THE "CHIEF" AND THE NEW BARAZA: HARNESSING SOCIAL MEDIA FOR COMMUNITY POLICING IN KENYA

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The exponential growth of social media use in Africa is not in doubt. The rapid rise in the use of mobile telephony, coupled with the spread of Internet-enabled gadgets, has made social media the latest catalyst of a grand transformation in Africa's social and political complexion. This essay reveals how a local chief in Kenya has taken to using the microblogging website Twitter to radically transform the historical meeting place known as the *baraza* into a site of peacebuilding and community policing.[1]

Shortly after Kenya's postelection violence in 2008, forty-eight-year-old Francis Kariuki quit his position as a primary school head teacher to take up a job in the provincial administration as a chief.[2] In his words, the sudden shift from working with young minds in the protective confines of a school to being in charge of an expansive administrative location was a switch from relative predictability to uncertainty. The decision made him the current chief in charge of Lanet Umoja, a semiurban location in Nakuru County in Rift Valley Province, which is about 200 kilometers from the city of Nairobi. Lanet Umoja is largely cosmopolitan and relatively poor and has about 30,000 residents (County Assembly of Nakuru 2015).

Following his introduction to Twitter by a youthful resident in 2011, Chief Kariuki became the focus of both local and international media attention after he began using it to complement his administrative duties. As of this writing, he had posted over 3,400 tweets to his account and had over 37,000 "followers." While the news media have heralded Chief Kariuki's use of Twitter as a first in deploying social media at a local level to face up to the social dynamics of a rapidly changing continent, less attention has been given to how his use of it as an online form of address constitutes his "public" as an extension, or refashioned form, of the *baraza*.[3] *Baraza* is a Swahili word that describes the semiformal and mostly regular public (open air) meetings convened by a local chief for purposes of addressing local issues and facilitating the percolation of state agenda and policy down to the grassroots.

In this study, the main aim is to show how information and communication technologies (ICTs) are used every day in Lanet Umoja and how they punctuate ordinary life to build, in a subtle yet effective way, a more cohesive society at a very local level. Without exaggerating the impact and place of ICTs in building peace in Africa, I intend to show how a local actor, using local social structures and infrastructures, has attempted, with varying degrees of success, to create predictable patterns—or routine forms—of consumption and use of ICTs that, in a sense, reproduce a communication "fabric" for fighting crime, responding to emergencies, and creating a virtual vigilante. His use of an ICT also acts as an experimental form of spiritual healing.

As several other scholars have argued, caution is needed in making broad claims regarding the impact of ICTs in Africa and whether they are simply refashioning existing communication structures (Nyabuga 2008; Asiedu 2012; Berger 2012; Mudhai et al 2011). In pursuing this study, I had, therefore, to take note of three broad aspects of my research. One was the main actor (the chief), the second was his medium (Twitter; mobile telephony), and the third was his audience (residents of Lanet Umoja). Using Manuel Castells's idea of the network and John Postill's of concept actors or agents in a "networked community," I attempt to show how these three components interact to reproduce the aforementioned "fabric."

METHODOLOGY

The study used mostly interviews and focus group discussions as well as observations to accomplish its aims. A total of seventy structured and unstructured interviews were conducted with residents of Lanet Umoja

(which has two sublocations, Muronyo and Umoja 2, both of which are administered by assistant chiefs who report to Chief Kariuki). Six individuals who were thought either to be key in bringing about Twitter use in the area or to be opinion leaders there were selected through purposive sampling and included among the following interviewees:

- Chief Kariuki himself, with whom several interviews were conducted
- Chief Kariuki's two assistant chiefs, who are routinely deputized by him
- A number of village headmen, opinion leaders from the church, and school personnel (head teachers and teachers)
- A chief from a neighboring location (who was included to gain comparative insights)
- A youth leader, whom many in Lanet Umoja claim was the brainchild behind the use of Twitter there

Since a main concern was the depth of opinion regarding the use and perceptions of Twitter in community policing, the study also included six focus group discussions. Each group was made up of twenty to thirty participants, both male and female, comprising employed and unemployed youth and professionals (mostly primary school teachers). While organized settings such as schools provided a predictable structure for selecting participants for two of the focus groups, the case was different for the four conducted at a shopping center. Here, the researcher took advantage of the unique dynamics of most shopping centers in periurban settings in Africa, where groups sit together, sometimes whiling away time waiting to be hired for odd jobs or swapping stories. The researcher simply approached such already "formed" groups and asked their permission to discuss their perceptions of Twitter in Lanet Umoja.

In all instances, the groups enthusiastically engaged in what they felt was a worthy deliberative exercise. The researcher sought to ascertain their perceptions of Twitter within their locations, how they interacted with it, and the extent to which it had had a direct or indirect impact on their everyday lives.

The research—interviews and focus groups—was carried out entirely between May and August 2014, not including four telephone interviews the researcher conducted with Chief Kariuki before going into the field and

textual and content analyses of Chief Kariuki's tweets that were carried out between early 2011 and late 2013.

NETWORK, SOCIAL MEDIA, AND THE REFASHIONING OF THE BARAZA

In an interview with the author,[4] Chief Kariuki revealed how he fortuitously got into Twitter, and how he embarked on constituting his public. All Kenyan chiefs are required by law to convene at least two barazas a month. Chief Kariuki's initial motivation in subscribing to Twitter was so he could send notifications of upcoming barazas to the ends of expansive Lanet Umoja without the inconvenience and expense of pinning up public notices—a near thankless job, since in present day Kenya, barazas are perceived as a needless waste of time better left to idle, aging men and women.

Knowing, however, that younger faces occasionally appear at barazas during the odd instances when the government recruits unskilled labor through chiefs, Kariuki began constituting his Twitter public with that handful of attendees, whose numbers would sometimes peak at 150 people. At each meeting, he would explain the importance of having real-time, direct access to the chief and the need for obtaining a Twitter account to be able to "follow" him (and therefore, automatically receive his texts).

