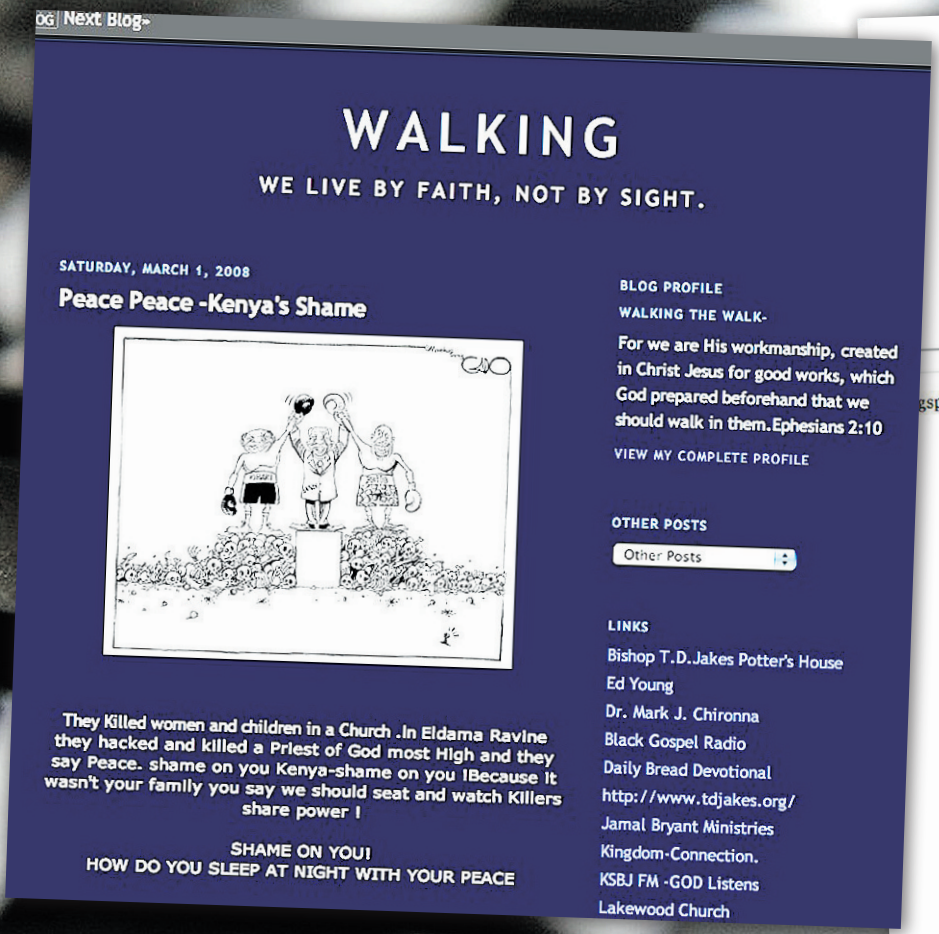


Kenyan run web logs (blogs) have existed for a while but were never more active than when Kenya was going through her crisis a couple of months ago. We interviewed some blog administrators about their sites and their roles in information dissemination, nation building, and truth telling. These are their stories



KENYAN BLOGGERS: DIGITAL ACTIVISTS OR DEADLY PROPAGANDISTS?

BY GRACE KERONGO

Kenya's Hitler! Exclusive: Secret plot for a coup! Military take over! No peace, no justice! Kill all the election thieves! Calling for a civil war! These were some of the many headlines on Kenyan blogs right after the elections last year. The period saw blogs segmenting into three major groups, the ODMers (die hard ODM supporters), the PNU bloggers and the impartial/neutral bloggers – who were very rare.

He clarified that the team of writers (who post articles on the blog) come from both sides of the political divide as well as very neutral persons who call themselves "horseless".

At a time when blogs were segmented into two, pro-government and pro-opposition, Kumekucha was seen as staunchly ODM, a claim that was hotly denied.

"We are a pro-reform blog. We usually look like we are leaning towards the political party we think is most likely to deliver change. The truth is, we hold nobody's brief except that of the ordinary folk of Kenya, the voiceless masses if you like."

The ride for the Kumekucha blogger has not been smooth. "I receive threats all the time. That is why I take my personal security very seriously."

On being regulated he said, "Governments are eager to regulate blogs and web sites. In a few years I am sure there will be all sorts of laws. It is never safe to blog from within the borders of one's own country."

He was quick to defend the blog against propaganda claims.

"I must admit that our big problem has been the comments (posted on the blog) from readers... some hate comments published in Kumekucha came from people who were upset, especially after the elections. But don't forget that with such a huge readership Kumekucha tends to mirror exactly what is going on the ground including what people are saying and feeling."

