daily Nation on May 27, p.22.

³ For further analysis see Joe Kadhi's article on p. 7

⁴ The Standard, 23.05.2012, Why is there doublespeak over coastal strip?, Daily Nation, 23.05.2012, Don't mollycoddle MRC

1.2.3. Breaches of the Code of Conduct

Accuracy and Fairness

According to Article 1 of the “Code of Conduct for the Practice of Journalism in Kenya” the fundamental objective of a journalist is to write a fair, accurate and unbiased story on matters of public interest. All sides of the story should be reported wherever possible; comments should be obtained from anyone who is mentioned in an unfavourable context⁵.

A significant number of the articles monitored for this report, however, neglected these basic journalistic rules and only told one side of the story. More than a third of all news reports referred to only one source and nearly one third presented only one viewpoint. Most of the one-source and one-viewpoint news reports were published in *The Star*.

Viewpoints in News Reports

| | | /Article/Viewpoints | | | | Total |
|--------|------|--------------------------|-------|-------|-------|--------|
| | | >3 | 1 | 2 | 3 | |
| Source | DN | Count 7 | 1 | 8 | 5 | 21 |
| | | % within Source 33,3% | 4,8% | 38,1% | 23,8% | 100,0% |
| | STAR | Count 0 | 17 | 17 | 0 | 34 |
| | | % within Source ,0% | 50,0% | 50,0% | ,0% | 100,0% |
| | STD | Count 2 | 5 | 15 | 4 | 26 |
| | | % within Source 7,7% | 19,2% | 57,7% | 15,4% | 100,0% |
| | TPN | Count 14 | 1 | 1 | 7 | 23 |
| | | % within Source 60,9% | 4,3% | 4,3% | 30,4% | 100,0% |
| Total | | Count 23 | 24 | 41 | 16 | 104 |
| | | % within Source 22,1% | 23,1% | 39,4% | 15,4% | 100,0% |

On May 14, 2012, for example, *The Star* reported on the scheduled transfer of two hundred administration police officers to Thika because of their alleged links with the MRC. The article covered the grievances of the APs extensively, without presenting any statements from the government side.

On May 29, 2012, *The Daily Nation* and *The People* reported that the Media Council of Kenya had launched investigations into the conduct of four Mombasa-based radio stations. They had allegedly spread hate messages and promoted the Mombasa Republican Council. The articles only presented the point of view of the Media Council and didn't obtain any standpoints from the accused radio stations⁶.

⁵ Article 1a, Code of Conduct for the Practice of Journalism in Kenya

⁶ *The People*, 29.05.2012, FM stations propagating hate speech face closure, *Daily Nation*, 29.05.2012, Radio Stations warned over biased reporting

Distinction between comment, conjecture and fact

Article 1 of the Code of Conduct also demands the clear distinction between comment, conjecture and fact⁷. Some of the news articles which covered the MRC, however, contained journalistic opinion and unproven speculations. On May 5 2012, for example, *The Star* claimed considerable local support for the United Republican Party in the coast region without providing any attribution or relevant proof: “Ruto’s party may take a large share in the Coastal region in terms of membership and votes, considering it has a similar name with the Mombasa Republican Council and enjoys the support of the grassroot leaders.”⁸

North Eastern may break away – Elmi



The Star, 30/05/12, p.10

Provocative and alarming headlines

According to Article 1 and 11 of the Code of Conduct, provocative and alarming headlines should be avoided, especially when covering ethnic, religious and sectarian conflict⁹. It is questionable whether the headline “North Eastern may break away - Elmi” published by *The Star* on May 30, 2012 respected this principle. Although it clearly identifies the source of the allegation, Minister Mohamed Elmi, it puts forward both a sensational and an alarming message. The article covered a rally in Garissa and presented only one viewpoint, stating that the North-East of Kenya had been marginalized by the government and that its residents would soon “borrow a leaf from the MRC”. The article didn’t provide any further context or proof for this allegation.

⁷ Article 1d, Code of Conduct: “Journalists, while free to be partisan, should distinguish clearly in their reports between comment, conjecture and fact”.

