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Gianluca Iazzolino and Nicole Stremlau

Comparative analysis of political  
communication and media strategies in  
conflict

March 2017

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Comparative analysis of political communication and media strategies in conflict

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## Executive Summary

This paper examines how political authorities communicate with one another and to their constituencies during democratisation conflicts in Kenya, South Africa and Serbia. By adopting a comparative perspective, it aims to situate the logics and practices of political communication in the broader political and socio-cultural milieu in which they originate and are deployed. It also discusses how narratives and ideologies inform the strategies deployed in the conflict, the role of old and new media as it emerges from both the interviewees' expectations and experience, and what the gap between these two tells us about the transformations that ICTs are prompting in political communication:

- A common feature of the conflicts is that they are all seen as a contemporary reflection of underlying tensions and deep-seated frustrations rooted in inequalities and unresolved issues that predate democratic transition: the end of the Milošević's regime in Serbia, Independence in the case of Kenya, and the end of Apartheid in South Africa.
- In each case, framing the past sets the stage for interpreting the current situation and building a vision of the future. The source of legitimacy of the parties involved in the conflicts is, in some cases, placed in transcendent values (such as Serbian identity, Christian norms, Ubuntu) or "the rule of law".
- Democratisation appears as an unfinished process in the three countries, as the tensions between more authoritarian structures of power and institutions based on representative democracy are brought to the fore. Moreover, media outlets emerge as actors with their own agenda. Market pressures not only test the boundaries of quality journalism, but also force politicians and state authorities to compete for limited attention by using increasingly polarising tones and arguments.

The comparative analysis also offers a glimpse into the use of social media for mobilising supporters online and reflecting many of the themes in the mass media, including the reproduction of forms of patronage and political co-option, while also posing new questions about greater citizen participation and spaces for public authorities to 'listen' to grassroots constituencies.

# 1. Introduction

This paper examines how political authorities communicate with one another and to their constituencies in situations of democratisation conflict in Kenya, South Africa and Serbia<sup>1</sup>. By adopting a comparative perspective, it aims to situate the logic and practices of political communication in the broader political and socio-cultural milieu in which they originate and are deployed. The underlying assumption is that the study of forms of engagement between leaders and the citizens in fragile democratic settings reveals underlying ideas of power and participation. It also discusses how narratives and ideologies inform the strategies deployed by the different actors involved in the conflict, the role of old and new media as it emerges from both the interviewees' expectations and experience, and what the gap between these two tells us about the transformations that ICTs are inducing in political communication. The first part of this paper explains the methodology used to collect the data and presents the conflict cases by country. The second part delves into the findings, divided into the seven sections, each focusing on a topic that recurs throughout the conflict under examination. We begin by focusing on the significance of the past as a source of political legitimacy within conflicts. We consider how the narratives used by the conflicting parties in each case studies make sense of the relationship of the country vis-à-vis the rest of the world. We examine the values and the ideologies at the centre of the political discourse and, next, how grievances are leveraged to mobilise supporters. Then, we discuss the strategies used by the parties to get their messages across and we look at the role of the media, focusing on the significance of social media.

<b>Country</b>	<b>Distribution and control of power</b>	<b>Citizenship</b>	<b>Elections</b>	<b>Transitional justice</b>
Kenya		Somali community (2013-2015)	Elections 2007, 2013	Kenyatta ICC
Serbia	Ombudsman (2015)	Pride Parade (2010)	Elections 2008	Milošević/The Hague (2001)
South Africa	Service delivery protests (Balfour 2009, 2010; Zamdela 2012-13); State of the Nation Address (2015)	Xenophobic violence		

<sup>1</sup> Due to the current political and security situation in Egypt, the country team encountered unforeseen issues during the data collection.

## 1.1. Serbia

The fragmentation of Yugoslavia in the early 1990s and the ensuing outbreak of a civil war in the Balkans strengthened the authoritarian rule of Slobodan Milošević, which ended in October 2000, in what Serbian nationalists call the October coup. The Democratic Opposition, supported by the civil society, had a key role in toppling Milošević but later split over the future of the country between a nationalist wing led by Vojislav Koštunica, and a liberal wing led by Zoran Đinđić. Koštunica went to become president of Yugoslavia and then Prime Minister of Serbia, while Đinđić was assassinated in 2003. However, the tensions between nationalist and liberal positions continued to define alliances and rivalries across the political spectrum, particularly as the extradition of Milošević and the Independence of Kosovo appeared to be the price to pay to advance the integration process within the EU. Serbian political landscape became increasingly polarised between anti- and pro-EU supporters. The themes recurrent throughout the Serbian case studies are thus the relation with the past, the subordination of the legislative and judiciary to the executive, with implications for media independence and freedom of speech in general, and the preservation of Serbian values and (imagined) identity.

**The Milošević ICTY Trial** - The arrest of former Yugoslavia's President Slobodan Milošević and his extradition to the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia in The Hague in 2001 sowed divisions at the institutional level and sparked a heated debate among Serbian public opinion. The controversy mostly pitted those supporting the decision against those claiming that the former head of state should be tried in Serbia, with nationalist groups calling for granting Milošević total immunity (Vltner and Kraetzschmar, 2015). A more pragmatic approach saw the Milošević trial as a necessary reckoning moment to leave the past behind and advance Serbia's membership application to the European Union (Dzihic and Wieser 2011; Jou 2010).

**The 2008 Election** - The 2008 elections revolved around two emotionally charged topics: the unilateral declaration of Independence of Kosovo, and the EU integration process. The two issues were interwoven, as the first one was portrayed as the price to pay to muster international support, particularly by the US, for EU integration, akin to the conflict over Milošević's extradition to The Hague. However, Serbian nationalists,

who continued to see Kosovo as a breakaway province of Serbia, re-cast the election as a struggle over national sovereignty.

**The Pride Parade of October 2010** - These themes emerged clearly during the public debate ahead and in the aftermath of the LGBT Pride Parade held in October 2010 in Belgrade and marred by the violent protests of right-wing nationalists (Voltmer and Kraetzschmar, 2015). The opposition to the Pride was multi-layered, and saw radical nationalists colluding with the Serbian Orthodox Church in portraying LGBT activists as “part of a foreign assault on the nation” (Gould and Moe 2015: 275). This narrative re-cast homosexuality as part of a “project of national genocide” advanced by Western liberal democracies. As evidence of this foreign plot to undermine alleged Serbian traditional values, Serbian nationalists pointed at the support for the Parade expressed by Western diplomats.

**Ombudsman** - The office of the Ombudsman was established with the mission to hold state administration bodies to account and Saša Janković, a prosecutor, was appointed at its helm. As ‘Protector of the Citizens’, Janković came into direct confrontation with the government and its allies first in the aftermath of the 2014 LGBT Pride Parade, as the Ombudsman had to file criminal reports against two military police officers accompanying Andrej Vucic, the Serbian Prime Minister’s brother, and Predrag Mali, the brother of the mayor of Belgrade. The fraught relation between the Ombudsman and the state apparatus further deteriorated in 2015 as Janković started to scrutinise the Military Security Agency and the tight connections between its top officers and the government. As a result, Janković became the object of a smear campaign orchestrated by two media outlets, Informer and Pink, both linked to the ruling party, which devoted headlines to the suicide of a friend of Janković, which happened a decade earlier, disseminating innuendos that the same Janković might have had a role in the death of his friend. The campaign, launched to delegitimise Janković, and through him the very office of the Ombudsman, polarised the Serbian public opinion and brought to the fore, at the same time, the resistance of the government to any form of accountability on the one hand and the ‘weaponization’ of the media to screen state and security apparatuses – both staffed by officers from the Milošević era – from scrutiny.

## 1.2. Kenya

Looking at it topically, the conflicts investigated in Kenya appear to be revolving around distinct issues: post-electoral violence in one case and minority targeting in the other. The former refers to the unrest that marred the aftermath of the 2007 political elections, which prompted the International Criminal Court to launch an investigation into the responsibilities of high-profile political figures (including President Uhuru Kenyatta) for stoking the violence, and raised the tension ahead of the 2013 elections, which eventually unfolded peacefully; the latter is centred on the security crackdown ordered by the Kenyan authorities on alleged sympathisers of the Somali-based militant group Al Shabab, and targeting, in particular, the large Somali community in the country, encompassing both Kenyan citizens of Somali origin and Somali refugees. However, as it will be discussed later, several interviewees established a link between the cases under examination, suggesting a vested interest of the Kenyan authorities in embracing 'War on Terror' rhetoric and policies to divert international scrutiny from the political responsibilities of the post-electoral violence. The picture emerging from the analysis of the 2007/2013 elections, of the ICC investigation into the alleged role of President Uhuru Kenyatta and of the Somali security crackdown thus stands against a common background tracing back to Independence and shaped by unresolved governance challenges between the central and the local administrations (Hope, 2014); entrenched inequalities due to pervasive forms of state capture (Bedasso, 2015); and disputes around citizenship and national identity at the core of the Kenyan state-building process and reflecting the fraught relationship between the Kenyan state and, at the same time, its Somali population and its most troublesome regional neighbour, Somalia (Chau, 2010; Lochery, 2012; Burbidge, 2015).