Although Chief Kariuki succeeded in getting a few people to subscribe to the microblogging site, a shortage of Internet-enabled smart phones and the obvious difficulty for first-time Internet users of navigating social media proved a huge obstacle to constituting his online public. Realizing, however, that almost everyone had access to a mobile phone, he negotiated with mobile network provider Safaricom, which linked his Twitter account to a unique four-digit number (8988). His tweets would bounce off this number and instantly appear as short message service (SMS) or text messages to anyone linked to it. Subscription to the four-digit number has proved very easy and practical, since a villager needs only to send a text message with the number to the service provider to begin receiving Chief Kariuki's tweets as texts. Despite using a third-party platform, the service is entirely free to the constituted public, which also means the people in periurban Lanet Umoja do not need Internet connections to access Kariuki's tweets.

A significant but relatively small proportion of the residents interviewed in this study (about 40 percent), most of them small business owners

and/or individuals educated beyond high school, own Internet-enabled smartphones and are registered on Twitter. The majority, who are farmers, casual laborers, and jobless youth, use normal mobile phones with no capacity to connect to the Internet. This latter group, therefore, mostly receive the tweets as texts through the Safaricom Platform 8988. It follows, then, that Chief Kariuki's more than 37,000 followers on Twitter form a fraction of his entire public. His entire public may be much bigger, especially considering that mobile phones are sometimes shared within households.[5] In an interview with the author,[6] Kariuki said that, as far as he was concerned, his public as constituted through the four-digit number comprises over 100,000. He suggested the number could be even higher, since the arrangement allows for any Kenyan not on Twitter to join as well. According to him, most members of adjoining locations follow his tweets.

The infrastructure described above, involving a local service provider and Twitter and launched on Kariuki's initiative, represents a network that is organic and indeterminate. Gane and Beer (2008) argue that the concept of networks, although commonly linked to computer engineering, has moved into the social and cultural sciences to describe contemporary social phenomena. Manuel Castells, perhaps the foremost authority on how communication technology is redefining contemporary society, defines networks as emergent structures made up of a number of interconnected nodes, the character or topology of which may be very different depending on the type of systems they are part of (Castells 1996, 501). More important for Castells, networks are social structures. He writes, "Networks are open structures, able to expand without limits, integrating new nodes as long as they are able to communicate within the network, namely as long as they share the communication codes" (Castells 1996, 501–2).

While networks in themselves are nothing essentially new, Castells observes they have taken on a new vitality in the information age, especially where they are "powered by new information technologies" (2000, 15). Postill (2008) cautions us, however, on the dangers of reducing the plurality and social formations one finds on platforms such as Twitter to a crude community-versus-network structure. According to him, rather than positing a local community being affected by global networks, researchers ought to be focusing on how different field[7] agents and agencies compete and incorporate over matters concerning the local residents. In this sense, therefore, rather than seeing how Twitter simply convenes a fabric by means

of which residents can be cajoled into social action, we need to see how the interests of individual actors, such as the chief, inform interactions in the field.

The use of Twitter in Lanet Umoja shows how preexisting networks and fields for societal interaction are refashioned by a new media form. The network constituted by Twitter in Lanet Umoja demonstrates how technologies transform networks by enabling "an unprecedented combination of flexibility and task implementation, of co-ordinated decision making, and de-centralized execution, which provide a superior morphology for human action" (Castells 2000, 15), and at the same time it gives us insights into the ways in which individuals' proclivities, agency, and motivations support such online/offline communities. As the findings here will show, the Twitter "infrastructure" created primarily as a tool of community policing in Lanet Umoja represents an emergent form of the technologized character of contemporary social relations that Castells and Postill vividly describe.

Extensive studies have been conducted in the past few years on Twitter and its everyday use. For instance, Marwick and Boyd (2010) have shown how social media users imagine a cognitive audience that, though boundless, is imagined and constituted as bound. In a study of the Egyptian uprising (Meraz and Papacharissi 2013), the authors underscore the significant role of ordinary users who rise to prominence and elevate others to elite status through network actions. In more recent Twitter research on Kenya's mediascape, Tully and Ekdale (2014) show how playful and deceptively flippant use of Twitter allows users critical civic engagement and participation in key local and global debates. I have shown, in Omanga and Chepngetich-Omanga (2013), how Twitter texts converge to form Kenyan news reports in a time of war. Still, while studies on media, peacebuilding, and security in Africa also abound (Botes 1996, 1998; Frère 2007), there is a yawning gap in knowledge of how Twitter is utilized for locally initiated processes that embed several activities, such as community policing.

As will be shown, the Twitter deployment in Lanet Umoja has equally revised social action, the routine practice of administration, and quasi-religious didactics in everyday life and has even led to the commercialization of the emergent network. Indeed, the constant shift of linguistic register and dialect in Chief Kariuki's tweets not only gives hints of the action desired in response to them but also evidences an acute awareness of the differentiated and heterogeneous public, whose diverse segments are regularly

addressed through this online performance. Although Kariuki confesses that his entry into Twitter was meant to support publicity campaigns for his regular barazas, a cursory look at his first tweets in 2011 shows it did not take long for his Twitter account to subsume far broader roles extending from his position as chief. From a means to deal with lost documents, missing children, and lost animals, post job adverts, and carry out several other routine duties of a chief, the Twitter account soon turned into a potent platform for prompting social action—a move that has not only ushered in the acclaim that Kariuki savors but also allowed him to experiment with different roles beyond those of an ordinary chief.

THE COLONIAL EMERGENCE OF THE CHIEFS

Unlike chiefs in other countries on the continent, particularly in West Africa, those in colonial Kenya did not enjoy the admiration and affection of much of their communities. They were considered extensions of what was then a repressive state, a matter that was not helped by their own abuses of their largely amorphous powers. Historically, most of Kenya's communities were governed by councils of elders; the idea of chiefs was a colonial invention designed to entrench influence at the grassroots level. Haugerud argues that the early twentieth century takeover of Kenya by the British began with the imposition of local chiefs in communities that formerly knew no such political authorities (1995, 122). This act dislocated power from the elders, who were considered political and judicial authorities, and the emergent dispensation of colonial chiefs offered important, novel opportunities to men without significant prior standing in their own communities.

