

# **Abi Too**

## **Project report**

**BCM390, “Media, war and peace”**

**Autumn session, 2014**

**University of Wollongong**

The project report assignment had two parts. For details of the assignment see [http://www.bmartin.cc/classes/BCM390\\_14outline.pdf](http://www.bmartin.cc/classes/BCM390_14outline.pdf)

*Abi Too* prepared

(1) an information pack in the form of a website: <http://riotsandthekenyancrisis.wordpress.com/>

(2) a fictional dialogue on doing the project: see following pages.

- The link to this document is from [http://www.bmartin.cc/classes/mwp\\_tops.html](http://www.bmartin.cc/classes/mwp_tops.html).

### BCM390 - Dialogue

**The following dialogue is a discussion between the creator of this project report (AFP) and a close friend (KW) who has little knowledge of the theory and case study chosen.**

KW: How's your final project report going? I've seen on the news lately so many episodes of conflict and unrest around the world.

AFP: Well I've finally decided on a topic. I found it a little challenging trying to choose a theory related to peace, war, violence or non-violence, there are so many and I wanted one both interesting and informative.

KW: Yes I've noticed that you have a lot of tabs opened on your computer. Have you found any useful information?

AFP: The theory I'm looking into is riots. I'm sure you've heard in the news the ongoing protests and unrest in Libya and Thailand?

KW: I have, and it's really unbelievable to think such acts of violence could happen. Is your case study based on these countries?

AFP: No, I've chosen to relate riots to the events that occurred in Kenya from 2007 to early 2008.

KW: Wow that's interesting! I don't think I ever realised that they were having problems in 2007. The only events relating to riots to my knowledge have been the ones broadcasted in the news, such as the Cronulla riots in 2005 and the well televised situation in London 2011.

AFP: I know what you mean, I wasn't aware that Kenya had problems in 2007. I only came across it after researching riots and found that the Kenyan crisis was not explicitly addressed in mass media. So I thought it would be a good case study to investigate because I think Western media doesn't allocate enough resources to investigate problems in developing countries, especially those Africa.

KW: That's a really good idea. What information have you found so far?

AFP: Well I've had to do some research, and at the moment I have news articles and extracts from academic sources such as journal articles and books. I hope the website I've started will help you understand the topic a little better and I've included external resources and websites if you need extra information

KW: Awesome! Well I'm looking forward to the final product. From the information that you've gather, how do they define riots? The only knowledge I have of riots is from media news stories but I'm not sure whether they are credible sources.

AFP: You're right about that! I totally agree with the opinion that media sources aren't always the best way to get information about a particular issue. I've found a few theorists that are of the same opinion. According to them a riot is a form of public disorder and is often

influenced by society and its ideologies.<sup>1</sup> I came across a theorist Dan Braha who believes that a collective human dynamic and its connection to mutual aggression can lead to protests and riots.<sup>2</sup>

KW: That's so interesting. I've never even heard of that! So what causes riots? Do you think the Cronulla riots had the same characteristics?

AFP: Absolutely. A riot involves individuals and groups who have a common goal in mind, maybe it's because they feel a need for change in society or they're unhappy about state control. That means social, political, economic, environmental factors can cause rioting, also racial or ethnic differences that were seen in the Cronulla riots may lead to violence and disorder.<sup>3</sup>

KW: I've seen so many images and television footage of violent behaviour. Are riots always so aggressive?

AFP: That's a really good question. I realised that riots don't always have to be violent but it just so happens that anger and stress seem to inevitably lead to violence. I mean historically riots have always been a constant feature in society due to governmental pressures, poor living conditions, food rationing, and even due to results at sporting events!<sup>4</sup>

KW: Would you say that there is a legal definition of a riot?

AFP: There are many definitions; each country considers a riot differently. For example in England under the Public Order Act 1986, a riot defined as 12 or more people causing public disturbance, while in the United States in 1968 they refer to it as 3 or more people engaging in unlawful acts.<sup>5</sup>

KW: It seems so hard to actually find a universal definition. So how does this relate to your case study in Kenya?

AFP: Well, you're going to find this so interesting! Kenya organised a presidential election in December 2007 and in the aftermath supporters of the elected president Mwai Kibaki and those in favour of the opposition leader Raila Odinga engaged in protests and violence.

KW: So it was a political issue? Were people unhappy with the results?