**Election conflict 2007/2008** - Several studies have highlighted the multi-layered nature of the political violence that engulfed Kenya in the aftermath of the 2007 elections, causing the death of over 1,400 people and the displacement of hundreds of thousands (ICG, 2008). In the weeks following the proclamation of the incumbent president Mwai Kibaki over the rival Raila Odinga, suspicions of electoral fraud acted as a catalyst for the eruption of hostilities deeply entrenched in the post-colonial order and based on the unequal distribution of resources across ethnic and geographic lines (Republic of Kenya, 2008). Media, particularly vernacular radios, have been widely

held responsible for 'fuelling the flames' (Osborn, 2008; Abdi and Deane, 2008) by spreading inflammatory rumours. However, the proliferation of militias, the weakening of local institutions by a centralised executive dominated by the presidency and a winner-take-all attitude ingrained in political parties driven by ethnic clientelism (Mueller, 2015), are all factors pointing at leadership failures in some cases and at the cynical use of violence to leverage one's political influence at the negotiation table in others.

**The 2013 Elections** - The memory of the unrests loomed over the country as it went back to the ballots in 2013. Despite renewed fears of vote rigging, international pressure to ensure the peaceful unfolding of the elections pushed Kenyan leaders to take a clear stance on political violence. At the same time, media outlets played a very different role than the previous time, embracing a 'peace narrative' that, while hailing democratic values and championing national unity, toned down the debate on contentious topics, but often at the expense of free speech. (Cheeseman et al. 2014). As a result, key issues that had sparked violence in 2007 and in other elections beforehand have remained unsolved, leaving open the possibility of future violence (Halakhe, 2013: 6).

**The Kenyatta ICC Trial 2014** - Another fallout of the 2007 elections that played a role in 2013 was the investigation of the International Criminal Court (ICC) into the responsibilities for stoking the post-election violence. Although it is hard to tell whether the investigation acted as a deterrent for fresh unrests, the topic polarised public opinion, being seen through the lens of national politics rather than international justice as the ICC put under scrutiny a number of high profile politicians, including the front-runner candidate Uhuru Kenyatta and his running mate William Ruto. Political and media criticisms to the ICC investigation and to the Kenyan organisations that backed it escalated during the campaign. After the victory of Kenyatta and Ruto, most politicians and media outlets withdrew their support to the prosecutors, who also blamed Kenyan authorities for their lack of collaboration and for the intimidation and bribing of witnesses (Gustaffson, 2016).

**Somali conflict** - The history of the Somali community in Kenya is one of state violence, political marginalisation and recent economic success. Mostly concentrated

in the North Eastern Province (NEP), Somalis have seen their irredentist aspirations and their insurgency to become part of Somalia crushed by the Kenyan state in the aftermath of Independence. The inflows of refugees from Somalia after the collapse of the Somali state in 1991 created a humanitarian economy in Kenya that ended up benefitting also Somali Kenyans, as illustrated by the rise of business hubs such as the one in the Nairobi's neighbourhood of Eastleigh. Also, the arrival of hundreds of thousands of refugees brought to the fore the multifaceted reality of the Somali community, in which both clan and class dynamics shape group identities.

The ICC investigation unfolded against a background characterised by the threats of terror attacks. The rise of al-Shabaab in Somalia had an impact on the popular perception of Somalis in Kenya. Increasing insecurity in the borderlands and in the humanitarian facilities foreshadowed the risk of a spill-over of the Somali conflict into Kenya. In October 2011, the Kenyan government launched Operation Linda Nchi (Protect the Country), officially to strike al-Shabaab strongholds in southern Somalia and prevent terrorist infiltrations. Instead, the operation achieved the opposite, triggering a spike in terror attacks claimed by al-Shabaab in the Kenya-Somalia borderland areas and in Nairobi, and fuelling suspicions of the Somali refugee population, particularly in urban centres. Although the Somali community in Kenya has suffered harassment from security forces since Independence, the period following the launch of the Operation Linda Nchi saw a spike in the number of reported abuses (Teff and Yarnell, 2013). Over the next two years, major terror attacks (particularly the raid of the upscale Westgate shopping mall in Nairobi) fuelled ethnic profiling of the Somali population (HRW, 2014). Stoking pre-existing communal tensions, particularly in the coastal region, the security crackdown escalated between March and April 2014 when the government launched the Operation Usalama Watch (Peace Watch). Over 4,000 people were arrested in the course of a massive security swoop across Kenya, punctuated by gross violations of human rights and eventually ineffective to curb the violence, as was illustrated by large-scale attacks staged, allegedly by Al Shabaab, in the NEP.

### 1.3. South Africa

Following the end of white minority rule and the first democratic elections held in April 1994, South Africa witnessed a period of profound changes at both social and political levels. As the main force behind the anti-Apartheid struggle and the party of the icon of democracy and national reconciliation, Nelson Mandela and the African National Congress (ANC) catalysed popular hopes and expectations, claiming the role of the main architect of the New South Africa and, as such, winning the support of the voters at the ballot box. Political and media actors contributed to forging narratives of social justice to bridge racial divides and class inequalities. Significant rates of economic growth during the 1990s and early 2000s underpinned the aspirations of a marginalised population, who saw in the end of political disenfranchisement also an opportunity for economic empowerment. However, these expectations were increasingly betrayed by widespread corruption, state capture and growing inequalities. The emergence of a black elite stood in contrast with the dire conditions in which large swathes of the population continued to live, both in the cities' townships and rural areas (Bond, 2011). As the national economy started losing momentum in 2008, the rise of Jacob Zuma to the presidency further undermined the moral authority of the ANC and accelerated the fragmentation of the South African society. Social conflicts were exacerbated by a crisis of political representation, with the partial exception of workers' unions and community leaders. As anger and frustration mounted among the poorest segments of the population, protests against local administrations and the scapegoating of foreign workers intensified.

**Community protests** - Popular protests and workers' struggles have not only been instrumental to the end of Apartheid, but have also actively shaped South African politics after 1994, as the ANC governments, under the pressure of international donors, increasingly steered the country towards neo-liberal policies (Alexander 2010; Ballard et al. 2005; Pithouse 2008). As argued by Alexander and Pfaffe (2013), South Africa's local mobilisations – or, in their words, 'rebellions of the poor' – largely relied on the organisational skills of experienced unions' cadres, who helped direct grassroots actions towards the demand of service delivery. This kind of protest, which intensified from 2005 onwards, addressed material needs such as water, electricity and housing but underscored deeper anxieties related to social and political exclusion.

**Xenophobia** - Similar anxieties were compounded by a deteriorating economic situation and created the breeding ground for a wave of xenophobic violence. Attacks against foreign workers and entrepreneurs and their property increased in number since 2000 onward and reached a peak in 2008 and 2015.

**The 2015 State of the Nation Address** - As the government became enmeshed in multiple corruption scandals, new political subjects, such as the Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF) led by Julius Malema, emerged to challenge the dominant position of the ANC. In particular, the EFF seized the opportunity offered by the outrage over the alleged diversion of state funds to pay for Jacob Zuma's private residence (Beresford 2015) and disrupted the 2015 State of the Nation address (SONA), urging the President to 'pay back the money' (Voltmer and Kraetzschmar 2015a).

## 2. Methodology

### 2.1. Description of sample

The sample of the interviewees included government officials and political and community leaders involved in the conflicts under study. Some leaders perceived themselves as activists and, in several cases, political authorities made it clear that they were speaking without consent from their organisation. The interviews were conducted face-to-face and, when possible, they were audio-recorded.

The dataset (of Work Package 6 in the original project design) consists of material collected in 51 interviews which were conducted in the four countries: 10 interviews in Egypt<sup>2</sup>, 22 interviews in Kenya, 19 interviews in Serbia and 16 interviews in South Africa (see detailed lists in Appendix 1). In total, the sample builds on 46 hours and 09 minutes of interview conversation (11h and 03 minutes in Egypt, 11 hours and 15 minutes in Kenya, 15 hours and 30 minutes in Serbia and 8 hours and 21 minutes in South Africa).

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<sup>2</sup> At the moment of writing, the interviews conducted by the Egyptian research team had not been translated and coded yet.

The interviewed government authorities and political and community leaders were selected according to their involvement in the conflicts in each of the three countries. Although leaders may play a critical role both in fuelling and mitigating tensions in conflicts, for obvious reasons all interviewees emphasised their commitment to democratic values.

The interviewees were asked to describe their communication strategies through which they got their messages across, the narratives they embraced and the values underpinning their political views. They were also asked to reflect on their relationship with the media and on their capacity to identify stresses and potential for violence, including through 'listening' to citizens. The interviewees were selected according to the overall sampling strategy that was agreed upon by the MeCoDEM consortium and indicated in the research plan. There was a rigorous discussion about whether to include only formal or also informal leaders and, based on the specific features of the fields of investigation, we decided on a combined approach. Although the initial focus was on government authorities, we realised that, in order to understand top-down volatile communication contexts, we needed to consider leaders both *de jure* and *de facto*, and, therefore, we included in our sample also community and religious leaders.

## 2.2. Techniques of data collection and data analysis

The research was based on qualitative, semi-structured interviews in order to explore an interviewee's point of view in detail. Qualitative interviews were based on an interview guide to ensure that all topics are covered, but makes allowance for probing topics that had not been anticipated or need further questioning. The interview guide starts with a basic checklist of information that could be analysed to get an overview of the demographics of participants, their position within organisations, etc. All interviewees completed a questionnaire to provide key demographic data in order to collect a general picture of the interviewees' personal and professional backgrounds. Data was also collected on interviewees' personal involvement in each conflict case, the structure of their organisation and strategies for mobilisation, internal and external communication, relationship with and views of mainstream media, and values and objectives.

The interviews were preceded by a reconstruction of the selected democratisation conflict in order to clarify the interviewee's involvement in the conflicts. The reconstruction was in most cases helped by articles and photos to trigger the interviewees' 'retrospective introspection'.