This new category of chiefs was to be a defining feature of the colonial and postcolonial Kenyan state. Throup observes that the emergent crop of chiefs was less communally minded than the elders had been; most were young, educated, Christian, recently installed men, eagerly accumulating land and seeking economic dominance (1988, 146, 240). Ochieng (1972) adds that their functions at this time included tax collection (hut tax), chairing meetings and adjudicating disputes and legal matters, conducting huge infrastructural projects on their own initiative, and having the final say in matters to do with land ownership.

The authority of the chiefs was legitimized by their collaboration with the British colonial machine. While some used their broad powers to improve the lives of the locals by protecting their land from settler occupation,

urging parents to take their children to schools, and introducing innovations in agriculture, most blatantly abused them. The struggle against the British in general was severally directed to the colonial chiefs, who were the "innocent" local agents of the colonial administration, and they quickly found themselves targets of insubordination and resistance (Ochieng 1972, 64). During the Mau Mau uprising in the 1950s that ushered in the country's struggle for independence, chiefs became targets of assassinations, as they were seen as representing colonial interests. After independence, they were retained as part of the provincial administration, but with their power now diminished and properly defined by law.

One of the enduring features the colonial chiefs bequeathed to the postcolonial Kenyan state was the baraza. The word *baraza* referred to a public gathering specifically for the purpose of interaction between the ruled and the rulers. Emerging from the Swahili culture of public debate and orality, the postindependence use of the term specifically meant a semiformal forum at the level of the administrative location or division, organized by the provincial administration and usually aimed at producing a pro forma popular consensus rather than robust debate (Haugerud 1995). The baraza became extensively used as a quasi-compulsory public meeting convened mostly by chiefs and addressed by politicians and civil servants. Prior to the advent of political pluralism in the 1990s, barazas became venues for mostly state-centric discourse meant to legitimize a provincial political ideology. Indeed, they were part of the state's everyday forms of domination, while at the same time providing an opportunity for citizens to speak back to the state.

The baraza, whose efficacy was considerable at a time of high illiteracy and grounded in a strong culture of orality, began to lose its power and influence in the late 1990s. It was no longer possible to coerce participation, as had been the case when members of the public had been required to close their businesses to attend. In the twenty-first century, the rapidly changing dispensation of political pluralism, coupled with the diminishing role of the chiefs, has further undermined the baraza's place. In addition, the historical baggage carried by the administrative chiefs hampers their interaction with members of their locales. Although in the modern Kenyan state the role of chiefs is less visible and far less intrusive than it used to be, they continue to be incorrectly perceived as obstacles rather than assets for meeting the full realization of their people's aspirations. Such perceptions undermine their otherwise noble intentions in their areas of jurisdiction.

THE EMERGENCE OF THE NEW BARAZA

Against this historical background, the communicative acts of Chief Kariuki can be perceived as a deliberative practice aimed not only at conducting community policing with his public but also at reinventing and refashioning the baraza through social media.[8] As several interviews with locals in Lanet Umoja and the chief himself make clear, nearly all interactions with the chief take place via Twitter except in cases when face to face deliberation is required (and even in these instances, the youth rarely attend). A young man, Polo, summarizes how youth engagement with the baraza has changed since its convening by Twitter:

> We never attended the baraza, and neither do we plan to attend any in future, but with Twitter we feel we are somehow part of the baraza. Where is the time anyway, when you need to look for work and food, in the first place? (Translated from Kiswahili)[9]

For most middle-aged residents, however, Twitter has simply complemented the actual baraza. A shop owner who lives just meters away from the chief's office reported to the researcher,

> We always make a point of attending the baraza at the chief's court when called upon to do so. But, of course, with the popularity of Twitter here, he [Chief Kariuki] has drastically reduced the frequency of such face to face meetings. Still, for those issues that require a face to face interaction we feel obliged to attend. It is still important.[10]

Thus, I do not argue that Twitter entirely displaces the face to face baraza in Lanet Umoja; rather, it complements and opens new spaces of interactivity between the chief and his public that were hitherto inaccessible.[11] This is partly because, unlike the postcolonial baraza, Twitter conceals the power divide and creates the impression of equivalence between the chief and his public. This transformed public constituted through Twitter is dispersed, extensive, and indefinite, and everyone in it receives the chief's messages at the same time.

Today, social media is integral to Kenya's social and political dynamics. Apart from simply connecting friends, it has been used effectively to drive positive

change, galvanize and channel public discontent, bring about political mobilization, govern, and raise civil awareness from "below." Among the various forms of social media, Twitter has been a key organizing medium in popular movements in Kenya, such as a recent doctors' strike, and in the coverage of sporting and political events in the country. In fact, the military operation carried out by the Kenyan defence forces against the Somalian militant group al-Shabaab was largely shaped through Twitter (Omanga and Chepngetich-Omanga 2013).

TWITTER, GROUP ACTION, AND REGISTER IN THE "NEW BARAZA"

The "new baraza" represents the increasingly "mediatized," deliberative practice that is complementing and in some instances appearing to displace the age-old traditional baraza in Kenya. At its core, the "new baraza" is shaped by and shapes the conflation of social media, specifically Twitter, with mobile phone text messaging, thus transcending economic and technological hurdles and vastly transforming deliberative practice and group action in local communities. In this section, I show how, unlike the old baraza, the new baraza deploys its public for community policing through group action, an effective use of linguistic register and language choice, and a rearticulation of geographical space through tweets.

According to Chief Kariuki, his almost twenty tweets per day reach all segments of society, including school heads, church leaders, the police, and ordinary folk—a fact, he claims, that has drastically reduced crime. It was his crime-busting tweets that ushered him into the global limelight, even gaining the attention of global media powerhouses such as CNN, the Associated Press, and the *Daily Telegraph*, among several others. So successful was he that even petty criminals and bootleggers took to following him on Twitter to avoid being caught off guard. These series of tweets, which succeeded in foiling robberies, mobilizing villagers for emergency rescue operations, and uniting missing children with their parents, gave Kariuki the online influence he needed to vastly expand his network.

As we will show, however, the new baraza is not simply a network maintained through Twitter; it also differs from the old baraza in the sense that it is spontaneous, organic, and versatile, as opposed to being a largely routine, strategic ritual. In this section, I focus on Kariuki's tweets that mobilized group action—or, rather, those designed to coordinate a large number of people,

mostly indeterminate, to direct energies simultaneously at a common goal or problem.