⁸ The Star, 05.05.2012, Ruto’s URP to hold rallies in Mombasa

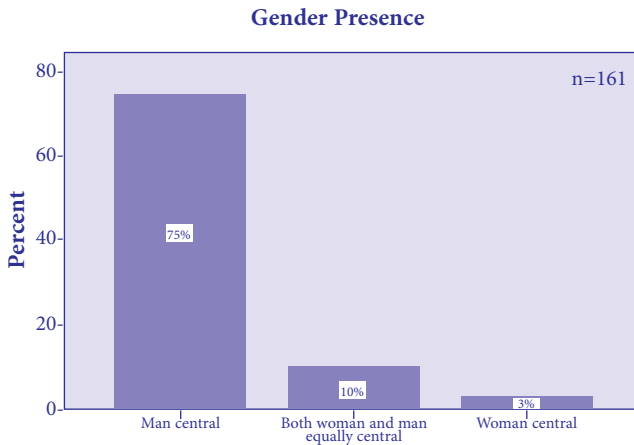
⁹ Article 1e and 11b, Code of Conduct for the Practice of Journalism in Kenya: “In general, provocative and alarming headlines should be avoided.”

Diversity and Gender Representation

Article 1 of the Code of Conduct says that journalists should present a diversity of expressions, opinions, and ideas in context¹⁰. Article 15 demands that women and men should be treated equally as news subjects and news sources¹¹.

The diversity of MRC coverage, however, was limited. The majority of articles neither included the views of ordinary coastal inhabitants nor did they present local protagonists or projects engaged in the solution of the coastal problems. 45% of all news articles featured state officials as the main subject of the story, 31% politicians, and only 4% introduced ordinary citizens as their main protagonists.

Gender equality was also far from being achieved. In 75% of all the articles men were central to the story, only 3% featured women as central protagonists.



1.3. Conclusions and Recommendations

The MRC coverage lacked background information and investigative reporting on historical developments, structures of marginalization and activities of the Mombasa Republican Council. Many stories provided only one viewpoint instead of presenting a fair and balanced picture.

Besides adhering to the basic rules of fair and diverse reporting, the coverage of conflict-ridden issues like the MRC needs to consider the principles of conflict-sensitive journalism. Reporting could be improved by including in-depth-analysis

¹⁰ Article 1 h, Code of Conduct

¹¹ Article 15, Code of Conduct

of the coastal conflicts as well as possible solutions. Instead of only quoting political leaders and their familiar demands, journalists should go beyond the elites and include the views of ordinary people. It would be crucial to report the conflict not as consisting of only two opposing sides; instead also other interests and needs which are affected, and positive examples of the solution of local problems should be explored.

The following publications provide in-depth information on conflict-sensitive journalism:

- My Tribe is Journalism. Conflict Sensitive Journalism, A Handbook by Ross Howard, Special Edition Kenya, IMS 2008
<http://www.i-m-s.dk/files/publications/1312%20Conflict.v5.pdf>
- Conflict Sensitive Reporting. A Toolbox for Journalists;
Peter du Toit, Conflict Sensitive Journalism Project, Rhodes University 2012
Electronic copy can be obtained through: Sol Plaatje Institute for Media Leadership <http://spi.ru.ac.za/>

The Media Council of Kenya regularly conducts training workshops on journalism ethics and conflict-sensitive reporting.

2. In-depth Analysis:

The coverage of the MRC Phenomenon

By Joe Kadhi, Lecturer Journalism,

United States International University, Nairobi

2.1. Introduction

Nothing, of late, has challenged journalism in Kenya more than the coverage of the mysterious Mombasa Republican Council. Engaging in conveyor-belt reportorial presentation of stories journalists have only been writing about utterances of the organisation's leaders threatening to secede from Kenya and the rebuttals from national leaders expressing their views on how to deal with the situation.

An in-depth exposé telling the real story that would answer a number of questions in Kenyans' minds about the organisation has yet to be written. What is the origin of the shadowy organisation calling itself MRC? Who finances it and for what purposes? Is it a political party or a tribal organisation? Are its demands genuine or are they a concoction of politicians out to win the next general elections?

All the questions and many more are yet to be answered by journalists covering MRC stories. Reporting MRC, and indeed many other important current events, through exposés or simply by engaging in interpretative coverage is a serious professional as well as ethical challenge to Kenyan journalists. Due to its controversial nature the coverage of the MRC is, for all practical purposes, the coverage of conflict. Ethically, journalists in Kenya are required to follow very well defined principles. These principles give three specific instructions which journalists in Kenya have to observe.