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<sup>1</sup> Wilkinson, S 2009, 'Riots', Annual Review of Political Science, Vol 12, pp 329-343

<sup>2</sup> Braha, D 2012, 'Global Civil Unrest: Contagion, Self-Organization, and Prediction', PLoS ONE, Vol. 7, No. 10, access at <<<http://www.plosone.org/article/info%3Adoi%2F10.1371%2Fjournal.pone.0048596#abstract0>>>

<sup>3</sup> Wilkinson, S 2009, 'Riots', Annual Review of Political Science, Vol 12, pp. 329

<sup>4</sup> Braha, D 2012, 'Global Civil Unrest: Contagion, Self-Organization, and Prediction', PLoS ONE, Vol. 7, No. 10, access at <<<http://www.plosone.org/article/info%3Adoi%2F10.1371%2Fjournal.pone.0048596#abstract0>>>

<sup>5</sup> Legal Information Institute, 1992, 'U.S Code: Riots and Civil Disorder', Title 5, Part III, Subpart F, Chapter 73, Sub Chapter II: 7313 <<<http://www.law.cornell.edu/uscode/text/5/7313>>>

AFP: Definitely! Odinga supporters were angered by the election process and unhappy with the fraudulent results. Many believed Kibaki won due to a rigged election. Crazy right?! You haven't heard the worst of it yet. It wasn't just disappointment over the political situation; it further escalated into chaos and anger over other issues such as corruption and poverty became apparent.<sup>6</sup>

KW: That doesn't seem hard to believe, it seems to me that people in situations like this one act on their anger when they feel like there aren't other viable options.

AFP: True. I agree that in this instance many acted on instinct and aggression. However what I find surprising is that these elections ultimately revealed the ongoing ethnic tensions between groups and in effect fuelled the existing hatred within the Kenyan community.<sup>7</sup>

KW: That's so sad to think that ethnic hatred came into play. What did these riots involve?

AFP: They lasted around two months and occurred primarily into the Rift Valley Province.

KW: Is it true that this area has a long history of violence and political instability?<sup>8</sup>

AFP: You're absolutely right! This region belongs to the Kikuyu people, and the incumbent president was a member of this group. In this area, perpetrators mostly Odinga supporters went on rampages, killing those who they believed to be supporters of the elected president. Slums in Mombasa and Nairobi were also massive targets of violence. No one was safe and many were forced into hiding.

KW: I can't believe this! So people just went house to house and attacked others?

AFP: Yes that's right. Apparently ethnic tensions became one of the factors in the riots with gangs and looters using the situation to engage in ethnically motivated attacks. I saw a video where a group of people were forced out of a van and a man was violently hacked and killed!<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Ndungu, N 2008, 'Kenya: The December 2007 Election Crisis' Mediterranean Quarterly, Vol. 19, No. 4, pp. 111-121

<sup>7</sup> Langer, J 2011, 'The Responsibility to Protect: Kenyan Post-Electoral Crisis', Journal of International Service, pp. 1-18

<sup>8</sup> Bau, V, 2013, 'Five years on: identity and Kenya's post-election violence, access <<<http://www.opendemocracy.net/opensecurity/valentina-ba%C3%BA/five-years-on-identity-and-kenyas-post-election-violence>>>

<sup>9</sup> SBS Australia World News Service, 2008, 'Man hacked to death by panga in front of film crew' <<[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=x6GD\\_KwU9CY](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=x6GD_KwU9CY)>>

KW: That's horrifying! I feel that in a situation like this, the police should have done something to stop these riots! Don't they have resources to control the people, using pepper spray, attack dogs and water cannons?<sup>10</sup>

AFP: The government did try to enforce police control over the population but even that caused more unrest. As times the police were too forceful, resulting in police brutality in many situations.<sup>11</sup>

KW: So you're saying it turned into a national crisis? What happened in the end? It sounds like a humanitarian crisis that began as a small situation and escalated into a civil war like environment. I remember reading about how the United Nations has the authority or ability to intervene and aid countries if the need arises.<sup>12</sup> Don't tell me the crisis in Kenya evolved into a Rwandan like event?

AFP: Yes it was a national catastrophe. The government couldn't even control its people and with great political and economic instability, it's a wonder how the nation survived in the aftermath. An estimated 1,500 people were killed and up to 600,000 people were displaced. It would have been a higher statistic if the United Nations and other countries didn't follow through in their peace missions. I found an article by theorist Johannes Langer, and he explains that the U.N acted swiftly not wanting this mission to be a failure like many in the past.<sup>13</sup> It would have been disastrous if it resulted in a Somali or Rwandan episode!