At the time of this writing, Chief Kariuki had already gained widespread attention for his use of Twitter in fighting petty crime in his location. In one of his many accounts reported by various international media,[12] Kariuki describes how, on one chilly evening, he got a distress call from a neighbor whose house was being broken into by burglars. He turned to Twitter and typed a tweet in Kiswahili:

> *Kuna wezi kwa baba kelven saa hii pale Tuinuane. Wako sitting room. Tafadhalini tusaidiane.* [There are thieves in Kelven's dad's house at this moment. They are in his sitting room. Please let us all help!][13]

The response was almost instantaneous. Barely a minute later, a follow-up tweet from the chief announced,

> *Hao wakora wametoroka. Asante kwa wale walio jitolea.* [Those thugs have now run away. Many thanks to all who volunteered.][14]

Apparently residents who had subscribed to Kariuki's tweets jumped into action, surrounded the house, and scared the thugs, who fled into the night. These tweets and many others like them that have prompted group action by mobilizing members of Lanet Umoja in real time to respond to emergencies have made the chief popular. Still, some residents claim that Lanet Umoja residents defy the name of their village (*umoja* means unity), and that such group action as displayed on Chief Kariuki's Twitter page does not work seamlessly.[15] Kamau, who runs a gambling game at Umoja Shopping Center, explained:

> I have not heard of anyone leaving their house as a result of a Twitter-led distress call. How can you? Imagine the risk you expose yourself to by venturing out when armed robbers are scampering away in panic. I just think most robbers simply disappear in the darkness simply because they are also on the platform, and they also fear confrontations with people. Everyone knows this, so no one leaves his house.[16]

Although Chief Kariuki denies such sentiments, he acknowledges that most robbers whose activities he tweets about escape because they are part of the network. He sees his use of Twitter for community policing as a form of crime prevention, nevertheless; one assistant chief, however, cites a need to rethink the approach, claiming that while the network may indeed be good for the prevention of crime, it is not good for the apprehension of criminals. She argues,

> Our work as civil servants in charge of security is evaluated purely on actual arrests. As long as robbers keep being part of our "intelligence" network, we are failing terribly. We might say that we are preventing crime, but we need to also make actual arrests of these criminals. Also, we real-ize that sending distress calls via Twitter only makes robbers more vicious, since they panic and imagine the entire village is aware of their whereabouts. As a matter of fact, I know of many of our police officers who are reluctant to respond to network-initiated alarms because of the probability of run-ning into a panicked gang of criminals who would fire at the slightest hint of movement. The network's greatest weakness is the broadcasting of what I feel is security intelligence that should only be consumed by a small, relevant public.[17]

Chief Kariuki, for his part, feels that such a narrow definition of community policing, based on actual arrests of criminals, is not very useful. The emphasis on arrests and convictions only leads to hardening criminals once they are released from prisons, he says. He also believes the best form of security is that which comes from below and involves the community as its own police. It is worth noting that no instances of criminals turning violent to either police or victims of crime have been reported in Lanet Umoja.

A few residents feel, however, that a persistent supply of messages reporting crimes and the responses to them has created an inaccurate impression that their area is insecure. One focus group participant goes as far as to suggest he missed an employment opportunity in Nakuru town by merely residing in Lanet Umoja, which, he claims, made others suspect that he was one of the thieves everyone keeps reading about in the network. He adds that

once, some property got lost, and I was wrongly linked to the loss as a result of the chief's tweet. The infrastructure created by the network here in Lanet Umoja does not allow one to clear one's name if wrongly accused.[18]

The researcher could not independently verify these claims, since Chief Kariuki is not known to post names of suspected criminals on the platform. Unlike the focus group participant, most residents, especially the older members and those gainfully employed as businesspeople and professionals, laud the chief's efforts and are full of praise for him for his innovations. The chief himself argues that just because crimes in Nakuru and other areas are not reported does not mean they do not also have them.

In fact, crime in Lanet Umoja is not common, and opinion suggests the network constituted around Twitter has helped reduce it drastically.[19] Furthermore, most of the respondents interviewed confess the main reason they remain subscribed to Chief Kariuki's Twitter feed is the informative nature of the tweets. About 90 percent say the tweets have had a generally positive impact on their lives. Interestingly, even those who say the chief's tweets are not of any help to them remain subscribed to the platform. Most feel it keeps them apprised of current events and of the area's situation in terms of jobs, security, and other issues of development. Indeed, the sending of texts by Chief Kariuki has become a powerful ritual that punctuates the quotidian of Lanet Umoja life, and the mere routine of receiving them gives residents a sense of affinity with their community.

In short, the chief's Twitter performance often goes beyond responding to security matters, and policing crime is only a part of what is essentially a broader deliberative practice that allows Chief Kariuki to experiment with various roles through his position as a chief. Among the first of such tweets was one sent on the night of November 2011, when an elderly man fell into a freshly dug latrine;

> *Kuna mzee dani ya shimo Umoja 2 area. Tume ongea nayeye na simu lalini mteja sasa.* [There is an old man who just fell inside an unused latrine near Umoja 2 area. I spoke to him awhile ago on the phone but his phone has gone off.][20]

Villagers responded instantly, especially those living in the Umoja 2 area, and within hours the old man was pulled out alive but with broken limbs.

The confirmation was relayed in another tweet about two hours later:

> *Tumempata sasa. Yuhai asante.* [We found him. He is alive, thanks.][21]

The chief's experimentation with different roles is discussed in more depth below.