Called "Covering Ethnic, Religious and Sectarian Conflict" the ethical principle says news, views or comments on ethnic, religious or sectarian dispute should be published or broadcast after proper verification of facts and presented with due caution and restraint in a manner which is conducive to the creation of an atmosphere congenial to national harmony, amity and peace. Then it requires provocative and alarming headlines to be avoided. And lastly it suggests that news reports or commentaries should not be written or broadcast in a manner likely to inflame the passions, aggravate the tension or accentuate the strained relations between the communities concerned. It further suggests that articles or broadcasts with the potential to exacerbate communal trouble should be avoided.

While covering conflict or any other controversial story, journalists in Kenya are extremely lucky to be protected by the supreme law of the land which creates an environment so conducive to the free practice of journalism that the vibrancy of the Kenyan fourth estate is quite conspicuous to any visitor.

Article 33 of the Constitution, for example, clearly says every person has the right to freedom of expression, which includes freedom to seek, receive or impart information or ideas; freedom of artistic creativity; and academic freedom and freedom of scientific research.

By using this part of the Constitution journalists have actually allowed MRC leaders to say virtually everything they have wanted to about their amorphous organisation. While doing so, however, journalists ought to know that the same part of the Constitution also says the right to freedom of expression does not extend to propaganda for war; incitement to violence; hate speech; or advocacy of hatred that constitutes ethnic incitement, vilification of others or incitement to cause harm; or is based on any ground of discrimination specified or contemplated in Article 27 (4) which says the State shall not discriminate directly or indirectly against any person on any ground, including race, sex, pregnancy, marital status, health status, ethnic or social origin, colour, age, disability, religion, conscience, belief, culture, dress, language or birth.

Looking at that provision of the law, journalists in Kenya should realise that they have quite a free hand in covering the MRC though they are expected to be very careful in making sure the derogatory statements by the organisation's leaders, which at time come close to incitement and could therefore cause harm, are properly doctored professionally. The Constitution also says in the exercise of the right to freedom of expression, every person shall respect the rights and reputation of others.

Article 34 of the Constitution says freedom and independence of electronic, print and all other types of media is guaranteed, but does not extend to any expression specified in Article 33 (2) discussed above. Be that as it may, the supreme law says the State shall not exercise control over or interfere with any person engaged in broadcasting, the production or circulation of any publication or the dissemination of information by any medium; or penalise any person for any opinion or view or the content of any broadcast, publication or dissemination.

Because of this provision a number of FM stations down at the Coast have given a lot of freedom to the so-called leaders of the MRC mainly because the Constitution also says broadcasting and other electronic media have freedom of establishment, subject only to licensing procedures that are necessary to regulate the airwaves and other forms of signal distribution; and are independent of control by government, political interests or commercial interests. By examining this particular section of the Constitution the ownership of a number of FM stations at the Coast could be said to be contravening the law as a number of them actually belong to politicians and could therefore not be categorized as independent of political interest.

Today State-owned media are much freer to professionally select stories as they please because the Constitution gives them the liberty to determine independently the editorial content of their broadcasts or other communications and be impartial; and afford fair opportunity for the presentation of divergent views and dissenting opinions. Despite this freedom however there has not been any noticeable in-depth reporting by the State-media about the MRC.

The matter is made worse by the existence of Article 35 of the Constitution which gives journalists, like all other citizens, the right of access to information held by the State; and information held by another person and required for the exercise or protection of any right or fundamental freedom. For the first time in history the Constitution allows journalists to engage in investigative exercise of their profession knowing very well the supreme law protects the people's right to know. Despite all this journalists have not made use of the Constitution to engage in any meaningful investigation about the MRC. At the time of writing this report there were quite a number of pertinent questions about MRC that still remained mysterious and therefore unanswered.

Back in my days as the *Daily Nation's* Managing Editor my efforts to expose police brutality faced a tough personal reprimand from President Daniel arap Moi himself demanding to kill complete stories including the coverage of the Saba Saba in 1990 when a number of people were killed in Nairobi. On that day I had to defy orders from the President to let Kenyans know about riots that followed peaceful demonstrations for multi-party democracy in their own capital. I witnessed a lot of brutality during the demonstrations in the city but when I decided to publish it, I was condemned. So I deliberately published to be damned! Today journalists don't have to go through this professional trauma as they have all the freedom to publish the truth about almost any subject of their choice including the MRC.

