

Ethnicity as Discursive Construct in Kenyan Televised Comedy: Humorous Harm?

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Abstract

In this article, we evaluated the value of televised comedy frequently broadcast in Kenya through television comedy shows such as ‘*Churchil Live Show*’ (which airs on Nation TV) and the already completed series of ‘*Kenya Kona*’ (which used to be aired on Kenya Television Network “KTN”). We argue that ethnicity is a problem in Kenya because it is entrenched in stereotypes that date back to pre-independence, carried from generation to generation through socialization and today it is reproduced and re-enforced through televised comedy. Thus, this study asks if televised ethnic comedy in Kenya is innocent or guilty in the formulation of ethnic stereotyping.

Key words: Ethnic stereotyping, comedy shows.

Introduction

Television is the centre stage of comedy since the beginning of the 19th century. Recent studies have found that there is difficulty in distinguishing social commentary and satire reproduced from the ideological ethnic stereotypes in televised comedy. In most cases, the debate shifts to whether the viewers of these comedy shows laugh at the stereotyped group or the stereotyped group laugh alongside (Kerrigan, 2011; Oring, 2011). Some studies have proved that ethnic comedy can be a double-edged sword; sometimes it can be offensive to some groups and sometimes it is not, although there is always the right time for them (Meyer, 2000). In this case, it has been argued that ethnic comedy can be more acceptable when the portrayals are made, and it is clear that the group being stereotyped will be laughing alongside others.

In Kenya, television comedy has become extremely popular in the last two decades; starting with the popular *Redykulass* show. Today, every television channel has a programme with comic content. The Kenyan comedy peaks with ‘Churchill Live Show’ led by Dan Ndambuki and aired by Nation Television (NTV) and; *Kenya Kona* hosted by Jalang’o and Mshamba; initially aired by citizen TV and later by the Kenya Television Network (Laughindustry.co.ke, 2013). Currently *Kenya Kona* series is over, but its ethnic jokes still live on recorded tapes. These shows are the two most popular stand-up comedy shows ever aired national television. Kenyans laugh at their ethnic jokes and like them. But is there any harm of stereotypes that the comedians keep repeating regarding some of the 42 ethnic groups in Kenya?

Understanding Ethnicity, Stereotypes and Ethnic Stereotyping

Ethnicity is the demarcation of society members with regard to their supposed natural characteristics like language, physical features, place of origin, color, accents among others (Rappoport, 2005; Gataullina, 2003). Stereotyping has been serving multiple purposes in the society that include cognitive and motivational dynamics (Norrick, 2009). In the media industry, stereotyping is born of the need to convey information about characters in a simplified way and to inculcate in the audiences expectations about the actions of portrayed characters (Casey, et al., 2002).

Stereotypes are significant in comedy because they not only help to establish instantly recognizable behavioral pattern, but the portrayal of such patterns constitutes a comic relief (Gillot, 2013). However, critical attention should be paid to the ideological implications of the stereotypical treatment of ethnic groups in comedy. In the argument of King (2002, p. 129), such attention should provide an insight as to whether stereotypes are “read as a symptom of existing social relations or as a more active component of the politics of representation.”

And furthermore, ethnic stereotyping is a misrepresentation of an ethnic group using what are thought to be representative characteristics of members of that ethnic group. Ethnic labels are the images that are used to misrepresent an ethnic group, and they relay underlying messages about cultural norms, status, behavioral patterns and groupthink of an ethnic group. Ethnic stereotyping is very common in ethnic comedy which in most cases is considered offensive and in other cases a comic relief or joke. In their analysis, Steers and Nardon (2005) contend that since ethnic comedy is considered a comic relief as a result of their realistic caricatures of various cultures, the commonness of such jokes emanate from the significance of cultural differences. However, it is important to quickly caution that ethnic stereotypes, just like cultural stereotypes can produce binary opposed consequences. Whereas ethnic stereotypes can reinforce positive values that benefit a group over another, they can also result to significant stereotypes inimical to ethnic, cultural, social cohesion and national integration and coexistence.

The Power of Media

According to Ndonye and Nabea (2013), media remains the most influential institution in the 21st century and therefore, society must be aware of its irresistible logic. Ndonye and Nabea (2013) also suggest that media is the new opium for the masses, and likewise, Gataullina (2003) reports that that media is the leading ‘althusserian ideological apparatus’ that has proved to muscularly control the mind of masses. Hence, Gataullina avers:

Mass media became one of the main sources of popular culture in modern capitalist society. Media, however, not only entertains and offers news to people, but also transfers the stereotypes, beliefs and values of the society to reproduce the existing order of social life (p.1).