Linguistic Register and Language Choice

Chief Kariuki's tweets are noteworthy for his deliberate use of a mode of linguistic register meant to address specifically the residents of his village, who are mostly of the urban working class, small time traders, and (mostly peasant) farmers. Among his followers are scholars, journalists, international and local nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), professionals, and government agencies who merely follow to gain insights into the famed chief's tweets. His use of the local language, Kiswahili, to summon group action indicates an awareness of the diversity and breadth of his public. Aside from reflecting its widespread use in the locality, embedded in the corpus of these tweets is a consistent pattern of Kiswahili as the language of alarm, meant to spur a specific and usually prompt action by the public. For instance, on January 19, 2013, the chief posted the following:

> *Kwa mama Sammy muwa karibu na trasformer kuna wezi wanaiba mabati. Majirani saidieni.* [There are thieves at Sammy's mum's, near the electricity transformer, stealing iron roofing sheets. Neighbors, please help.][22]

Shortly afterward, another tweet confirmed the results of the distress call:

> *Wezi wameangusha mabati na kutoroka. Wananchi asanteni kwa kurespond.* [Thieves have dumped the iron sheets and taken off. Many thanks to all residents who responded.][23]

According to interviews with several residents, such tweets indeed help greatly expand the chief's audience. The reference to residents and geographical points by name, for instance, as in the mention of "Mama Sammy" (a common respectful way of referring to women by their motherhood), suggests a specific address, to a specific public, designed to prompt a specific action by the addressee. The emergent discourse of

informality and familiarity reveals fairly close social linkages between the chief, the geographical area, and the addressed public.

Hundreds of tweets from Kariuki's account contain this repetitive pattern of informality and connotations of a social network existing within the public, where knowledge of particular places and specific people is crucial for participation in the desired action. A good example is the following series of tweets following the theft of a cow in early February 2013. The first tweet announces the crime in progress:

> *Kuna ngombe ya red imeibiwa Baraka saa hii. Wezi wameipeleka kuelekea Kiamunyeki.* [There is a red cow that has been stolen in Baraka right now. The thieves have driven it towards Kiamunyeki.][24]

A subsequent tweet isolates and activates a specific segment of the public:

> *Watu wa Kiamunyeki tafadhari saidieni. Imeonekane ikielekezwa huko ikipitia kwa Mungai.* [People of Kiamunyeki, please help. The cow has just been driven past Mungai's house.][25]

 A further tweet addressed to the wider public reports success and provides closure:

> *Ngombe imepatikana. Wezi wameicha. Iko karibu kwa kakapole. Asante!* [The cow has been found. The thieves abandoned it. It is near Kakapole. Thanks!][26]

As with the tweets regarding the theft in progress of the iron roofing sheets, knowledge of specific persons, such as Mungai, and places, such Kakapole and Kiamunyeki, is required for recipients to understand the series. The tweets specifically address a small fraction of the public who live in Lanet Umoja and, even more specifically, those who live along the path taken by the thieves stealing the cow.

While the first two tweets in this series simply help in locating the stolen cow—and also help the thieves escape, if they receive them—the last is extremely important, serving several functions. On its surface, it appears to be an innocent update, meant merely to report success and ensure closure. Addressed to the entire public on the chief's Twitter account, the message

is encouraging, letting residents of the different sections of Lanet Umoja know a crime has been nipped. More broadly, it also serves to position the network for similar responses to future texts on crime that also require group action.

Not all tweets solicit immediate group action. Those dealing with cases of stolen cars and reporting thefts of goods long after the event are clearly meant to caution and inform the public, rather than demand its instant response. On several occasions, tweets have addressed specific groups within the public, asking them to be aware of patterns of crime or events in their neighborhoods. Those focused on crime have not concerned actual, real-time acts but rather the possibility of similar acts recurring in future. These tweets are meant to boost surveillance and preemption and bolster preparedness in the event of actual acts.

A glaring difference between tweets that call for emergency group action and those that are cautionary is the language in which they are sent. For instance, in 2011 Kariuki forwarded (retweeted) the following two messages, in English, from one of his assistant chiefs:

> Hi! Be ware of chicken thieves in Murunyu.[27]

> Be ware,there's a man in Baraka(thief) armed with a *panga* [Machete]. If you see him raise an alarm![28]

Kariuki himself posted the following, also in English:

> Plse,be ware,there are thieves with master keys capable of opening any padlock.don't leave your premises unattended.[29]

In virtually all of the tweets sent since Chief Kariuki signed up for Twitter, instances that required immediate group action in the event of crime were relayed in Kiswahili. English was mostly used in those that were meant to raise caution and provide advisories on the possibility of crime. Kiswahili, a language understood by most irrespective of age and education, has become the most effective register in times of emergency and quick social mobilization, as well as a veritable code of alarm. On the other hand, the use of English in posts about crime and danger evince a diminished sense of urgency and an inbuilt luxury of caution and forewarning.

Apart from mobilizing people to react to real-time crime, some of the tweets Chief Kariuki sends mobilize them in a different, more tempered, and much less rousing manner. Strictly speaking, these tweets perform the function of social connection—that is, they seek to result in a physical connection between two separated entities. In most cases in Lanet Umoja, they include tweets that link young children who have lost their way from school with their parents, or strayed domestic animals with their owners, or aged citizens who have lost their way home with their families. Chief Kariuki tweets for the purpose of connecting social groups or individuals on an almost daily basis. For instance, on January 18, 2013, he reported a child lost:

> *Simon kihonge wa ma nyambura na uniform ya Little Angels amepotea. Kwao ni kwa mama charity wa Mutitu.* [Simon Kihonge of Nyambura (name of a place), wearing a "Little Angels" (name of a school) uniform is lost. He is from Mutito, at Charity's mum's home.][30]

This tweet is specific and demands on the part of the addressed public social knowledge of the persons named and intimate geographical knowledge of the places mentioned to initiate any meaningful action. Although consumed by an undefined public within the network, it circumscribes and cajoles a specific category within it. Furthermore, the consistent pattern of using names of persons and places assumed to be readily understood by his public shows how Chief Kariuki, despite an ever expanding network that numbers in the thousands, still manages to stay loyal to his core function of performing the everyday roles of a chief. That evening, he tweeted that the boy had been found, again reporting success and providing closure to his series of tweets:

> *Simon kihonge aliyepotea Jana yuko kwa Mama magiri karibu little Angels.wazazi wake wamuangalie huko.* [Simon Kihonge who was yesterday reported lost has been found. He is at Mama Magiri near Little Angels, and his parents should pick him from there.][31]

Worth noting again is that the provision of closure for instances of crime and lost children or animals serves several functions: it invites the public's participation in this performance, persuades all stakeholders the performance is worth being part of, and provides an index of the merits

of this approach. Also important to note is that while literally hundreds of tweets follow the pattern of problem identification–solution–closure, closure is not given in all instances. This is not because the people are not reunited with their folk or the crime is not solved or nipped; rather, according to Chief Kariuki,[32] the manifest silence indicates that for some local, specific problems highlighted on Twitter, modes of communicating closure other than online are still active, if not more active than Twitter.