Because of the freedom given by the Constitution, journalists are free to cover the MRC issues from many angles which are professionally stipulated in the art of news reporting. A professional examination of the coverage of MRC, therefore, requires looking at three types of reporting: Reportorial conveyor-belt presentation of stories; Interpretative presentation of stories and Commentaries and editorialized presentation of stories.

2.2. Reportorial presentation of MRC stories

The majority of MRC stories are reportorial presentations of utterances by Kenyan leaders condemning MRC, or pledging to work with the group, or MRC leaders explaining their position. One such story was published by the *Sunday Nation* on February 5th 2012, when the paper claimed to have "unmasked" MRC. The paper had a front page story warning that the Government was staring at a major security threat over the rise of MRC. It also cautioned that despite the Government banning

the group it had refused to go. The paper talked of anxiety gripping upcountry people as reports warned the outlawed group advocated split with Kenya and that it was gaining popularity among indigenous people including MPs.

The only effort by the paper to demystify MRC was shown when it revealed the name of its leader as ex-policeman Omar Suleiman Mwamwanzi who is said to be the Chairman of the Governing Council. In the same story the Sunday Nation quoted Omar Hassan, a former Commissioner of KNCHR and a highly respected personality from the Coast region, calling for one nation. Though the story was well displayed in the centre spread, it begged more questions about the MRC than it provided answers. It said the State appeared to be without a solution and seemed to be at a loss on how to handle MRC. It also talked of a violent disruption of the group's meeting at Shika Adabu followed by a meeting between the Coast PC, Earnest Munyi, and the group as the late Saitoti condemned calls for secession. The interpretative journalism displayed by the paper appeared to paint a hopeless picture.



Daily Nation, 15/05/12, p.4

At about the same time *The Standard* published reportorial stories on MRC which quoted Kenyan leaders saying a number of things about the MRC. Their utterances however showed differences between them on how to deal with the illegal organisation. The story highlighted differences between President Mwai Kibaki, who was saying the Government would not tolerate separatists and Prime Minister Raila Odinga, who was calling for dialogue with MRC as Deputy Prime Minister, Musalia Mudavadi, was calling for a motion in Parliament to establish dialogue with MRC. Needless to say this story created more cobwebs in the minds of Kenyans about the MRC. Kenyan leaders did not even see eye to eye on how to deal with the prohibited organisation.

The MRC story has also been used a number of times by the FM stations. Capital FM station, for example, quoted Mwai Kibaki in an April 24th broadcast in which the station claimed the President had for the first time spoken out strongly against the outlawed Mombasa Republican Council (MRC) and told the illegal group to forget about secession of the coastal region from Kenya. Kibaki is painted by the media as a man who regards MRC followers as enemies of Kenya. On that same day the station reported the death of a MRC man killed by a stone thrown by a rioter in Mombasa after police blocked members of the outlawed group from entering a court house.

According to the story riot police fired teargas to stop more than 100 members from reaching the court to hear a case in which they were challenging the ban on their group. In general the media have always reported confrontation between the police and the MRC without giving any satisfactory explanations about the real causes of the riots and confrontations. Engaging in reportorial presentation of the MRC stories journalists have concentrated in quoting government sources. On June 10th 2012, for example, *The People* newspaper quoted the NSIS Director, Michael Gichangi, saying that the Government was aware of secret relationship between politicians and illegal organisations such as the MRC and that the intelligence service was watching keenly and declared the war on MRC was on.

The paper also quoted the NSIS boss warning MPs who began embracing MRC and added that the new found relationship posed a serious threat to peace and national security ahead of the polls. On June 14th, *The Star* quoted Coast clerics telling voters to reject illegal groups including the MRC. The story quoted the Coast Interfaith Council of Clerics urging the people not to boycott elections but it also quoted Coast Supkem Chairman, Shariff Mohdhar, warning religious leaders against taking political stands. Used big in the inside pages the story was quite punchy!