### 2.3. Data analysis and ethics

The data collection was carried out according to the ethical standards defined by the MeCoDEM guidelines. Interviewees were given the option to remain anonymous and data was encrypted. The interview guide explained the aim of each question. Research documents were accurately translated into local languages where required. The research instruments were all tested in four pilot interviews, one conducted in each country. Amendments to phrasing and sequence of questions were made based on the findings of the pilot interviews. Each country team entered their data in an NVivo coding template. An integrated dataset was then developed incorporating data from three countries.

### 2.4. Data management

Interviews were recorded, transcribed and (in the case of Serbia and Egypt) translated into English. In order to ensure consistency for transcription and translation across countries, we used the transcription and translation manual that was developed during earlier stages in the project. All material relevant to the interviews was uploaded to the relevant space on the University of Leeds N:drive server space, and stored here in line with MeCoDEM's ethical guidelines on data security. The material includes: Interview transcripts (both the originals and English versions); Scanned questionnaires; The reconstruction material which was used in the course of the interviews based on the reconstructive approach: Audio files of interviews; Signed consent forms; documents related to the organisations of the political authority, such as annual reports, pamphlets, placards, etc.

### 2.5. Description of the NVivo dataset

In order to build a consistent and structured integrated dataset, which can be used for analysis, NVivo software was used in line with the procedure followed during earlier

stages (WP5). The country teams prepared single NVivo datasets for their respective country based on a template and additional instructions provided by the University of Oxford team. After the single datasets were finalised by the country teams, they were compiled into one integrated dataset by the University of Oxford team. Both single datasets and the integrated dataset have been uploaded to the N:drive.

The NVivo dataset (a) includes all material relevant for the analysis of the interviews. Thus, anonymised interview transcripts, as well as questionnaires and reconstruction, have been imported as sources into the NVivo project. To ensure consistency within the data, the documents have been named according to the following scheme: WP6\_Country\_Interview[number]\_Transcript/Reconstruction/Questionnaire

Moreover, the dataset (b) provides structured data, organised around certain criteria: Specifically, the material has been organised dependent on which participant they belong to. In addition, given the MeCoDEM case study approach and the research focus, the material has been organised dependent on the conflict cases it refers to as well as on the topics that are raised in the interview. Thus, the NVivo dataset already included the first step of coding and serves as an important basis for the in-depth analysis of data later on.

### **3. Findings**

#### 3.1. Framing the past

As Voltmer and Kraetzschmar (2015) remind us, ‘democratisation conflicts are not only about the future, but also about the past’ [11]. Interpretations of historical events, related to the transition from the previous regime to democracy and to the foundation of the local political institutions, reverberate not only on conflicting agendas, but also on the visions of the place that the country should occupy in the world and of its future trajectories. Communicative practices are thus crucial to craft and propagate narratives of the past that legitimate present discourses and political strategies and enable citizens to make sense of the struggles that the conflicting parties are waging. It is significant that reflections on the past, and on its importance to understanding current events, are dominant in the interviews to political authorities in Serbia, where the

aftermaths of the Balkan wars in the 1990s and the traumatic events that led and followed the ousting of Milošević are still a controversial and very divisive issue.

The past is at the centre of contested interpretations that define political identities and drive collective action. Take, for example, the extradition of Milošević to the International Criminal Court in The Hague. There is large consensus on the fact that the decision was the only way to put the past behind – or to ‘clear up the political scene’ [16], acknowledging the political significance of the trial and even drawing analogies with the Nuremberg trial [16]. It was a reckoning moment, which symbolised a cut with the past in the eyes of both Serbians and the international community. An interviewee recalled the event, which polarised national public opinion, in almost metaphysical terms, as a decision to ‘tame’ the domestic forces that acted against ‘us’ [16] – referring, with the term ‘forces’, to the aggressive nationalism spawned by the regime’s incendiary rhetoric, consolidated during the Balkan wars and aggrieved after NATO stopped Serbia’s campaign in Kosovo. On the contrary, when speaking about the ICC case against Milošević, radical and nationalist leaders embraced conspiracy theories according to which the Democratic Opposition of Serbia was a product of those intelligence services ‘that dismantled ex-Yugoslavia’ [4] and ‘the west financed and insisted on that revolution that overthrew Milošević in October’ [7] – what Serbian nationalists call ‘the Fifth of October coup’, while pro-democracy activists call ‘the October Revolution’.

The past is also a prism through which to look at contemporary events and future challenges and the place where an injustice is rooted and suffered by the community, either national or ethnic, and whose repercussions are still felt today. This is the case, for instance, for the conflict erupted in the aftermath of the 2007 Kenyan political elections. The interviewees generally agreed on the fact that the alleged rigging of the 2007 elections was the kindling that sparked deep-seated tensions. Grievances tracing back to Independence were mentioned as the underlying cause and the post-election violence related to large unequal allocation of resources, starting with land. Indeed, the epicentre of the post-election violence was the Rift Valley, the most fertile area of the country. Following Independence in 1963, Kenya’s first President Jomo Kenyatta favoured his tribe, the Kikuyu, to repossess the land previously owned by British colonialists at the expense of other ethnic communities [9]. Although elite pacts

encompassing leaders of different tribes have characterised Kenyan post-colonial history (Bedasso, 2015), Kenyan political parties have maintained a clear ethnic connotation, with the ruling Party of National Unity (PNU) associated to Kikuyus and the main opposition party Orange Democratic Movement (ODM) associated with Luo's. Thus, there is a widespread awareness, among the interviewees, that tribal identification largely shapes political affiliation. This acknowledgement is generally underpinned by two complementing ideas: on the one hand, that the identification with specific ethnic communities is strengthened by the sharing of similar grievances, on the other, that political leaders, to a different extent, mobilise tribal identities during elections. The elections were thus seen as an opportunity to challenge entrenched relations of power and reverse the status quo, claiming back 'Haki yetu, Haki Yetu - Our right our right', as outraged citizens chanted in the streets of Nairobi after the incumbent president Mwai Kibaki, a Kikuyu, was announced as winner amidst fraud allegations [11].

The legacy of the past, with its unresolved issues, also looms over the South African cases. As in the Serbian and the Kenyan case, the conflicts here examined were largely seen as triggered by the contingent event but reveal pre-existing tensions fuelled by inequality and marginalisation. This was particularly evident in the case of service delivery protests, multi-layered and multifaceted conflicts driven either by grassroots movements' claims to rights, such as land or services, or by local leaders vying for dominant positions in communities. The boundaries between these two forms of protest are blurred, but both build upon an underlying anger against a wider economic conjuncture [7]. As an interviewee put it:

It isn't necessarily they have a problem with a, b or c. they're angry about the general situation... And they articulate their anger at the broader socio-economic position through a protest march on the specific issue. [7]

At the origin of the anger, interviewees recognised multiple causes related to unresolved issues from the Apartheid era. Some leaders attributed this frustration to the gradual deterioration of the relationship between the ANC and its constituency, leading to periodic flare-ups of violence. Service conflicts intensified during local government elections as they merged with strikes organised by civil servant unions. Municipal workers leveraged 'the sensitivity around the elections and the fact that the

ruling party wanted peace and calm during the election process' to get their demands met by the government. In that case, the ANC was simultaneously the employer and a target of broader grievances, which have been exacerbated since 2008. The service delivery protests expressed a brewing anger against the inability of the ANC to bringing development because of gatekeeper politics (Beresford, 2015), thus betraying the legacy of the anti-Apartheid struggle.

### 3.2. 'Us' vs 'the west'

Another theme recurring throughout the interviews and shaping the narratives of the opposing parties is the position of the country vis-à-vis the rest of the world, often 'the west'. The conflicts under examination reveal an underlying tension between openness and closure, or, to say it better, between a positive and a zero-sum game view of international relations. In Serbia, the possibility of EU integration was interpreted by some as a step forward to leave the past behind, while, for others, was paramount of relinquishing national sovereignty. While for democracy activists the extradition of Milošević to The Hague and the Independence of Kosovo were the price to pay to introduce a new Serbia to the rest of the world, meaning particularly the EU and US, nationalist politicians did not hide their mistrust of Western interference, regarding the whole democratisation process as a decoy to further emasculate Serbia. As a nationalist politician suggested:

I think that democracy is just a cover for some other interests, and the interest I am talking about is the interest of conquering foreign lands. Slobodan warned of this. We are currently in the process of being conquered. [4]

This 'siege mentality' is a staple fixture of right-wing movements (Holbrooke, 2013; Šram and Dulić, 2015), and is directly linked to the paranoia derived by the perceived threat to the national integrity. Kosovo was thus framed as a battle for the soul of Serbia, as, in the word of a right-wing politician, Kosovo is 'the heart of Serbia' and the 'cradle of Serbian civilisation' [6]. This anxiety was largely kept at bay by the prospect of EU annexation, at least until 2008, when the process of reckoning with the past was increasingly portrayed in public discourses as a wound to national pride, a violence imposed from the outside with no benefits in return as the EU continued to drag its feet over the integration process. Nationalist politicians saw the arrest and the extradition

of Milošević and the unilateral declaration of Independence of Kosovo as a way to appease the international community and as another example of violated national sovereignty, carried out against the law [14]. This was done despite deep disagreements within the government. In 2008, the general frustration due to the impending economic crisis was compounded by widespread disillusionment because of the lack of progress in EU integration [17]. The 2008 elections were framed as a conflict to protect Serbia's national sovereignty against Western influence [3]. As one right-wing politician said:

those parties are nothing more but political puppets of the west, and they understand the political struggle and the act of ruling only as a means of serving the interests of the European Union and as a means of fulfilling the goals of the European Union, or the United States. [6]