Rearticulation of Geographical Space through Tweets

The closure tweets serve yet another function that is becoming increasingly crucial: they are disseminated to a wider online public that is mostly not resident to the location, including journalists and opinion leaders in government, business, and local and international bodies, and that is steadily becoming influential. Indeed, it is this segment of the network that has gained both local and international recognition for Kariuki's work in community policing and innovation in carrying out the functions of a chief. As a result, he has been invited to address a UN function in Geneva, as well as having landed invitations to local and international conferences. He has also been hosted by various media shows in Kenya and was recently promoted to the position of a senior chief by the government.

The media publicity and near celebrity status of the chief have had their drawbacks. Beyond the usual jealousy from his seniors, most of whom have never travelled abroad, the greater challenge is the huge expectations imposed on the chief every day. Indeed, most youth interviewed feel they have been let down in some way by the chief because they assume he should do more with his accumulated social capital. In fact, most of what the youth claim Kariuki should do is clearly outside the jurisdiction of a chief. His accrued global status is interpreted as giving him the ability to solve all the social and material problems that are often assumed to be the concern of elected leaders. One youth in a focus group had this to say:

> I think the chief has ascended far much than we can reach
> him. He is inaccessible. He should try and come to our level so
> that we can have a discussion on how best to move our village
> forward. He has all these international connections, yet we,
> the youth of Lanet Umoja, are jobless and desperate. Now-
> adays we just see big cars with foreign number plates drive
> to his place. They have never stopped to even ask us what we

think about the chief, or this Twitter thing. All media reports are told from the chief's perspective.[33]

Others claim the chief has become a TV personality and celebrity who has lost touch with issues at the local level. Furthermore, his ever increasing public and the need to address both his international and local audiences come at a great price to the local residents who actually receive his tweets as text messages. A complaint from several respondents is that their inboxes are full of messages that have little to do with their day to day lives. "I have pulled out of that subscription," says Peter,[34] "I also asked my wife to unsubscribe from that thing. I am being inundated with irrelevant information."

On the other hand, the network also exerts a subtle pressure on the chief to tweet every so often. In a recent interview,[35] he confessed that if he goes a day without sending tweets, he receives calls from Lanet Umoja residents or collective tweets from KOT (Kenyans on Twitter) asking for his whereabouts. Closer scrutiny, however, reveals that managing public expectations at the local level and the corresponding social relationships, especially with the youth, remains the greatest handicap to the effectiveness of the performance. Indeed, it is not possible to separate real or perceived social relations from the way in which Twitter texts are perceived by their recipients. Chief Kariuki himself admits he cannot possibly please everyone, especially as a chief who occasionally has to make arrests, confiscate local illicit brews, and solve disputes.

THE NEW BARAZA AND NEW MODES OF EXPERIMENTATION

Apart from sending out invitations for traditional live baraza meetings, Chief Kariuki uses Twitter to create an online baraza, where information that normally would be shared within the traditional baraza is equally shared through his text messages. This "new baraza" is extremely dynamic and adaptable to various conditions.

Kariuki's texts show that his experiment with a new medium has not changed the formal content of the baraza much. Similar to what Haugerud (1995) observed in her study of postcolonial barazas in the 1980s, the online "gatherings" are constituted for monologue and pro forma consensus rather than debate, and for passing on to the public government directives or policies on health, agriculture, or civic issues. In addition, Kariuki deftly

intersperses among his texts announcing polio vaccination campaigns, free medical clinics, and crime reports religious messages that would not be possible to relay in the traditional baraza.

Despite this conflation of virtual baraza with actual baraza, the elderly folk in Lanet Umoja still respond most positively to attending actual barazas, for which the younger residents rarely show up. Those interviewees who attend acknowledge that the tweets have helped improve the popularity of the live barazas, with most stating they did not go to them before the chief started tweeting, and that the tweets have helped generally boost attendance. On the other hand, although most residents consider live barazas key for discussing certain issues, some argue there is no need to attend, since most of the information will be posted on the network.

Another characteristic of the new baraza is that it appropriates and takes on the personality and individual proclivities of its key actor, the chief. In so doing, it is able to serve social and community needs while also meeting his personal aspirations. In an interview with Chief Kariuki by one of the local TV stations in Kenya, for instance, the host marvelled at the huge number of tweets from his account that represent a religious discourse. "I am a pastor with United Methodist Church," Kariuki offered.[36] Indeed, upon opening his account and announcing an upcoming baraza meeting to be held at his office, he retweeted as his third message a tweet from American evangelist Joel Osteen:

> Don't stay where you are. Learn how God can take you ABOVE AND BEYOND when you stretch your faith.[37]

And in the days that followed, the two most prominent issues in Kariuki's texts mainly reflected his functions as a chief and his religious convictions. Posted in English, the following represent only a sample of most of Chief Kariuki's almost daily religious tweets:

> Even in times of hurt or disappointment, God is with you. No matter how you feel, He will never leave you confused or discouraged.[38]

> If you acknowledge the good things that God has put inside of you, then you'll see those good things increase in your life.[39]

> Don't let negative pictures play on the movie screen of your mind. You own the remote control. All you have to do is change the channel.[40]

The chief's performance as a pastor on Twitter is equally sensitive to specific seasons and hallowed days like Christmas and Easter, at which point he sends texts germane to the occasion:

> Happy Birthday Jesus! I love you.[41]

> As this year comes to a close, reflect back on 2011 with gratitude and remember how God blessed you with His favour this year. Happy new yr.[42]

Indeed, according to interviewees, most of the tweets retweeted to other people not within the network are inspirational messages, followed closely by those that publicize employment opportunities and lost items and, of course, those providing security alerts. In another interview with the chief,[43] he reports that some of his religious tweets have been able to effect positive change and influence in his community. He cites one case in which a woman on the verge of committing suicide changed her mind after receiving an encouraging retweet from one of his followers.