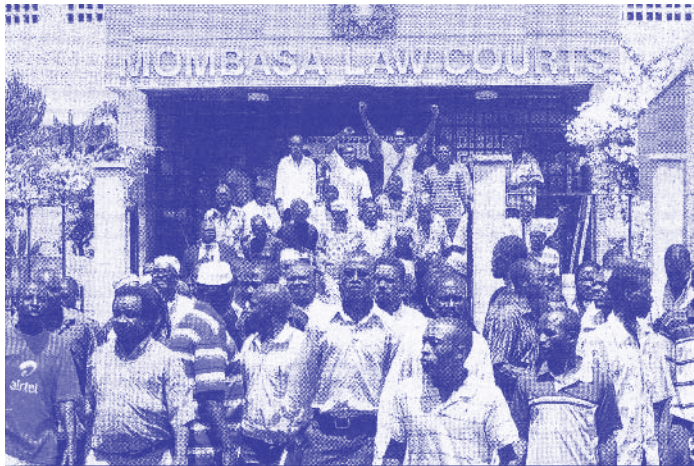
The People also had a similar story on the same date when it quoted clerics urging the Coast people not to boycott election as demanded by MRC. It also quoted the Supkem Coast boss Mohdhar criticising the government for not taking steps against leaders who preached hatred. Though used in the inside pages the story was quite punchy, too.

2.3. Interpretative reporting of the MRC stories

Like the reporting of all other stories in Kenya that of MRC fell short of professional interpretative handling. This requires a thorough knowledge of both the topic and the methodology of investigative journalism. Interpretative reporting leads to a superior presentation of stories which are based on the ability to investigate and a thorough understanding of the topic. A good example of interpretative reporting could be the call by MRC to boycott elections. Reportorial conveyor-belt presentation would quote subjects speaking for or against the call. Interpretative reporting would tell readers a lot more such as who would really benefit from the boycott;

what does the law say about the right to vote; how the MRC real goals would be achieved by not participating in elections and what the MRC secret plans are to enforce election boycott?

Throughout the coverage of MRC issues journalists have shown very limited knowledge of the clandestine organisation. Lack of thorough investigative skills has led to the presentation of articles that tell very little inside stories about the MRC. A very impressive academic research on MRC has been done by Paul Goldsmith; but reporters have shown very little inclination to use the academic report, yet they have not come up with their own in-depth analysis of the organisation.



The Star, 23/05/12, p.13

The Goldsmith report shows the issues fuelling MRC activism; the Kaya Bomba raiders and human rights abuses; the Mombasa Republican Council agenda and the opportunities for engaging the MRC. In my view, journalists could perform a much better job by making proper use of the good old 5Ws and H. Used properly this could play the professional trick. For example, everyone seems to know WHAT the MRC is: an illegal organisation banned in 2008 but; WHAT are its secrets? WHAT are its sources of funds? WHAT external forces back it? WHAT are the possible outcomes of the MRC?

Who are really behind it? Goldsmith tells us that the Swahili, Arab, and Miji Kenda segments of the indigenous coast population are the people WHO are members on MRC but; WHO can be credited with the originality of MRC; WHO are the Kenyan politicians secretly backing it? WHO are totally opposed to it and ready to go to war? WHO has a solution to the entire problem?

When was it really established? Goldsmith also tells us that the events that were precipitated by the Kaya Bomba raiders in 1997 constitute the time WHEN the MRC phenomenon come into existence but; WHEN did the real problem start? WHEN did the Coastal people start feeling marginalized? WHEN did politicians decide to use it as a stepping stone to get re-elected or gain higher offices? WHEN is the problem likely to be solved?

Where is the MRC really strong? Though it is believed that it is in the coastal counties of Kwale, Kilifi, Malindi, Taita-Taveta, and Tana River WHERE the MRC is spread; WHERE in these regions is it most popular? WHERE in the region is it least popular? WHERE do its leaders secretly meet? WHERE, outside Kenya, does it get its support from?



The People, 15/05/12, p.14

Whereas many believe that historical injustices are the reasons WHY Mombasa Republican Council was established; WHY has the MRC suddenly become current? WHY has the problem become so serious now? WHY are leaders divided on the issue? WHY has MRC united people? WHY do MRC leader claim it is not a political party?

Goldsmith also believes efforts to secure coastal autonomy, which represents a regionally and historically specific type of sovereignty pursued by mwambao activists, could explain HOW MRC was formed but HOW is the MRC really organised? HOW are its members recruited? HOW is its propaganda spread? HOW does the

Government intend to deal with it? HOW difficult is the effort to establish dialogue?