'Respect' is a recurrent term in the interviews with radical politicians, and the evidence of the lack of respect of foreign power towards Serbia is seen in both the alleged attempts to disintegrate Serbia by decreasing 'the size of Serbian territory to the size of Belgrade and the surrounding region' [6], and in anecdotes such as the one according to which an American ambassador would 'visit the Serbian Government dressed in his tennis clothes and in his shorts, as if he is the boss who owns the place' [6]. Being supported by Western diplomats, the LGBT Parade epitomised, in the eyes of the 'First Serbia', a further blow to Serbian political sovereignty and cultural identity. Although right-wing politicians were accused of advancing an 'isolationist' agenda that would take the country back to the Nineties [5], the issue was really about which international community each party was referring to. In fact, Russia, with its Slavic cultural roots and its restrictive laws against the 'public display' of homosexuality, was seen as a natural point of reference by those who saw LGBT rights as at odds with the imagined Serbian identity [15]. Also, the Ombudsman was framed by nationalists and pro-government media outlets as the imposition of institutions and values foreign to the Serbian political system and culture [2]. An interviewee, for instance, recalls how:

during one public debate one editor-in-chief of a pro-regime media outlet exhausted herself trying to explain to me how we imported the Ombudsman as an institution from Scandinavia, and she claimed that this was some fancy modern thing that we didn't need: 'Why would we have to look up to some, I don't know, Scandinavians? I mean, why should they be so important that we have to look up to them?' [10]

The case of Kenya is different – historically a strategic ally of the West and a major recipient of official development aid foreign direct investments in East Africa. The 2007-2008 post-election violence marred Kenya's reputation among international partners as a beacon of political stability, however misplaced this assumption was. In 2007, the presence of international election observers did not prevent the riots from happening. As Cheeseman et al. (2014) suggest, by questioning the election results, the EU observers induced the defeated candidate Raila Odinga to think that he would have international support if he led, or however subtly encouraged, the protest of his followers – it was a path with disastrous consequences. In 2013, international donors made plain their concern about a repeat of violence, thus adding pressure on political actors to guarantee a peaceful election. A widely-held opinion among the interviewees was that the ICC investigation into the responsibilities for the previous election violence, and associated perceptions of international interference, contributed to forging the alliance between two leading political figures, Uhuru Kenyatta and William Ruto, thus defusing the risk of conflict between their respective ethnic communities (Kikuyu and Kalenjin). The attitude towards international partners emerging from the interviews does not reveal any specific polemical overtone but is surprisingly constrained given public statements about western interference and western NGOs often made by politicians. Interestingly, when discussing the security crackdown on the Somali refugee population in Kenya, some interviewees argued that Kenya had already proven a commitment to its humanitarian duties and now it was time for the foreign countries to take their fair share of the burden. There was an urging for greater western involvement, perhaps reflecting strong benefits (including financial as well as a willingness to temper criticism of domestic issues such as human rights) of security partnerships with the US, UK and EU, that the Kenyan government received. As a government officer explained:

What we have done by announcing the process and going to media and interview is that we have put the plight of the Somali refugees in front of the world ... This is a big problem that requires the entire world to work together in repatriating the Somalis... we are happy that the world has woken up to the plight of the Somali refugees. It would not be good to let them continue staying there after 25 years in deplorable conditions if there is a better alternative which is resettling them in their own country. There they can start building permanent structures and not living in tents. [20]

Surprisingly, some of the South African interviewees also appeared to echo some of the concerns of Serbian nationalists, wondering whether the democratic model championed by Western representative democracies was also a viable example for the South African context. This argument expresses the scepticism against universal definitions of democracy, suggesting instead that 'Western-style democracy' should be 'Africanised'. But while from Serbian interviews this mistrust appears directly linked to the siege paranoia that portrays democracy as a 'Trojan horse' to further erode Serbian national sovereignty, South African interviewees emphasise the importance of cultural norms that should be taken into account and integrated within democratic institutions. As an ANC communication officer pointed out:

Democracy itself is (...) not an African concept. Democracy obviously has to be Africanised. It has to be integrated into the African cultural systems. For instance, when we say we have overhauled the rules for the first time since 1994 we are talking of moving away from Westminster style type of parliament and to a truly South African/African parliament.

This argument is particularly effective to legitimise patron-client relations and the claim that leaders should be exempted from scrutiny. This topic will be discussed further below. However, it is worth noting that at the centre of criticism there are particularly Western notions of separation of powers and mechanisms of check and balance, ideally to stem authoritarian tendencies, that should be adapted to 'African' norms of respect [13], according to which:

you don't call an elderly person with his or her first name it doesn't matter the disagreement that you have. But in our setup here in South Africa, you will find a young boy calling even the president of this country by his first name. I don't agree with Zuma, I don't like his ethics but we are not at the same age and I can still pursue my position effectively without belittling him.

These debates are occurring in the context of widespread and significant student protests, including calls for 'decolonizing' universities, transforming curricula away from more western-centric literature towards more African rooted scholarship. There are also increasing pressures on the executive, with calls for President Jacob Zuma to resign over corruption allegations and abuse of power.

### 3.3. Values and ideologies

As suggested above, narratives are underpinned by a complex interweaving of systems of values and vested interests. In particular, the thread running through the interviews in all the cases under examination is the tension between inward and outward tendencies. In Serbia, this clash of values was particularly evident in the case of the LGBT Pride, seen by many as a powerful watershed between “two Serbias”, or what is also called The First Serbia and The Second Serbia. The former is, as one interviewee described, ‘the one that supported Slobodan Milošević and Vojislav Šešelj and which is against the EU and the West and so on, and which was the majority in the nineties’, while the latter is identified by the support to the accession to the European Union ‘and some Western values, democracy and so on’ [15].

The LGBT parade was seen as an arena in which two groups of ‘external influence clashed... we had a group of states which supported one side, and on the other hand a group of states which supported the other side. So, the influence of the international community was naturally there’ [15]. The reference here was to the values embodied by the EU and the West in general and those championed by an ideal Slavic and Orthodox community whose leading proponent was Russia, a country with a poor record when it comes to LGBT rights. This contributed to defining the positions in terms of Pro-European and anti-European [3]. Some identified themselves as anti-globalist, rejecting the idea of Serbia joining the European Union, but advocating an equal footing with other European countries [6]. Another right wing politician related the protest of LGBT Pride to a broader battle against a degradation of traditional values perceived as spreading on a global scale. The opposition to the LGBT Pride was thus seen as just another front in a broader battle against a world in which ‘everything is soft, wavy and fluid, even borders and human and minority rights. Everything can be brought into question and there are no rules that we strictly abide by’ [3]. The same interviewee, though, identified a precise political strategy behind this cultural battle on a global scale, arguing that ‘behind all of this, the United States is pulling the strings’ [3]. The opposition to the LGBT Pride reflected a deeper rejection of ‘the devastating effects of the so-called transition that began in the year 2000’ [6], and, more broadly, of ‘values to Serbia that are not entirely acceptable in the context of our society’ brought by ‘globalism and the EU integration process’ [18].

While Serbian nationalism emerges from the interviews as a response to a momentous transformation that is seen as, at the same time, jeopardising a system of values ingrained in an imagined collective identity and humiliating national sovereignty, in Kenya the situation is different. Identity politics based on tribe, is unanimously rebuked as a backwards relic undermining Kenyan democracy, national unity and peaceful coexistence. Although tribes are recognised as the bricks of Kenyan national identity, and the loci in which forms of solidarity emerge and are cultivated, tribalism as an ideology is associated to neo-patrimonialism, in which political leaders tend to favour members of their own community in terms of public appointment, thus further marginalising other communities. While in 2007-2008 the state, the security forces and the civil society were found largely unprepared to respond to the escalation of violence and to craft a narrative to oppose the inflammatory rhetoric that pitted ethnic communities against one another (mostly Kikuyu and Kalenjin in the Rift Valley and Kikuyu and Luo in Nairobi), in 2013 a 'peace narrative' was mainstreamed to tune down the 'zero-sum game' attitude that had typically characterised previous elections. By promoting a dialogue across ethnic lines, political and community leaders sought to advance a narrative that stressed the interconnectedness of the different communities, the message being that wanton violence and looting would affect Kenya as a whole [13]. A constellation of public authorities and organisation sought to counter tribalism with a narrative which emphasised national unity under the rule of the law. As a government authority said, 'The law is our Bible and we apply on individuals, not communities' [6], while another pointed at the abidance to the law, and to constitutional norms, as a precondition for peace [13].

However, some pointed out that this emphasis on peace not only legitimised the status quo, but conflated political dissent with the risk of social unrest and, in so doing, silenced any in-depth debate on persisting inequalities (see also Cheeseman et al. 2015). For some interviewees, mostly linked to opposition parties, this totalising peace discourse was seen as preventing the full implementation of the Constitution, with the result that structural issues were left to simmer under the surface (and likely to lead to fresh violence in the future). As the government takes on the role of guarantor of peace and stability, some interviewees expressed the concern that the country could drift towards authoritarianism or, in other words, that Kenya could go 'the Ugandan way'

after rumours spread that in the future the votes would be tallied in military barracks [13].