While the spatial dynamics of a live baraza and its historical tradition of formality and state-centric discourse would hardly permit such a consistent serving of text aimed at a religious imperative, the online baraza constituted by Chief Kariuki enables him to use Twitter to transgress the norms and unwritten rules defining his office without essentially contradicting his diverse roles. The network allows him to conflate his other lives—those of a pastor and a former teacher—and use them through his position as a tweeting chief. Again, Kariuki exploits the dispersed nature of his public through the use of technology that, unlike a face to face baraza, allows him to send a single message all at once to thousands of people. According to him, aside from enhancing his roles as a chief, Twitter allows him to fulfill a long-cherished aim of sharing words of encouragement from God.

In short, the new baraza combines the personal with the public. Asked by the Kenya TV host how he manages his different roles on Twitter, the chief responded, "I do everything to do with humanity, that's what I have been doing," obviously reflecting on his previous work as a teacher and his current

preoccupations. Not everyone appreciates this fusion. As mentioned, his efforts to reach the diverse publics within his network have resulted in an "information overload" for residents of Lanet Umoja. Some respondents feel the messages the chief sends them are sometimes irrelevant, seen to benefit only a few, especially those tweets that advertise high-end commodities (see below). Still, despite their irritation, they believe such messages could benefit other people within the network as well. The most scathing response is from unemployed youth in the location, who argue that the network has been inundated with irrelevant texts, and that the chief uses it for his own benefit. They are a minority, however; the residents interviewed are almost unanimous that, by virtue of their form as short messages, the tweets posted are a must read, and more than 90 percent find the religious tweets encouraging.

THE COMMERCIALIZATION OF THE NEW BARAZA

With Kariuki's fame on the rise as a result of a fascination by the media, which routinely refers to him as "Kenya's tweeting chief," and of the overall effectiveness of his performance, the number of his Twitter followers has increased exponentially from a few hundreds to thousands. It is hardly surprising that, as the network continues to swell, he has commodified his newly acquired social capital by "selling" "space" within it. "I am a latter day Robin Hood," he says in one interview, "I take from the rich businesspeople who want to sell in the network, and I share with my people."[44]

The exploitation of his network as a market has obviously been motivated by the realization that, at the mere tap of a button, Kariuki has access to a vast audience at almost no cost, and that his position in the village will ensure the commodified texts are sanitized of their market and profit intentions and largely perceived as an extension of the chief's function. The near thankless tasks of coordinating communication between wandering children and their parents and lost animals and their owners and sending regular updates of abetted crime have proved rather too costly to Chief Kariuki to sustain. In addition to paying Safaricom a shilling for every tweet sent to the special four-digit number, which is then purveyed to hundreds of thousands of non-Twitter subscribers, he bears the cost of calling parents or animal owners or potential crime targets regarding the progress of their "cases."

On these grounds, the chief began occasionally "selling" this hallowed space. Proprietors of schools and colleges were the initial face of this

commodification. On May 1, 2012, the first such post came through a private university seeking students for admission under the guise of providing partial and full scholarships:

> GRETSA UNIVERSITY- is offering partial and full sponsorship for degree and diploma. Application forms at Chief's office.[45]

Gretsa University, a private institution whose main campus is located over 300 kilometers from Lanet Umoja, sought to overcome geographical limitations and reach the comparatively remote location by not only exploiting the market potential of Kariuki's already assembled public but also using his position as chief to do so. By design or default, the chief has thus ceded his role in the "new baraza" virtual space and effectively turned his public over to other performers who use his "voice" and his accrued social capital to exploit his constituted public financially. The following are additional examples of this development:

> DVD on Leading a Purpose Driven Student Life Call +254722******.[46]
>
> Kena Institute of Technology n Hospitality has a Modern comp lab,kitchen,restaurant n beauty rm for practicals. FREE DRIVING 0713******.[47]

As the above suggest, texts with a commercial imperative are exclusively in English. These particular texts, clearly targeted to residents of Lanet Umoja, are aimed specifically to address the part of the public perceived as needing opportunities for higher education.

According to Chief Kariuki, he imposes a charge for every text with a commercial imperative. Normally, this is in the form of airtime credit or cash so as to sustain his other uses of Twitter, with little direct commercial return. He claims that

> the commercial imperative was inevitable, but it was important, especially for residents of my location who are less endowed. I have helped old poor widows sell their animals at the best prices; I have helped residents sell land [and] household goods, as well as get information on institutions that are hiring.[48]

Most of the individuals interviewed in Lanet Umoja hold Kariuki in high regard, and they very much appreciate his work and innovation. Through the Twitter-enabled network, they feel the chief has brought a sense of belonging and cohesiveness to the area. Indeed, most feel his way of administrating through social media has changed their perception of new-media technologies. Still, a small minority believes the chief is making a lot of money for himself through the platform. Some think he should not be taking any money for information relayed to him for consumption within the network.

CONCLUSION

Chief Kariuki's communications to his Twitter network reveal a person acutely aware of his constituted public. The nature of the network, apparently indeterminate and organic in growth, is severally constituted as homogeneous or heterogeneous, active or passive, or bounded or boundless. When the chief activates a segment of the public, more often those known to him, for purposes of instant group action, the public is assumed to be potentially active and bounded. When he activates the public by offering spiritual nourishment, the boundaries are blurred, and the same public is largely constituted as passive.

All of his texts point to a progressive refashioning by Kariuki of the age-old baraza into something new, which, although not entirely substituting for the traditional baraza held at the chief's office, allows room for experimentation, creativity, and variety. Largely because of his access to the Twitter network, Chief Kariuki has drastically reduced the frequency and content of his physical baraza meetings. He argues that much of what he would relay in live barazas, such as information about polio campaigns, medical clinics, and other government programs, can simply be tweeted and thus reach more people faster and more effectively. The refashioned baraza also allows Kariuki to experiment with other roles that permit a kind of self-realization by creating "a pulpit," whereby he conflates the roles of a chief, a pastor, and a teacher into the network.

Meanwhile, as the costs of maintaining the network rise in tandem with an expanding public, Chief Kariuki's texts evince occasional acts that point to its increased commodification. In an interview with the author,[49] he tells of the burden of fame, and how he has both to manage his Twitter-constituted network and directly serve members of Lanet Umoja, who require regular

government services. In spite of the enormous task of managing this mostly online social network, which sometimes runs into the wee hours of the night, Chief Kariuki considers his work a calling analogous to that of a missionary. It is a role that has enabled his self-realization while giving him the satisfaction of knowing that Lanet Umoja is a more secure and cohesive place because of his innovative use of social media.