Answering these pertinent questions through investigative journalism during the reporting stage and presenting the stories in an interpretative manner during the writing stage, in my opinion, would go a long way towards demystifying the Mombasa Republican Council. The watchdog role of the fourth estate has been seriously neglected in both the reporting and writing of the MRC stories.

2.4. Commentaries on MRC

The Standard Digital of 14th June had a commentary by Dann Mwangi saying: In the recent past, the outlawed Mombasa Republic Council (MRC) has been making secessionist demands that are not founded on law, facts and history. Inasmuch as they have been invoking a frivolous and outdated colonial agreement that the Coast Province no longer belongs to Kenya, this is not true. They continue to abuse our territorial integrity and national sovereignty and this must not be tolerated by the Government. In a nutshell Mwangi is saying: 1. MRC is abusing our territorial integrity. 2. Do not tolerate it.

The Daily Nation sounded a warning on June 12th when the paper had a commentary by Jackson Mwalulu saying: MRC insists it's pursuing a just cause, top of which is Coast people's land rights. All of us buy into their agenda. People of the Coast need land with title deeds. Of late, though, MRC has been associated with both verbal and physical violent expression of their agenda. The declaration that no elections will take place next time at the Coast; the burning of the Electoral Commission's property; attacks on police officers; the Pwani si Kenya mantra with its secession clarion call, are pointers to the unveiling of a guerrilla movement. In a nutshell Mwalulu is saying: A guerrilla movement is in the making!

The Star talked of MRC as a monster. In a commentary on 3rd June by Muthui Kariuki the paper says: The activities and pronouncements of this organization (MRC) have clearly proved that it is not your regular neighbourhood welfare chama. It has all the makings of a monster that will end up eating the chicken, the children and the foolish master! In a nutshell Kariuki is calling the MRC a dangerous monster!

The Sunday Nation proposed devolution. In his column "The Week that Was" Kwendo Opanga says: I do not support secession of the Coast as demanded by the MRC. I support the Constitution. I believe the Coast's challenge in part arises from failed leadership. Therefore the MRC should move to legally fill this void. It must plot to win all seats in the Region in the coming general election legally. Then it should embark on changing the Coast in accordance with the Constitution. In a nutshell Kwendo is saying: Get your autonomy legally!

Except for the commentary by Kwendo Opanga all the others can be described as adversarial. They say: Don't tolerate it; a guerrilla movement is in the making because it is a dangerous monster. Whereas every media house, indeed every journalist, is protected by Article 33 defence of freedom of expression, the same Constitution says freedom of expression does not extend to propaganda for war; incitement to violence; hate speech; or advocacy of hatred that constitutes ethnic incitement, vilification of others. Besides that the ethical principle calls for news reports or commentaries not to be written or broadcast in a manner likely to inflame the passions, aggravate the tension or accentuate the strained relations between the communities concerned.

Journalists are nationalists and the subject of secession can be extremely emotive. Despite that, however, they are expected to be professionals first and adhere to professional ethics as much as they obey the law. The fact that the MRC exists is itself very important news. But looked at the whole phenomenon as the existence of a serious and maybe legitimate conflict, then the coverage of the whole scenario must be approached from a professional way of covering conflict which is growingly becoming a very important area of specialisation in the profession.



The Star, 03/05/12 p.10

2.5. Conclusion

Examining the few examples of the coverage of the MRC phenomenon elucidated above leads one to conclude that the manner in which the stories were written could not, strictly speaking, be said to be ethically upright. The stories examined showed the tendency for journalists, backed by their editors, to concentrate on repertorial conveyor-belt presentations of stories instead of engaging in a much more professionally admirable method of interpretative reporting. By and large the print media exhibited an impressive ability to adhere to the ethical principle of impartiality, which, from the moment it was first established many years ago, called for the avoidance of tendentiousness in news presentation.

The same, however, cannot be said about the FM stations down at the Coast, where the MRC is said to be gaining popularity through local MPs who secretly back the banned organisations. The matter is made worse by the fact that a number of them own the stations which are said to be sympathetic to the movement. I obtained this information from a number of journalists who work for the FM stations and with whom I rubbed shoulders when I was training them in Mombasa recently.