This argument presents a platform, on which the power of media can be understood, especially in inculcating stereotypes and ideologies. The ability of the media in the modern capitalist world to be the most revered god; then is significant in understanding why media logic is a threat and for that case, television content will remain atop all other influences. In this case, televised comedies are the optimally placed to inculcate stereotypes. Worse is that the comedians use a form of comedy that society does not realize that they are being fed a psychological satiety that affects the way they picture their brothers and sisters, a process that is completed and sealed through laughter.

What is not said is that although there laughter, it inculcates ethnic stereotypes, as in racial stereotypes, the impact goes beyond the joke (Park et al., 2006). For example, the ethnic conflict that Kenya experienced after the disputed 2007 elections calls for a need to evaluate ethnicity in Kenya and the influential institutions that entrench it need to be highlighted.

One such institution is media and television in particular, and it is undisputable that media content has impact on the society as media logic is firmly inculcated through its content with television as the most influential given its audio visual ability to traverses all other media (Druckman, 2003). Therefore, when it comes to ethnic stereotyping, television has been noted as the major influence in society.

In Kenya, the history of ethnic stereotypes dates back to colonial times when colonialists used ethnic stereotype as a tool for their 'divide and rule' policy to contain communities. During the colonial period, zones of confluence between various ethnic groups were systematically frozen. Thus, careful social engineering attached some negative ethnocentric labels among some Kenyan ethnic groups. For example the Luo were labeled as genetically lazy, the Kamba as sex maniacs, the Kikuyu as cheeky, the Maasai as trustworthy albeit savage natives and so on (Onyango, 2008). And in this mix, the process of ethnic stereotypes has taken on political and cultural significance wherein popular ethnic labels are highly socialized to the extent that they are acculturated into the ethnic groups that are being misrepresented.

Commonplace Ethnic Labels in Kenya

Some of the labels that were popular and accepted even to date as true representations of the major ethnic groups in Kenya are that the Kikuyu communities are naturally thieves and love money more than anything else. This stereotype is used to explain the Kikuyu's success in business and entrepreneurship. In this case, the ethnic label has been posed in both positive and negative light and is highly accepted as true by both Kikuyu's and other ethnic groups.

It is also popularly argued that members of the Kamba and Gusii ethnic groups possess the greatest art of witchcraft. While Gusii are popular with night running, the Kamba are popular with *Kamuti*; a medicine that is capable of seductive powers. This *Kamuti* logic was associated with the idea that the Kamba are sex maniacs. The Kamba are also seen a loyal because during revolt, they were massively deployed in colonial army to fight the Mau Mau for the British. And for the Gusii, they are associated with eating people, and thus accused that they unbury their dead and eat their bodies.

Members of the Luhya ethnic group are allotted their characteristic based on their staple food of chicken and *ugali*. They are said to love chicken so much. They are also misrepresented on the bases of their capability in employment and are said to be the best watchmen and cooks. They are also portrayed as loyal; something that emanates from their loyalty to Nabongo Mumia (1852-1949), the paramount chief of the Wanga kingdom during the colonial era.

Moreover, members of the Luo are believed to be educated, knowing English and preoccupied with conspicuous consumption. Sometimes, these labels are presented in good light in some times in bad. The Luo are also seen as an arrogant and chaotic ethnic group that like to throw stones in demonstrations. They are also associated with loyalty especially in management positions; a stereotype ascribed to them when Kikuyu were replaced by Luo in colonial farms, used as supervisors loyal to the colonial government.

The Maasai ethnic group is associated with cattle and is said to love two things in this world: grass and cattle. Maasai are believed to articulate and think along the lines of these labels. For example, a Maasai man will tell a girl I love you like a cow and it will mean a lot to her. They are also seen and described as a primitive ethnic group. There is also a stereotype that members of the Somali community are terrorists by nature. And when a grenade or a bomb explodes in Kenya; all security focus their attention to Eastleigh, a suburb of Nairobi and members of the Somali community. Another stereotype prevalent in Kenya is that members of the Swahili community are lazy, and especially women who are housewives.

These are just a few labels, and most of them are accepted. As most of these labels are popular in politics, the criticism through media caused the most negative to disappear. Hence, discrimination via ethnic groups has been fading in serious talk due to fear of being netted under the defamation act. However, the media has revived the labels through comedy because it is not taken as serious, but as a comic relief.