Kenyan Diaspora Pro-democracy Movement: geraldbaraza.blogspot.com

Gerald Baraza is a student and Officer in charge of Special Projects at the Grand Valley State University in Michigan. He runs the blog geraldbaraza.blogspot.com.

His was the first to post: "Kenya has a new President: Hon. Raila Amolo Odinga!"

He also claims that he predicted Kalonzo Musyoka's move to join the government as VP days before Kalonzo accepted the appointment.

Baraza accepted that some bloggers spewed vitriol during the post election period. "It is very true! Blogs were used to spread

propaganda. Some of it is very cheap and misleading."

As a staunch ODM supporter, Baraza was accused by his blog readers of "spreading hatred". To this he said, "I stand for justice. I stand for democracy and I stand for the truth. Like any other peace-loving and law-abiding Kenyan, I only spoke out against the election malpractices and those who were behind them. I have a right as a Kenyan to express my opinion and that is what I did."

Due to his straight shooting and liberal writing, Baraza received threats via email.

"My relatives and friends from Kenya and Europe called me and advised me to stop blogging because according to them, I was putting my life and the lives of my relatives at risk. My answer to them was that everything has a cost. If my life or that of a dear one was going to be taken because of me standing up for justice and democracy in Kenya, so be it."

Several of his American friends also advised him to stop using his real name.

Unlike most bloggers, Baraza chose to reveal his identity on the blog because, "I have not committed any crime. I have nothing to hide. If anything, I am aspiring to contest in Nambale in 2012 so I can't be hiding when I am a potential Member of Parliament."

Other Bloggers' Take on Politics and Censorship Kenyan Entrepreneur.

The kenyanentrepreneur.com focuses on small internet businesses, and frequently writes about business and economics in Africa and Kenya in particular.

"I was accused of being a counter-propagandist site for the Kibaki government, but I didn't view it that way. I think people on both sides of this crisis were very passionate about the issues and the

politician to sue for defamation. "I guess they can, if they can get the identity of the blogger. The thing is, how would they establish who publishes the blog? This is something one can delete anytime."

The Displaced Kenyan

Mwangi runs displacedkenyan.com, he is based in Melbourne, Australia. His blog was created during the post election violence but he steered clear of politics.

"The blogosphere definitely spread some hate, the place where hate was simply unavoidable was Mashada and Kumekucha. I fully understand why Kobia (Mashada

You Missed This: kumekucha.blogspot.com

Of all the controversial blogs, Kumekucha takes the trophy. The blogger behind it couldn't reveal his name or where he is based for security reasons, but only said, "I earn a living writing for other websites all over the world."

He went ahead to explain what his blog is about.

"Since inception Kumekucha's main

owner) had to shut the place down for a while, it all got a bit too much."

"There was a beautiful outpouring of love and support from sites such as Ushahidi.com, Mama Mikes, Operation Save Brian, IHaveNoTribe.com amongst others all came out of this tragedy. In addition to that, a lot of bloggers were willing to step up and talk about things like tribalism, class, wealth disparity and other issues that are really at the core of the crisis."

The rancorous chatter is still going in most blogs, which is made possible by the illusion of an impenetrable alias. One question though: if blogging reveals a blogger's honest opinion, what does that say about the quality of citizenry in Kenya and the Diaspora?

political analysts believe the power sharing arrangement can only come into effect if undertaken in tandem with constitutional reforms. The current constitution does not have a position for a minister.

And last evening, the European Union warned that it would not hesitate to take "stern action" against individuals perceived to be the stumbling block to the negotiations.

The EU stressed that it was watching the unfolding events in the country keenly and as parties to the outcome of the Annan sessions. President Kibaki, however, dispatched by the Presidential Press Service (PPS) soon after a meeting with the Harambee House, gave assurance that the government is supportive of the mediation.

"The current constitution must serve as a guide while the mediation team works on institutional reforms are needed to move the country forward," the PPS President.

He nevertheless expressed his willingness to

Girl in the meadow: sylkwan.blogspot.com

A Nairobi lawyer simply known as Shiroh owned the blog. She was a staunch Government supporter during the post election crisis.

As a practicing lawyer Shiroh says it would be impossible for a

TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 19, 2008

KENYA: THE PEACE-TALKS HAVE COLLAPSED! WHAT NEXT? TOTAL WAR!

Mediation efforts to resolve the post-election crisis are in danger of collapse after the government ruled out possibilities of sharing of power under the so-called grand coalition.

President Mwai Kibaki and MPs allied to his PNU party appeared to seal the fate of the power sharing arrangement when they insisted that "any political solution that will be proposed must be in tandem with the current Kenyan constitution."