According to the stories published about the MRC, journalists point out that the leader of the organisation is the uncharismatic and unassuming Suleiman Mwamnwani whose background is only said to be that of a simple policeman. The obvious professional scream for an urgent personality interview with the man obviously went unheard and so the mystery of MRC continues to deepen. Such an interview could probably reveal where the MRC gets funds from to launch a regional campaign of propaganda covering Kwale, Kilifi, Malindi Tana River and Taita Taveta counties.

An attempt by the *Sunday Nation* of February 5th to demystify the organisation was commendable; but was not professionally done to the level of leaving no stone unturned. Though the paper painted a hopeless picture of the future of MRC, it didn't give any reasons for that conclusion. Journalists gave the Director of NSIS, Michael Gichangi, a lot of publicity when he revealed that the Government was aware of a number of politicians associated with MRC. Yet they made no attempt to find out who the concerned politicians were.

An attempt to get answers to a series of FIVE “Ws” and “H” questions posed above would have formed the basis for news editors' briefing and debriefing of reporters covering the MRC. That, together with techniques of investigative reporting, could have helped the country understand the many intricacies surrounding the illegal organisation.

3. Monitoring Report: The Coverage of the Mombasa Republican Council by Coastal Radio Stations

3.1. Introduction

The Media Council of Kenya monitored three coastal radio stations, Rahma FM, Kaya FM and Radio Salaam, and their coverage of the Mombasa Republican Council in April and May 2012. All three radio stations are owned by politicians: Environment minister Chirau Ali Mwakwere owns Kaya FM, Defence minister Yusuf Haji owns Radio Salaam and Nassir Abdulsamad, the son of the late Shariff Nassir, runs Rahma FM¹².

Eleven call-in-shows covered the MRC as a major topic in the monitoring period; ten were aired on Rahma FM and one on Radio Salaam.

3.2. General Observations

The majority of the radio discussions were based on comments by politicians, for example the comments Raila Odinga and Musalia Mudavadi made during their coast rallies on May 20, 2012. The presenters played the respective clips and invited listeners to call in and give their views on the comments.

Each show had an average of ten, predominantly male, callers. There were no studio guests. At the end of the shows, the presenters read out text messages that had been sent throughout the programme.

The presenters did not regulate the discussions nor did they give any background information on the MRC conflict. They allowed the callers to give their views, asking no or only very few follow-up questions. The presenters did not stop or correct callers who expressed inciting statements or incorrect facts (see Breaches of the Code of Conduct).

3.3. Breaches of the Code of Conduct

Radio Salaam: 20.04.2012, 7.10 AM

The topic of the discussion on Radio Salaam on 20.04.2012 at 7.10 AM emerged from a 7.00 AM news item. The news report quoted Assistant Minister for Livestock, Dhadho Godana, who had asked the Government to expeditiously deal with the MRC issue.

The presenter then asked the listeners to give their views and opinions on this statement. One male caller expressed the following views:

“Nikidhani mbunge wa Galole amenena maneno kweli na laiti wabunge wetu wakinena kama yeye sasa sisi huu mwambao wetu wa pwani tutaupata bila vurumani kwa sababu wabunge wetu wamekaa kimya kwa sababu wanaploti wamechukua na serikali itawanyang’anya. Sasa sisi tukin’yang’anywa raslimali yetu sisi katika mkoa wa pwani, watu wengi wafanyao kazi ni wanaotoka Kenya, Sisi watu wa pwani hatuna ardhi, hatuna kazi mwisho hata kibanda ya kufuga punda. Hatuna ardhi zote wamechu-

¹² Nairobi Business Monthly, July 2012, The Scramble for Space in Media, p. 36

kua ni watu kutoka bara. Sisi twawaambia hizi ardhi ni za babu zetu. Ikiwa hawatatupa kwa mikono zetu sisi ndio tunajua siku ya kifo cha nyani”.

English Translation

“I think the Galole MP has spoken the absolute truth. If our MPs spoke like him, we would secede without any problem. The problem is that our MPs have gone silent because they have grabbed public land and they fear the Government will reclaim it. We have been denied our ownership rights. The people who work in this region are from Kenya; we, the people of the Coast, don't own any land, and we don't have jobs or even land to graze our donkeys. Outsiders have grabbed our land and we want to tell them that this is our ancestral land; if they don't surrender this land they will suffer the consequences.”