The primacy of the rule of law was also used to justify the government's decision to securitise the Somali refugee population, underlining that the policy was neither an ethnic nor a religious profiling in a country in which Somalis with Kenyan IDs and Muslims are a large segment of the population. In fact, when explaining the decision to scrutinise the Somali refugee population and close down the refugee camps (this decision is currently put on hold), government authorities dismissed nativist concerns and, instead, emphasised the values of responsibility and accountability, by focusing on the security concerns of some Kenyan citizens following a spate of terror attacks. Moreover, the announced closure of the humanitarian spaces and the repatriation of all refugees to Somalia was explained as a necessary provision to prevent the camps from becoming breeding grounds for terrorist activities, with benefits for international donors, despite the criticism of human rights advocacy organisations. As a government officer pointed out:

we have made it clear that not all Somalis are terrorists and not all Muslims are terrorists, so this is not a blanket condemnation. The only reason why we are closing the camp is because it becomes a safe haven for these kinds of activities, we can only deal with that by closing these camps. [20]

Similarly to Kenya, in South Africa, the rule of law is upheld as the principle around which opposing parties articulate their narratives, with reference to conflicts at both national and local level. Occupying private land can be seen as a political statement or as a criminal offence, according to the party in conflict. However, both sides framed their action as in conformity with the constitutional law. Pluralism and the right to protest are both enshrined in the Constitution, provided that one does not encroach on the other, so that if people want to protest, 'that's their right (...) as long as they don't prevent others from seeing the SONA and whatever' [14]. Both the Government's and protesters' activities are looked at through the prism of the constitutional values and each party claims higher moral ground by emphasising its adherence to the legacy of the struggle against Apartheid. Since the Constitution is universally seen as the accomplishment of the struggle against minority rule, it stands for a promise of democracy that some see as partially fulfilled while others see as betrayed.

It is worth pointing out that ANC members regularly claim for their party not only the political legacy of the anti-Apartheid struggle, of which the Constitution is the bulwark, but also the values that inspired the struggle. Moreover, the ANC is seen as having proven throughout its history a long-term vision which, unlike for other parties, goes beyond a narrow political agenda. According to one of its members, the ANC:

is driven by our historical mission or historical objective of liberating all Africa or all black people and Africans in particular. And the values of democracy of constitutionalism. (...) the ANC historically led our people's struggle against Apartheid and colonialism. It led to the creation of constitutional democracy. And what we are advancing is that which is consistent, the values are consistent with our Constitution. [11]

The main tension recurring throughout the South African interviews was related to the relation between constitutional values derived from the democratisation process and the implementation of the law, seen by government officials as aligned and by protest movements as in contradiction with each other. A similar tension emerged when reflecting on the xenophobic violence. While condemning the violence, some government officers pointed at the high number illegal immigrants 'because of that perception that our economy is a great workhorse, so it's a place to work' but 'we also had to message that deals with that if you are residing in South Africa, you have to abide by our laws. You know, firstly a lot of people who claim to be refugees are not' [15]. However, other interviewees regard as a rupture with the notion of Ubuntu (a Nguni term meaning 'compassion' and 'humanity') and the Rainbow Nation narrative at the core of post-apartheid South Africa. As a community worker said:

People need to understand that xenophobic attacks were not going to provide solutions to the problems of the country, that people need to understand that we can live together as a nation, we can live together as different nations in one country and all work together towards a common vision...I think our values (...) always revolve around the spirit of Ubuntu that we are all Africans. So that's what guides us and that we are all protected by the Constitution of the Republic of SA. [9]

#### 3.4. Leveraging grievances

There is consensus across the different case studies on the fact that the conflicts under examination express broader dissatisfaction and that leaders emerge by intercepting discontent among segments of the population and leveraging grievances to mobilise

support around other issues, thus challenging the political status quo. So, in Serbia for instance, a party officer observed that the LGBT Pride Parade was 'used as a place where that sort of political forces could be mobilised' to 'undermine the authorities and actually prove that the government which was in power then, in 2009 and 2010, was not capable of organising a Pride Parade... LGBT members were not the real target, as the Democratic Party was the main target' [15]. In the words of right wing politicians, the protest against the LGBT parade was simultaneously an opportunity to lambaste the action of the government and a statement against the public display of homosexuality [18].

Some interviewees also suggested that it is not leaders that make conflicts but are rather conflicts that make leaders. Reflecting on the political repercussions of the extradition of Slobodan Milošević, interviewees from across the political spectrum agreed on the fact that the post-Milošević era saw the Democratic Opposition of Serbia splitting over nationalism and on the future trajectory that Serbia should take and the former president was used as a political pawn around which an internal struggle of power was played out. A politician suggested that 'Milošević's extradition marked the beginning of the conflict, nor did it mark its end' [14]. This specific issue was thus an opportunity that different leaders used to position themselves and appeal to different constituencies. On a similar note, but speaking about Kosovo, some interviewees suggested that leaders positioned themselves as nationalist or the other way around not out of conviction but rather to appease their constituencies. Supporting or opposing the Independence of Kosovo was seen by many as based on political calculations, as the case of Kostunica, first supporting and then opposing EU integration, clearly illustrated. So, 'both sides in this conflict had something against each other and Kosovo was just a good excuse for them to fight' [5].

In Kenya, grievances were often framed in ethnic terms, despite the consolidated practice of elite pacts that, through the country's post-colonial history, guaranteed a certain degree of stability. Tribalism was therefore largely recognised as the discourse used, often cynically, by leaders to mobilise their supporters and increase their political weight while negotiating in private. The unequal distribution of resources was unanimously regarded as the root of the grievances, but the interviewees also suggested that politics in Kenya still revolves around the idea that elections continue

to be seen as an opportunity to tilt the balance, but without questioning the neo-patrimonial logics that have produced and exacerbated inequality in the country [17]. The idea that vested interests are a powerful driver behind political agendas also emerged when considering the humanitarian arguments advanced by refugee advocacy organisations regarding the security crackdown of the Somali population. A government officer, for instance, claimed that:

there are businesses that stand to lose millions of shillings and dollars if the camps are closed. For them it is not about the refugees but about their businesses. [20]

The South African cases resonate similar arguments. Longstanding grievances and frustrations provided the fuel that was ignited by the failure of politics to address the broken promises of the post-Apartheid era. The SONA was expected to address this anger by focusing, according to an ANC communication officer, on 'the needs and the challenges of ordinary South Africans' clarifying 'what is it there for me that is going to better my life? What is government going to do' [11]. Instead, its disruption brought even more to the fore the scale of the frustration, underlying the inability – or unwillingness - of the ANC government to tackle the unequal access to resources and the widespread corruption, compounded by inefficiency in the state machinery, seen also as a major factor behind service delivery conflicts [17]. Xenophobic violence is seen as a 'contestation around the resources in community areas where the locals will feel that those that are coming as foreigners (...) take away their limited resources' [9]. Resources are the object of contention in situations of scarcity and cut-throat competition in which foreign nationals are accused of charging lower prices [1]. At the same time, leaders were accused of politicising xenophobic violence to divert the attention from the root causes of the inequality [9]. Opposition leaders put the blame on the ruling party for closing a blind eye the scapegoating of foreign shop-owners and workers as an opportunity to steer the rising popular anger away from the ANC:

The ruling party [s] they obviously needed to be seen to sort of be alleviating the violence but they were very much trying to sort of shift the blame from the social issues that they hadn't addressed...the problem was that there was a lot of frustration and a lot of tension around the social issues that hadn't been rectified and the slow pace of change and there was almost like a look for a sort of scape goat. And I think just the fact that [s] this whole 'us vs. them' and it was obviously quite easy to go for the foreign nationals who often come here and just manage to do quite well despite the circumstances. [2]

### 3.5. Crafting strategies and alliances to provoke and respond to conflict

In all the examined cases, the responses to the conflicts were fashioned by multiple actors, interacting with each other according to both formalised and personal connections. It is, therefore, important to draw a distinction between the organisations per se and the institutions, or, in Douglass North's words, the 'rules of the game' (North, 1990) shaping the relations among the involved actors. By looking at the institutional framework, it is indeed possible to understand whether democratic principles apply to both the organisations' internal structure and local configuration of power, and to what extent local conflicts, and context-based approaches to conflict resolution, reveal the legacy of structures and logics predating the democratic transition. At the same time, highlighting alliances and the interplay of different organisations enable us to clarify the design and implementation of strategies to counter or contain the violence and create spaces of engagement.

For instance, examining Serbian conflicts, organisational logics appear informed by the self-preservation of power structures. The continuity between the Milošević era and present times is evident when looking at both the protection that authorities from the previous regime still enjoy from current politicians and security officers and the mindsets that inform the notion of power, the role of the executive power and the relation with the media. This was brought to the fore in the case of the arrest of Milošević and in the case of the Ombudsman. As suggested by an interviewee:

it was clear that all members of the former regime had the protection of the most popular politician in Yugoslavia. I think this marked the death sentence to Zoran Đinđić (assassinated on 12 March 2003), because up until that night, every Hague inductee, the Red Berets, every evildoer, none of them knew whether they would end up in The Hague. [5]

Several interviewees suggested the existence of a shadow structure of power, tracing back to Milošević times, and resisting accountability, in terms resonating the concept of 'deep state' discussed in relation to countries such as Turkey (Gingeras, 2011; Söyler, 2013) and Egypt (Norton, 2013; Faris, 2013), in which unelected, corporatist networks involving the armed forces and large business advance and protect their interests away from public scrutiny and behind a formal democratic façade. In the Ombudsman case, the smear campaign began as Saša Janković began investigating

the political role and the corruption web centred on the Military Security Agency[16], thus threatening a deeply entrenched 'pyramid of power that pulls in and misuses state institutions and party structures' [12].