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NOTES

1. An earlier version of this paper was published as "'Chieftancy' in the Social Media Space: Community Policing in a Twitter Convened Baraza," *Stability: International Journal of Security and Development* 4, no. 1 (January 2015), http://www.stabilityjournal.org/articles/10.5334/sta.eq/. The author acknowledges this previous publication under the terms of the journal's Creative Commons license, http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/3.0/.

2. A "chief" in Kenya is a person appointed for the public service in a location or division within a larger province for the purpose of maintaining law and order, and for being a local link to the central government.

3. Later, I term this refashioned form of the baraza as the "new baraza" in an attempt to capture the increasingly "mediatized" form of the baraza.

4. Phone interview with Chief Kariuki, September 7, 2013.

5. The researcher could not determine the exact number of followers using the short code 8988.

6. Phone interview with Chief Kariuki, September 29, 2013.

7. Postill's idea of field is borrowed from Pierre Bourdieu's (1996) concept of field practice and appropriations of early work from the Manchester School of Anthropology.

8. Still, I must add that the infrastructure of Twitter, especially that devised for text messaging in Lanet Umoja, does not allow as much interaction and dialogue as it should. In a sense, its deliberative practices resemble those of the state-centric 1980s baraza.

9. Interview in Lanet Umoja, May 23, 2014.

10. Ibid.

11. Observations and interviews in Lanet Umoja, June–July 2014.

12. See, for example, http://edition.cnn.com/2012/02/18/world/africa/kenya-tweeting -chief.

13. Francis Kariuki, Twitter post, February 8, 2012, 6:36 pm, https://twitter.com/Chief kariuki/status/167436657316999169.

14. Kariuki, Twitter post, 7:03 pm, https://twitter.com/chiefkariuki/ status/167443525527539713.

15. Interviews with residents at Umoja Shopping Center, July 1, 2014.

16. Interview with Kamau at Umoja Shopping Center, July 1, 2014.

17. Interview with assistant chief, Lanet Umoja, July 23, 2014.

18. Interviews and focus group discussions held on various dates between June and the end of July, 2014.

19. Interviews and focus group discussions held on various dates between June and the end of July, 2014.

20. Kariuki, Twitter post, November 19, 2011, 4:11 pm, https://twitter.com/Chiefkariuki/ status/138046859880054786?lang=en.

21. Kariuki, Twitter post, 5:59 pm, https://twitter.com/Chiefkariuki/ status/138073981734486016.

22. Kariuki, Twitter post, January 18, 2013, 6:05 pm, https://twitter.com/Chiefkariuki/ status/292452622387011585.

23. Kariuki, Twitter post, 6:59 pm, https://twitter.com/Chiefkariuki/ status/292466314373652481.

24. Kariuki, Twitter post, February 1, 2013, 8:09 am, https://twitter.com/Chiefkariuki/ status/297376145383510018.

25.   Kariuki,   Twitter   post,   8:20   am,   https://twitter.com/Chiefkariuki/
status/297378796913434625.

26.   Kariuki,   Twitter   post,   9:59   am,   https://twitter.com/Chiefkariuki/
status/297403759766683648.

27. Aschiefmaina, Twitter post, October 19, 2011, 9:23 am, https://twitter.com/Aschief
maina/status/126695023931699200.

28.   Aschiefmaina, Twitter post, October 26, 2011, 10:35 am, https://twitter.com/
Aschiefmaina/status/129249735512043520.

29. Kariuki, Twitter post, October 31, 2011, 11:32 am, https://twitter.com/Chiefkariuki/
status/131076115803553792.

30. Kariuki, Twitter post, January 17, 2013, 8:47 am, https://twitter.com/Chiefkariuki/
status/291949935362994177

31. Kariuki, Twitter post, January 17, 2013, 7:22 pm, https://twitter.com/Chiefkariuki/
status/292109571382718464. The unplanned geography of Lanet Umoja is a nightmare for
small kids on their way to or from school. Most of the kids reported lost have just missed
a path or two. Indeed, some respondents feel such posts might create the impression of
a crisis of stolen children. In fact, there has never been an instance of a "missing" child in
the true sense of the word.

32. Interview, Nakuru town, June 2014.

33. Focus group discussion, July 23, 2014.

34. Not his real name.

35. Interview with Chief Kariuki, Eldoret, August 2014.

36. Interview with Larry Madowo, *The Trend*, NTV, http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FD
CFnZnpfGQ.

37. Kariuki, Twitter post, June 19, 2011, 3:09 am, https://twitter.com/Chiefkariuki/
status/82389410573848576.

38. Kariuki, Twitter post, January 4, 2012, 8:50 am, https://twitter.com/Chiefkariuki/
status/154605618240569344.

39. Kariuki, Twitter post, December 27, 2011, 9:09 am, https://twitter.com/Chiefkariuki/
status/151711337024724992.

40. Kariuki, Twitter post, February 4, 2012, 9:42 pm, https://twitter.com/Chiefkariuki/
status/166033829587451904.

41. Kariuki, Twitter post, December 24, 2011, 10:44 pm, https://twitter.com/Chiefkariuki/status/150829281730232320.

42. Kariuki, Twitter post, December 31, 2011, 9:01 am, https://twitter.com/Chiefkariuki/status/153158918422528000.

43. Interview with Chief Kariuki, Nakuru town, June 23, 2014.

44. Interview, August 29, 2014.

45. Kariuki, Twitter post, May 1, 2012, 11:36 pm, https://twitter.com/Chiefkariuki/status/197575183962341376.

46. Phone numbers in this quote and the next have been redacted. The full numbers appear in the original tweets. Kariuki, Twitter post, December 29, 2012, 9:18 am, https://twitter.com/Chiefkariuki/status/285072302398394369.

47. Kariuki, Twitter post, January 10, 2013, 11:26 pm, https://twitter.com/Chiefkariuki/status/289634334460219392.

48. Interview, August 29, 2014.

49. Ibid.

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