KW: So how was the country in the aftermath? I assume that there would have been many negative outcomes from the riots?

AFP: Spot on. I haven't finished my research but I'll be including a section on the aftermath and the affects the riot had on the country.

KW: Do you think the media had a great effect on the events? How are you going to relate that to your theory?

AFP: Well I do think the mass media played a role in fuelling the conflict, especially Kenyan media. It was a platform for political ideologies to be expressed and at times hate messages were broadcasted.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Firestone, J.M 1972, 'Theory of the Riot Process', American Behavioural Scientist, Vol. 15, No. 6, pp. 859-882

<sup>11</sup> Ndungu, N 2008, 'Kenya: The December 2007 Election Crisis' Mediterranean Quarterly, Vol. 19, No. 4, pp. 111-121

<sup>12</sup> International Crisis Group, 2008, 'Kenya in Crisis', African Report No.137, pp. 16

<sup>13</sup> Munyua, A 2011, 'Perceptions and misconceptions: The role of new and traditional media in Kenya's post-election violence (2007)', Global Information Society Watch, pp. 170-173, access <<[http://giswatch.org/sites/default/files/gisw\\_-\\_kenya.pdf](http://giswatch.org/sites/default/files/gisw_-_kenya.pdf)>>

<sup>14</sup> Modi, R & Shekhawat, S 2008, 'The Kenyan Crisis: Post December 2007 Elections', Working Paper No. 1, Centre for African Studies, pp. 23

KW: Do you think the media represented all sides of the crisis? Did it hold influence over opinions and manipulate perceptions?

AFP: Looking at my articles at the moment, I believe that the media had success in broadcasting the riots and attracting international attention. I'll have to research further and see if the media portrayed the events in a certain light and if they were bias in their reporting.

KW: I hope they weren't! The media is supposed to be a mediator in reporting and should be impartial.<sup>15</sup> Do you think you'll be able to fit all this information on your website?

AFP: I hope so! There is quite a lot of information but I'll use footnotes if I have any extra ideas and references. I've found it quite difficult to format my project and my theory.

KW: Are you struggling with finding theorists? Or having any other problems?

AFP: Well I've found some theorists and their perspectives on riots however the section on riots and its connection to the Kenyan situation is quite difficult. It would be good if I can find several perspectives that highlight the positive and negative aspects of the events. The sources I have on the media's influence seem well detailed and useful so I hope I can come to a conclusion on how the events were portrayed.<sup>16</sup>

KW: You seem to have investigated in detail. I think a website as a media platform is a fabulous idea, simple yet creative. Any links or extra information will be extremely helpful to people who have little knowledge of both the theory of riots and the Kenyan crisis.

AFP: Yes, initially I had so much trouble trying to create a website; I had no idea how to design one. But now I'm having fun with it and hopefully anyone who reads it will find it interesting and learn something from the information provided.

KW: I'm sure they will. I'm very interested in this topic and I'm positive you'll create a great information pack.

AFP: Thanks! I have to say, the data gathered has been interesting and unexpected. The numerous perspectives from theorists, scholars and media sources that I've collected will hopefully allow for a holistic approach to the theory.

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<sup>15</sup> Ismail J.A & Deane, J 2008, 'The Kenyan Elections 2007 and their aftermath: the role of media and communication, BBC World Service Trust: Policy Briefing No. 1, pp. 12, access <<[http://downloads.bbc.co.uk/worldservice/trust/pdf/kenya\\_policy\\_briefing\\_08.pdf](http://downloads.bbc.co.uk/worldservice/trust/pdf/kenya_policy_briefing_08.pdf)>>

<sup>16</sup> Munyua, A 2011, 'Perceptions and misconceptions: The role of new and traditional media in Kenya's post-election violence (2007)', Global Information Society Watch, pp. 170-173, access <<[http://giswatch.org/sites/default/files/gisw\\_-\\_kenya.pdf](http://giswatch.org/sites/default/files/gisw_-_kenya.pdf)>>

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**HONOUR STATEMENT**

Acknowledgement should go to the projects done by previous students of BCM390. They set the groundwork and were a model for how I went about creating my report, how information should be presented and certainly gave me some great ideas that essentially enabled me to improve the content of my chosen topic. Some of my friends who read through my work and gave me advice on changing certain aspects of my theory and case study, and furthermore gave me encouragement throughout this process should be thanked. I feel that the continued peer learning and assistance helped me in organising my report; as constructive criticism and feedback allowed me to put together a final project report.