The smearing campaign started once Janković was seen as having trespassed a red line drawn before the 2000 and, since then, never challenged. Therefore, although the attacks were personal, they aimed more broadly at setting an example:

the ombudsman received a yellow card from the government. "We are powerful and we have access to all information on you." [2] They can do this to anyone. They operate in a grey zone where there are countless possibilities for various manipulations. So, I just see this conflict as another attempt of the government to strengthen its ruling position. [2]

The response of the government echoed the tactics of the secret police during socialist times just like in Tito's times when there was a saying 'the secret intelligence service sees and know everything' [10].

Despite the prominence of political parties, there is, therefore, a widespread perception that politics is done behind the scenes, by actors, such as the military intelligence, pulling the strings, or through informal connections between political leaders and their followers. This dynamic was evident during the riots in the aftermath of Milošević's extradition and against the LGBT Pride, when nationalist leaders called to demonstrate:

groups of several thousands of young men that we can't really call football fans, because of course, football is not a priority to them... Their collective behaviour is their priority, association and feeling of some nationalist strength and belonging to a group, whatever they feel. At one moment someone encouraged them, told them: "Obstruct the parade now," and at some other moment they told them: "Now don't." [15]

What we see at work, in the Serbian cases, were forms of patronage through which politicians, particularly from radical parties, mobilise their supporters to exert pressure on the government. In the Kenyan contexts, these relations are seen through an ethnic lens, but, all the same, ended up contributing to polarising the society as political leaders who are rushing back to their tribal cocoons to marshal voters to back them for power [7]:

...political incitement, tribalism, of course they were very much used by the leaders. You know these political leaders they used their tribal power as a weapon to be elected. And off course they could manipulate young people with money ... [1]

As a local leader pointed out:

Nobody called people to fight, but that opportunity opened some unknown problems that the society has been masquerading and putting mask that things are okay yet they aren't, and that opportunity was just a trigger. [7]

In the Kenyan cases, the organisations involved in the conflicts under examination were both state and non-state actors. In fact, the institutional arrangements that emerged, or became manifest, were characterised by a tight relation on the interdependence between formal and informal leaders, against a background shaped by the political and economic influence of foreign donors. During the 2008 post-election violence, the involvement of community leaders was made necessary by the lack of preparedness and the shortage of resources of state actors as the violence broke out, as confirmed by the spokesperson of the Ministry of Justice, National Cohesion and Constitutional Affairs who, despite the civic education initiatives to 'prepare people for the elections' underlined 'financial constraints, personnel constraints, and the like' [1]. On top of that, the violence that followed the announcement of the incumbent president Mwai Kibaki as the winner of the election was a reaction not only to perceived rigged election but also to state bodies seen as delegitimised. Therefore, the response had to necessarily be fashioned by involved actors who were still deemed trustworthy. Churches and religious leaders were instrumental in both providing assistance to people displaced by the violence and providing a space for civic education and dialogue [9]. Government agencies relied on community leaders to regularly gather intelligence [6]. In general, trust in respected members of the community played a greater role than trust in state apparatus as religious and community leaders commanded greater authority than state officials, could better monitor the escalation of social tensions and leverage long-lasting relations built within the community. However, as the relevance of community leaders in conflict resolution became evident to the extent of shaping donors' policies, it led to a proliferation of organisations which rebranded themselves non-governmental organisations (NGOs) according to the circumstances. According to a representative of government:

The organisations like the church, the civil society organisations, they are there but coordination between them is not very strong. You will find a civil society organisation there but they are not working together, you will find people there only for their selfish [sic] interests (...) But when the US embassy is coming to Kisumu to talk about the elections you will see hundreds and hundreds of NGOs, you will wonder where they are coming from. [11]

As a result of the 2008 post-election violence, increased government and civil society awareness and donor pressure placed greater emphasis on preparedness ahead of 2013 election to avoid the repeat of similar unrests. State authorities also took stock of the lessons drawn from the 2008 post-election violence to engage with local stakeholders to map outbreaks of violence through regular intelligence gathering. Government officials reached out to religious members of the NCCK (National Council of Churches of Kenya) and local chiefs to discuss relevant issues in barazas [10]. A spokesperson of the Ministry of Information explains the strategy used to craft a message tailored to specific settings:

We talk to religious leaders because they are the people who are with those people, they understand those logistics. It is also good to note that most people do not fight when religious leaders bring that message because they trust them more than even the village elders and the chiefs. It is actually religious leaders who alert us if there is anything they think is not good... First, we go to the ground and assess, we have the chiefs, the village elders, we talk to them and we get the feeling on the ground. After getting the feeling of what is going on on the ground, we now package a message according to how you want to send it, if the ground is hostile we normally use the students, it is normally easy to catch the attention of students and those same students will take that message back home. [8]

Moreover, special emphasis was placed on particular demographic segments, such as women 'because we realised that the women had a greater role to play through the network of the church' [9] and the youth. In this case, specific initiatives were designed using innovative forms of engagement, such as football tournament, and tapping into funding from international donors, such as USAID [1]. These kinds of partnerships between the state and non-state actors were forged also during the anti-terror campaign Usalama Watch. Some state officials claimed to have reached to Somali businessmen in Eastleigh:

We told them that they have to report any suspicious characters living in their midst or we are going to have a collateral damage. That is what has happened now, us being taken to Kasarani. So we told them that it is our responsibility as

Kenyans and people who love peace because we cannot have business in Eastleigh if we have no peace. So being the hub of business in Nairobi, mostly the business men we've told them to take up the initiative, the Eastleigh Business Association we told them to take the security issues seriously... [22]

Similar to Kenya, in the South African cases engaging with communities was made necessary by the challenges faced by the police to tackle the xenophobic violence and the service delivery protests. These challenges were due, at the same time, to a lack of resources and a deficit of trust. In doing so, state representatives had to deal with what Robertson (2010) calls the 'professionalisation of the protest' (19), a direct effect of the strong influence that workers' unions have retained over South African grassroots politics. Regarding service delivery conflicts, protest marches expressed long-standing anger for poor living conditions, as previously argued, but also presented an opportunity for community leaders to emerge 'because potentially it means they'll end up as a counsellor or they're challenging power structures within their own organisation where they will cynically set out to harness protests' [7]. This remark allows one to critically look at the emphasis often placed on the concept of local community, as a social group whose internal hierarchies are the result of democratic practices. As a municipal worker pointed out, many community leaders seeking to engage with local administrations were self-appointed [4], prompting state organisations to look for alternative ways to get their messages across:

In the past we used to deal with community leaders and we realised that they didn't send the message through (...) So we went directly to the communities during this conflict and that's the structure that we used. And we used also, like I said, we invited community leaders that we've identified as the church leaders and invited them into parliament, so we met with them and explained to them. [4]

Also, in some cases, community leaders were part of the problem by fuelling the flames or encouraging and inciting violence, as became particularly evident during the xenophobic violence, when these leaders blamed foreigners as well for unfair competition in the job market, and depriving the South African youth of employment opportunities.

As a security officer commented, 'They're not seeing sometimes the bigger picture (...) if we were not getting mediation taking place within the community leaders, we would just arrest the ring leaders. So we would take the fire out' [3].

Eventually, poorly planned community meetings backfired by offering enraged leaders a stage to address the crowd and incite mob violence [3]. Most interviewees acknowledge the need to improve the early warning system currently in place, recognising the limits of the police in monitoring the exacerbation of tensions at the local level:

There are officials that are on the ground that are working with these communities on a daily basis and they do the physical verification, and those things - they do all those things - and then boom! It happens. So, it means in our systems we need something to be able to detect these things before it becomes an uncontrollable rumour. [18]

The South African cases were also characterised by the government's top-down strategy, including a 'carrot and stick' approach which balanced the deployment of security forces to quell outbreaks of violence with conflict resolution practitioners outreach to affected communities. As a spokesperson for the police put it, during service delivery conflicts:

It was successful sometimes to use full force in such instances and then coupled with positive messages on the airways to reach out to people to say 'look, let's calm down'. So force and communication. [9]

A similar approach was used also during the 2008 xenophobic violence, when the police used a two-fold response: mediation through community leaders and, if that didn't work out, rubber bullets, stun grenades and tear gas [3]. The security forces were called to respond to the violence coming not only from protesters but also, in some instance, from the citizens affected by the disruption. A conflict resolution practitioner working for a local administration recalled a situation in which he had to negotiate with a group of citizens discussing how to deal with the demonstrators 'once and for all', even suggesting 'Let the gangsters go deal with them' [4]. However, the police are often blamed for being unable to stop the violence before it spread through 'bush telegraph'. Some interviewee attributes this incapacity to the 'dysfunctional' structure of the South African Police Services, whose ranks swelled during the preparation for the World Cup and the police:

started taking people that were not qualified and should never be doing the job, purely because World Cup put pressure on SAPS to have numbers. So, they dropped their standards of enrolment and that caused a problem for them. And

that spirals across as a direct translation to lack of training to violence. The less a person trained, the quicker he is going to resort to violence; and that's been proven. [3]

Therefore, very often, the security forces ended up contributing to the escalation of the crisis by using excessive force.