The presenter let the caller talk without asking for any proof of his accusations or providing any additional context. He also didn't comment on the fact that the caller was referring to “Kenyans” as opposed to “people of the Coast”; thus supporting his secessionist view. The presenter also didn't react to the obvious threats expressed by the caller, that “Kenyans” would suffer the consequences if they didn't return their land.

Thus the presenter breached Article 11a of the Code of Conduct for the Practice of Journalism in Kenya, which demands that “news, views and comments on ethnic, religious or sectarian dispute should be published or broadcast after proper verification of facts and presented with due caution and restraint in a manner which is conducive to the creation of an atmosphere congenial to national harmony, amity and peace”. Article 11c also states that news reports or commentaries should not be written or broadcast in a manner likely to inflame the passions, aggravate the tension or accentuate the strained relations between the communities concerned.

Radio Rahma: 24.05.2012, 7.18 AM

The topic of the discussion on Radio Rahma on 24.05.2012 at 7.18 AM was based on comments made by Prime Minister Raila Odinga and Deputy Prime Minister Musalia Mudavadi. In separate rallies the two presidential aspirants had said that they would compel the government to accommodate MRC demands. Callers were asked to give their views and opinions on these statements. The presenter talked to a male caller who expressed the following views:

Mpiga Simu: *“Pwani Ni Kenya, na hakuna mahali yeyote imeandikwa pwani si Kenya. Kwa hivyo internal security ministry ili andika kwa speaker of national assembly yakwamba kukubaliana na MRC ita compromise national security. Kama bunge ita pitisha motion kukubali kuongea na MRC, Wale wengine wana makundi haramu wata uliza Kipali (...)”*

Mtangazaji: *“Ndugu Rashid wasema hivyo na tayari kuna watu mbali mbali wanaosema, kuwa hawa wanafaa serikali wakae chini na wana makundi haramu kuwaikiliza”*

Mpiga Simu: *“Prime minister Na huyu deputy yake walikua wameandikia spika kufile motion, lakini in turn minister for internal security akaandika kwa speaker of national assembly ya kwamba kusikilizana na MRC ina sabotage national security”*

Mtangazaji: “Bwana Rashid, ni pengine, yale mataifa yalifadhili au Kusaidia Sudan Kujitenga pagine haikua sawa?”

Mpiga Simu: “Nataka kusema hivi, ya Sudan is an exceptional, ile ya Sudan ilikuwa complete kutoka katiba ilifanwa 1958 mpaka 1962, mpaka southern Sudan walisema, let us forget it badaaye walianza ku correct

English Translation

Caller: “The Coast is in Kenya and there has not been a secession yet. The National Security Ministry wrote to the speaker of the National Assembly saying that a motion to legitimise the MRC grouping will compromise National security and as a result other illegal groupings will demand legitimacy.

Presenter: “Brother Rashid, you say that and already there are different people who feel that the Government should dialogue with the MRC?”

Caller: “The Prime Minister and his deputy filed a motion in parliament that sought to invite the MRC to dialogue with the Government, but the Internal Security Minister wrote to parliament indicating that such a motion will compromise National security.

Presenter: “Mr Rashid, are you saying that those nations that contributed to Sudan’s secession erred?”

Caller: “I want to say this, for Sudan it was an exceptional case. Sudan’s secession was adopted from the constitution review process conducted between 1958 and 1962. Then Southern Sudan said let’s forget it, and later they corrected it.”

The presenter clearly showed bias. His leading questions indicated that he disagreed with the caller who didn’t support the MRC secession demands. Thus the presenter breached Article 1a of the Code of Conduct which demands that all sides of a story should be reported wherever possible. Article 1h additionally states that journalists should seek to understand the diversity of their community and inform the public without bias or stereotype and present a diversity of expressions, opinions, and ideas in context.

3.4. Conclusions and Recommendations

The MRC issue was not highlighted prominently in the monitored radio programmes in April and May. Some of the call-in-shows which took up the topic, however, breached the Code of Conduct by airing biased and inciting content.

The MRC issue should be considered as sensitive and volatile and radio journalists should exercise due caution to ensure that their call-in-shows do not incite any side towards negative action.

The Media Council of Kenya has conducted several training workshops on conflict sensitive reporting, especially targeting radio presenters on the coast, and will continue to do so ahead of the upcoming general elections.



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