The President's insistence on sticking to the constitution—a colonial-era treaty which both ODM and PNU agree is long overdue for reform—could block any special new arrangement to accommodate Raila Odinga's party which is pushing for the creation of the premier's post.

UNAFRAID: Gerald Baraza and his blog



SHOOT THE BASTARDS... AND SHOOT TO KILL: SOUTH AFRICAN MINISTER TELLS POLICE TO SHOW CRIMINALS NO MERCY

Police in South Africa have been ordered to deal with criminals by "killing the bastards".

Susan Shabangu, the country's security minister, told officers not to worry about regulations, negotiations or warning shots.

Instead, police should use the guns given to them and go for the kill.

South Africa has become the murder capital of the world with more than 22,000 deaths a year.

Rape, pistol-whipping and torture are commonplace.

Mrs Shabangu's comments came at a public meeting to discuss her government's response to soaring crime rates.

Aiming her words at police chiefs, she said of criminals: "You must kill the bastards if they threaten you or the community. You must not worry about the regulations - that is my responsibility. Your responsibility is to serve and protect."

"I want no warning shots. You have one shot and it must be a kill shot."

"Criminals are hell-bent on undermining the law and they must now be dealt with. End of story. There are to be no negotiations with criminals."

South Africans who can afford it live behind high walls and fences, with alarms and 24-hour guards to protect them against robbery or attack.

For every day in 2006-2007, the country saw 57 murders, 120 rapes and 37 carjackings. More than 150,000 criminals are behind bars.

Much of the lawlessness takes place in the townships surrounding major cities — with drugs, alcohol and unemployment often blamed.

In the past few years, the violence has spilled into suburbs and white areas. More than 100 policemen were shot dead last year, on and off duty.

Mrs Shabangu's outburst won a standing ovation from her audience in the capital, Pretoria.

Opposition MPs, however, called on President Thabo Mbeki to sack her.

Dianne Kohler Barnard, of Democratic Alliance, said: "The death rate is high and horrendous, but to listen to a rabble-raising politician is the last thing our police need."

The country's human rights commission also condemned Mrs Shabangu's remarks.



But Pieter Groenewald, of Freedom Front Plus, another opposition party, said criminals should no longer be handled with kid gloves.

Ryan Schnell, chairman of a community policing group in Durban, said: "If the life of a policeman is threatened in any way, they should shoot and the criminals must understand that they will be killed if they break the law."

Mrs Shabangu — a 52-year-old widow with three children — was raised in the infamous Soweto township outside Johannesburg.

She takes a hands-on role at her ministry and is a strong supporter of the country's 160,000 police.

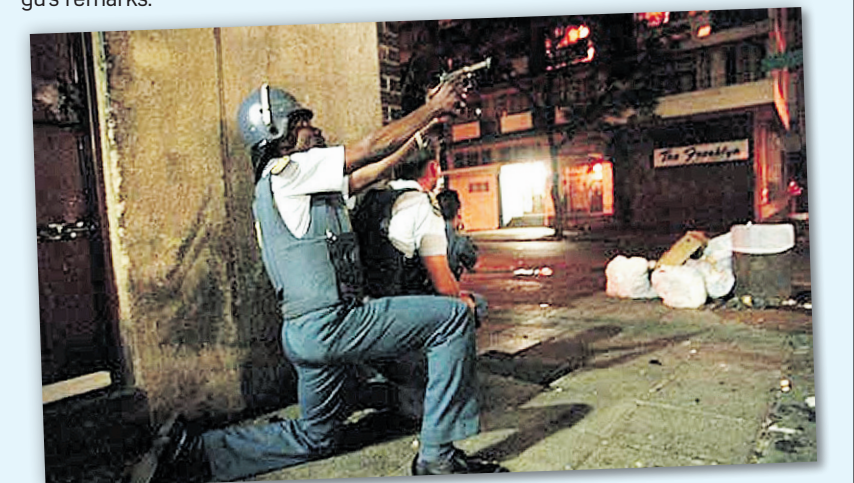
At the meeting, she said: "We need communities to get involved with us in order to restore law and order and in order for our country to have a future. If we don't, our children won't have a future."

"I won't tolerate any pathetic excuses for you not being able to deal with crime. You have been given guns, now use them."

Yesterday, Mrs Shabangu received backing from her immediate boss, safety and security minister Charles Nqakula.

Fano Makhathini, of the Police and Prison Union, said officers should not take the remarks as a licence to shoot randomly.

"Police must use firearms only when their lives are in danger — they cannot misuse them," he added.



UNFRIENDLY FIRE: Police in action in crime-ridden South Africa