Like in the Kenyan cases, on the one hand religious leaders were seen as more reliable; on the other, recruiting young people as 'digital ambassadors' was a strategy used to reach out to a critical segment of the population, more exposed to frustration because of rampant unemployment and therefore more prone to violence. For instance, the Johannesburg's municipality recruited:

about 1000 young people whose job it is everyday to knock on people's doors and teach people the basics of the internet. And so we use those young people in those conflicts, because they're already on the ground, they know the local people, and they're an extension of the resources that one would need in these situations. You have to find a way of getting young people active and involved. They are fascinated by technology and technology gets them excited - they are paid a daily stipend. [18]

### 3.6. Role of the media

Media have different and often diverging roles in the conflicts under examinations. An important aspect that emerges from the analysis of the different cases, though, is the need to consider media outlets as actors with their own rationality, and whose framing of stories of public interest may at times be based on market logics, or more personal agendas, rather than on the alignment with the political agenda either of the government or the opposition. According to the circumstances, political drivers can dominate economic reasons or can coincide with each other. In Serbia, for instance, media are largely seen through a political prism as a key instrument to build consent and sway public opinion according to a precise political agenda. Underlying this view of the relation between the media and the government there is, according to many interviewees, a hierarchical mindset that is rooted in Serbian political organisations and it is also evident in how political actors make use of the media:

it seems that everything is interpreted in a manner in which "you are either our ally or our enemy, because it's impossible that you are just trying to do your job."

This is a puzzle that they are incapable of solving. They just can't believe that someone is just trying to do their job. [18]

This was particularly evident in the case of the smear campaign against the Ombudsman. An interviewee supporting Saša Janković recounted how the attacks against him quickly escalated:

The Ombudsman gave an interview for *Nedeljnik* (...) and he said some things in that interview that made some people feel uncomfortable. The very next day *Informer* revitalised the exact same story which concerns his friend's suicide, and this story went through a renaissance of its own, as *Informer* is keen on portraying this suicide as a murder that Saša Janković committed and it aims to accuse him of being a murderer or a participant in that suicide, simply speaking. So this story will be brought up every time Saša Janković utters something that someone else might not like." Dragan J. Vučićević editor in chief and the owner of *Informer* was the key actor. Had there been no *Informer*, there would have been no smear campaign. [12]

The attack was coordinated across different media and, in the words of the interviewee was very 'dynamic':

in the sense that they learned from their mistakes, which means that they adjusted their strategy accordingly. So, they went from that brutal story about that suicide, which did not stick as well as they would have hoped, to a strategy of faking social dialogue and faking pluralism so that they could continue with their abuse. [12]

The case of the Ombudsman polarised the media and the public opinion, so that, to counter the campaign ran by *Informer* and *Pink*, Saša Janković was named as the person of the year by another magazine, *Vreme*. *Informer* and *Pink* were considered embedded in the 'pyramid of power' previously mentioned, the real locus of power behind democratic institutions, but, according to some interviewee, out of economic convenience rather than of ideological affinity. An interviewee claimed that:

a newspaper that receives 30,000,000 dinars from a certain party for campaign ads will also publish articles in favour of that party because it did not receive as much money from the opposing party. So big parties could afford such things, as they had the power, they had the "right friends", quotation marks included, they knew businessmen that controlled large corporations. [2]

In the case of the LGBT Pride Parade, media were blamed by right wing politicians for stirring the tensions between LGBT activists and anti-gay rights in order to 'portray the

progressives as if they still belonged to the so-called nationalist and rightist parties and so on, and the aim of this was to raise the so-called democratic capacities of the Democratic Party' [18]. Moreover, right-wingers accused the media of plotting to undermine Serbian values and silencing their arguments. The coverage of the LGBT Pride was seen through a political lens and linked to the endorsement of a globalist ideology:

Some media outlets that were protected and controlled by the west, and this is still the case today. ... The interests of the pro-western and pro-government media often overlap (...) Everything was being amplified and over-emphasised at that time. [18]

In South Africa, political authorities' state officers and ANC apparatchiks largely accused media of an anti-government slant. An ANC representative claimed that media had been hostile to the ruling party since 1994 and that the unfortunate reality is in the media space, the media has more sympathy for the trade unions than they have for government and as a result of that narrative, so more coverage given to trade unions because the trade unions were seen as the poor workforce [6].

Interestingly, when developing his argument that media 'should be developmental', he explained that they 'should understand the objective of the ruling party in South Africa which is to create a non-racial, non-sexist, democratic and prosperous society ... united on this' [6]. Instead, echoing an argument already found in the analysis of other cases, 'media have got their own agenda'.

It is important to note that there is a difference in the way media are seen by officers at the local and at the national level. Given the importance of personal connections to get favourable coverage, officers in Johannesburg reported that the relationship 'is very good (...) because most of the head offices of these media houses are here. We do go and do office visits, in studio visits so that they know us, we know them, we know who we're talking to when the phone rings, and so forth... so we know each other on a first-name basis' [18]. On the contrary, national government representatives, based in Pretoria, complained that the physical distance between political and media organisations hinders partnership:

Most of the media are in Joburg, and we are in Pretoria and we don't see them, except for press conferences, which is not really a time to get to know media. So you need to do more than that. They need to understand where you come from, you need to understand where they come from, that kind of thing. What are they looking for? So you need to have lots more engagement. [14]

While the degree of media control varies according to the institutional settings, there is a phenomenon on which most interviewees from Serbia, Kenya and South Africa seem to agree: the growing 'tabloidisation of the media', resulting in the deteriorating quality of the information and, in general, in the involution of the media landscape. Sensationalist language and framings are regarded by a Serbian interviewee as the weapons in a 'war (..) fought with disinformation, not by providing better quality information' [17]. So, in Serbia, the most popular media outlets have reportedly embraced an approach to information that often ends up adding 'fuel to the fire' [15]. According to this perspective, catchy headlines to polarise the public discourse were finalised to win readers. As one interviewee put it:

bad news is always good news for the reporters, because people read about it. So if they had focused on the good aspects of the parade, if they wrote about how the parade finally took place and who participated and such, those would have probably been the least popular media. [15]

Interestingly, someone suggested a sort of mutual reinforcement in the radicalisation of politicians and media. As some interviewees say with reference to Kosovo:

at one moment, [I] got the impression that Koštunica was reading only Politika and Pečat and that he started believing that he is the only defender of Kosovo, and that the rest of us are just waiting for him to blink so that we can betray him, so he entered that campaign very confidently with badges "Kosovo is Serbia" and "Kosovo is the heart of Serbia. [5]

The lack of preparation that hindered the response to state agencies and security forces during the 2008 post-election violence in Kenya was an issue also for the media, blamed by many interviewees to have contributed to fuelling the violence through a mix of sloppy reporting and the emotional presentation of divisive issues. Again, it was sensationalist reporting. This attitude was common to both national and international media:

The media actually fuelled in showing what happened in the streets of Nairobi or along the route from Nairobi to the western region of Nairobi. Had it not being shown and when the government acted by closing down the television stations people opted to start using mobile phones but not to the magnitude that was actually there. [7]

As a result, the riots were increasingly framed as tribal, engendering a copycat effect on a national scale:

When the media reports and even show pictures of people tormented or houses being burnt, you see elsewhere people are also mobilising themselves elsewhere to attack those who are attacking their people. They see them as our people and others. If our people are being persecuted in that area and we are living with their people here, we take revenge. [7]

International media was highly criticised for feeding and contributing to this tribal narrative:

(O)thers (...) fuelled the conflict by airing photos, showing certain ethnic groups being finished and by mentioning those ethnic groups. I remember even BBC one of the overseas radio stations asking leading questions which were very bad, I remember them asking this man who was killed who killed him, from what tribe and you know when the respondent mentioned the tribe, lots of houses were being burned for that particular tribe. So those leading questions are very bad and they are very provocative, and incite people. The others are pictures showing people being chased, that lead to anger and feeling of retaliating but as churches we encourage our people not to retaliate, of course not all people are Christians but we encourage them not to retaliate. [10]

Some interviewees would have welcomed a certain degree of censorship to contain the spreading of images of violence, which reinforced a zero-sum game view of politics in Kenya [6]. In so doing, media were seen by government officers as a potential amplifier of violence. Also, speaking about Operation Usalama Watch, a widespread perception among Kenyan government officers is that international media were giving more coverage to the situation of Somali refugees in the country than to security concerns of Kenyan citizens.

In South Africa, the use of media was informed by the same top-down approach previously described. The response of the authorities was at both national and grassroots level, partnering with both national broadcast and local radio to communicate positive messages [1+3]. The media become themselves part of the story when reporters put themselves at risk and they were targeted by criminals, 'if

they're carrying expensive camera equipment'. In the case of service delivery conflicts, an officer remembered that:

we tend to have several instances where we ask the media just to be aware that their presence was inciting and fuelling situations. Because what happens is the guys perform in front of cameras and they get silly and then sometimes it does escalate. [3]

It is worth noting that, among the 'guys getting silly', the same officer places security agents, who are therefore briefed to respect the chain of command to release statements to the press. Moreover, by giving prominence to gruesome accounts of violence, most mainstream media neglected to highlight positive stories on coexistence and civic dialogue. Also, state representatives blamed media, both national and international, for a perceived overuse of the word 'xenophobic' which tainted the 'Rainbow Nation' narrative that was informing South Africa's international image ahead of 2012 FIFA World Cup [14].

Also, monitoring media was viewed as part of a broader strategy to mobilise and organise a collective response to the violence. For instance, in Kenya, after the initial setback, government officers, supported by CSOs, used vernacular radio stations to pass on pacifying messages and involve local influencers and opinion makers to appeal to their communities [36]. In 2013, the response of both the state and the media was shaped by the lesson learned from the 2008 post-election violence, by reinforcing the capabilities of media regulators to monitor hate speech and organising training and seminars for journalists [6].

Similarly, in South Africa community radios were a key platform to timely deliver information and messages to a public unfamiliar with printed media and not always with access to TV [17]. They allowed authorities to extend the reach of public meetings, which remained the most effective space for engagement. Local media were also monitored – by the BCCSA on the radio front and by the Films and Publications Board for other media – to enable authorities to address and prosecute hate speech. While some in the government were accused of inciting the xenophobic violence, the government did attempt to respond. Radios were used to spread positive messages during the xenophobic violence, through drama, documentaries, and adverts [1]. Campaigns were launched to portray migrant workers in a positive light, such as 'Let

them come back', conveying the message that, after the violence, South Africa was once again a welcoming place for African migrants [1]. Messages were also broadcasted to 'tone down' the responsibilities of leaders in provoking the violence. As one government ally suggests:

for instance, claiming that the words of the king of the Zulus King Zwelethini, saying that "Foreigners who are doing criminal activities must go back home" were misunderstood. "And then people thought no, that means all foreigners must go home". You know English is a different language. So I think people misunderstood that to mean that hey, all the foreigners must go home. [1]

### 3.7. The significance of social media

The impact of social media on the broader media landscape and the role they played in shaping strategic narratives and facilitating mobilisation varied according to the country. In the Serbian cases, the interviewees devoted the most attention to printed media and TV shows. Twitter or Facebook were mentioned with reference to the Ombudsman case, as Saša Janković used Twitter to communicate directly to his supporters and a group to 'Support Saša Janković' created a page on Facebook. On the other hand, social media helped spread fake news and conspiracy theories, which fed an echo chamber effect among supporters and detractors of Janković and eventually contributed to further polarise the conflict. An interviewee recounted when he:

had the opportunity to see a T-shirt with Saša Janković's face printed on it, and this was supposedly a shirt for his presidential elections campaign. As far as I know the man has nothing to do with this, but this flooded Facebook. And such things are completely counterproductive. And I even believe that this shirt stimulated Informer to start writing about Saša Janković's friend's suicide again. [13]

Moreover, social media have also created a space where the so-called astroturfing phenomenon, a sort of coordinated trolling, emerged. The astroturfers were mostly youth from the Serbian Progressive Party, social media savvy, who acted as a stand-by force to attack online different targets with comments when instructed by their political referent [13]:

They have a programme in which you can see all the news headers and you can see exactly what sort of comments you are supposed to post below each article and they have the entire Serbia covered by this network and they have some young people who spend their whole day typing up some meaningless comments for fifty, a hundred or two hundred euros, and these comments appear on multiple websites in the same form. [13]

In Kenya, besides a greater awareness of the risk of violence, the other key difference with the previous elections was the popularity acquired in the while by social media, particularly Twitter and Facebook. This presented both opportunities and challenges. It is worth considering that, since 2008, a 'Silicon Savannah' narrative has started taking shape around the leading role of Kenya as a technology hub in East Africa and one of the most dynamic economies in Africa and in the developing world as for digital innovation. This narrative had received an institutional endorsement as it was enshrined in the Kenya Vision 2030, the country's development agenda approved in 2008 under President Mwai Kibaki, and underpinned the state's initiatives harnessing technology to promote peace and national dialogue and opposition's communication to engage with the youth on the issues. For instance, CORD, the coalition of opposition parties made use of both new and old media, deploying bloggers and social media commentators and sharing online information on the schedule of the candidate [36]. According to a CORD secretariat officer:

The advantage with the new media is that you will disseminate the information in its original form, no censorship and its real time so that you can record the candidate's speech and transmit it on social media and everybody else who is on social media would be able to share that information and we had several pages on social media, both on Twitter and Facebook which we operated with a huge following. [36]

Although the emphasis was placed on democratic forms of protest, Kenyan opposition saw in social media an opportunity to discuss structural issues that would be otherwise blanketed by the dominant peace rhetoric. As argued by the same officer:

Instead of giving the country the true position of what had happened in the election, they (mainstream media) departed from that and started playing peace messages and peaceful songs. And that's not what the electorate wanted. [36]

Social media, however, were considered a double-edged sword. Despite providing state bodies, CSOs and political parties a platform to quickly disseminate messages,

they also still present significant obstacles when it comes to monitoring hate speech, with the risk that, along with useful and reliable information, they will also help disseminate inflammatory rumours and coordinate violence, even strengthening tribalism. As a political activist from Kisumu pointed out:

tribal clashes have moved from running with pangas in the streets to the social media. And these people are expressing their depression and everything, and if there is any opportunity hell breaks loose, these people from the way they are interacting on social media will put this practical on any person they will see around. [7]

Social media were largely seen as an arena of discussion mostly for younger, urban segments of the population. As a security officer observed:

The issue is that the social media level does not really reach down to [s] because the main perpetrators here, it will happen at the grassroots with the poor. Those people don't have access to Twitter and if they have on Facebook, the reality of all that literacy then will be a problem. [9]

The limited popularity of social media in areas affected by the xenophobic violence played in favour of the security forces, otherwise unable to monitor Twitter and Facebook. Union leaders acknowledged the difficulty to control the information flow on social media, as 'you can very easily throw out a threat or you can very easily publish inflammatory remarks without any consequences' [10]. However, in service delivery conflicts, a mixed strategy was used, disseminating messages on community newspapers, billboards, on pamphlets in various languages [10], and radio to announce the time and place of community meetings, since face-to-face interactions are still considered the most effective form of communication in townships [4]. At the same time, unions and grassroots organisations have become increasingly aware of the importance of ICTs and social media, 'to immediately reach members of the public and allow for two-way feedback simultaneously' and 'to influence public perception' [10] during conflicts. Since communication is at the core of the strategy of protest movements, media savviness is seen as a crucial skill to craft the narrative and, as previously said, frame the action as legitimate and aligned with constitutional values.

#### 4. Discussion and Conclusion

Despite obvious differences due to the local specificities, a comparative analysis of the conflicts examined in each MeCoDEM country provides insights on key moments in democratisation struggles which reveal continuity and changes at an institutional level, the reluctance of established elites to surrender their grip on power, the entanglement of values and vested interests and the mutual shaping of power structures and narratives, as the latter are emanation of the former and, simultaneously, are used to legitimise existing hierarchies and forms of deference and subordination to the authority. In each case, framing the past sets the stage for interpreting the current situation and building a vision of the future that becomes an issue on the political agenda. The interviewees conveyed narratives that made sense of the historical path taken by local political institutions and attributed to their country a specific place in the world. In the three countries, the source of legitimacy of the parties involved in the conflicts, either as competing factions or peace brokers, is placed in either transcendent values or the rule of law. In a few instances, these two sources of legitimacy coincide. The former can refer to religious precepts, such as Christian guidelines in the case of Kenya, an idealised national identity or culturally-ingrained norms, such as Serbian traditions or South African Ubuntu; the latter points to the adherence to the values enshrined in the Constitution. In Kenya and South Africa, for instance, interviewees from both the ruling and the opposition parties, state officers, and community leaders claim higher moral ground by framing their action in legalistic terms.

A common feature of the conflicts under examination is the fact that they are all seen as the catalyst of underlying tensions and deep-seated frustrations. In all cases, these frustrations are rooted in situations of inequality resulting from unresolved issues, tracing back to an era predating the democratic transition, which coincides with the end of the Milošević's regime in the case of Serbia, Independence in the case of Kenya and the end of Apartheid, in the case of South Africa. Democratisation appears as an unfinished process in the three countries, as the tensions between authoritarian structures of power and institutions based on representative democracy are brought to the fore by contingent issues. Moreover, media outlets appear as actors with their own agenda, and their relationship with the government can be tactical, rather than

strategic, thus driven by calculations of convenience rather than by ideological affinity. These calculations might be related to the expectation of material benefits either from political actors, such as money for campaign ads that, according to a Serbian interviewee, some newspapers received from major parties [2], or from the market, in terms of an increase in readership or viewers. A widespread idea, emerging from the interviews, is that sensationalism, or, as it is also called, the tabloidisation of the media strongly contributes to exacerbating violence and debasing the political debate: it aims at stirring emotions while reducing the space devoted to the analysis of the background causes of the conflicts. It also propagates superficial interpretations that further entrench pre-existing biases. And, yet, it is a growing tendency, particularly in the Serbian and Kenyan cases, driven by a drop in the sales and the crisis of consolidated business models, which pushes the press to go after 'catchy' news. Some South African interviewees, for instance, suggested that market pressures not only tested the boundaries of quality journalism, but also forced politicians and state authorities to compete for limited attention by using increasingly polarising tones and arguments. Further research ought to be done to understand whether the tabloidisation of the media contributes to shape, consolidates or simply reflects a winner-takes-all attitude which characterises the political competition.

So, while the cases here examined confirm that 'in transitional societies the media are frequently a major battleground for power struggles, as politicians, media owners and other groups try to gain control over the media agenda and, ultimately, public opinion' (Voltmer and Kraetzschmar, 2015: 8), it is also useful to consider the media not only as a battleground but as a stakeholder with well-defined interests that can be aligned with political agendas according to the circumstances.

The comparative analysis also offers a glimpse into the use of social media for mobilising supporters online and thus reproducing forms of patronage and power. There is some irony in the fact that ICTs, often hailed as instruments to expand the arena of public debate and thus create an informed public able to hold political leaders to account, can be used by political factions who in fact challenge the notion of checks and balances at the core of liberal democracies. The evidence of 'astroturfing', or trolling in Serbia on the part of youth from the Serbian Progressive Party and the spread of spread fake news and conspiracy theories around the Ombudsman case are

not isolated. While our interviews in Kenya did not pick up on similar trends on these specific conflicts, an analogous phenomenon of serial callers particularly around elections when politicians pay callers to regularly phone in support to radio programmes or spread key messages, is a prevalent and growing phenomenon. The rise of fake news in the 2016 US elections has certainly made such issues a pressing global challenge for social media companies and governments to urgently address.

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