However, the form used to pass content does change the packaging of a message, but the effect remains the same. In this case, ethnic labels passed through television comedy shows are equally stereotyping. Since these stereotypes are common, and especially now that they are being used in comedy shows so as to hide under the guise of comic relief; no one has ever tried to debunk their myths and therefore, it is possible that society will continue to be socialized incorrectly about ethnicity in Kenya.

Comedy and Stereotyping

People can't ignore the impact of ethnic stereotypes as they watch television comedies. And although most people would argue that they do not believe in stereotypes or they do not take them seriously, they cannot avoid doing so because they have it in their subconscious minds (Kan, 2004). In fact ethnic stereotyping in media becomes an insidious act in the long run, although society pretends that it is not harming, it harbors in their id cumulatively (Morgan & Shanahan, 2010). Thus, suppressed and repressed, but it comes out when provoked. In Kenya, ethnic stereotypes are exploited by politicians to down play their competitors or to place members of other ethnic groups in a bad light. This was evident during the 2007/2008 post-election violence in which Yieke (2008) contends that:

Before and after the general election in Kenya, there was a lot of hate speech in both the private and public domain. In most cases, this was meant to incite people against members of the 'Other' ethnic community, or to intimidate members of an ethnic community (p.15).

The hate speech at that time was highly based on stereotypes that ethnic communities held for the other. Stereotypes on television comedy has produced comedic ethics that has become popular in the Kenyan entertainment industry and when politics presents a chance for these ethics to be utilized, politicians do so in ways inimical to the country's peaceful coexistence. According to Yieke (2010), "In Kenyan multiparty politics, ethnic labels have acquired more salience than either policy or ideology" (14). It is from this understanding that we recognize that the vehicle to communicating, socializing and institutionalizing these ethnic labels, whether negative or positive is through televised comedies. In the same note, Yieke contended that, "A Kenyan voter today is a member of an ethnic group first and a citizen of his/her country second" (p. 14). This means that in Kenyan politics, ethnic labels are dominant and as we have already noted, the politicians use these ethnic labels as a recipe for their advantage and to exploit the stereotyped weaknesses of other ethnic groups.

Some contend that what is important is to find out the effects of living with stereotypes inculcated by the comedy shows (Kroeger, 2012). For those who do not believe in them, they argue that there are no negative effects. Others have said that the possible effect of stereotyping in comedy and entertainment industry is not scientifically proven, since no study has proved such effect (Kan, 2004). However, the fact that there is no study suggesting that ethnic stereotypes in comedy are harmful does not mean there is no such harm. This will remain a fallacious belief until the proponents will prove otherwise, through a study.

Moreover, there is also a contention that comical stereotyping in itself is not negative because it's a natural occurrence and that people use stereotypes to reduce their efforts in thinking about something (Kroeger, 2012). This view is that stereotyping is a simplified mental picture of an individual or group of people who share certain stereotypical qualities (Rappoport, 2005). Therefore, people find stereotyping entertaining and the exaggerated portrayals are easy to understand. This view is self-destructing as simplification produces poor models, when people are more complex entities, and additionally, the fact that stereotyping is not negative does not necessarily mean it is not harmful.

Here, the pertinent question is whether people believe in the stereotypes they see and hear. In most cases, people accept the stereotypes because they amuse them and they subconsciously believe the comic characterizations because they are amused. In this case, the consequences are negative because it leads viewers to seriously take the stereotypes as truth. Television comedy, therefore, can contribute to ethnocentrism and negative ethnicity, hate speech, and ethnic attacks, demeaning, etc., all which contribute to an inability to coexist and tolerate other people's abilities, culture and way of life and it can even lead to violence.

Whereas there are no studies to prove that comic stereotyping has any negative effect, there are studies proving that stereotyping in general is harmful. Ethnic stereotyping has a fundamental problem when it comes to how much people rely on them to base their behavior and reaction to members of the stereotyped group. Stereotypes are believed to be more harmful and dangerous when they become mainstreamed (when said in word of mouth or through mainstream media like television).

For example, stereotyping in effect becomes more conspicuous when it affects the audience in such a way that when they encounter the stereotyped person, they already have a preconceived notion of them. For example in Kenya, when members of other ethnic groups viewing all Kikuyus as thieves so when there is social interaction, a lot of reservations and caution is unearthed. And also, there is a possibility of a groupthink among the Kikuyus that they are allowed and empowered by the larger community to indeed rob and steal, using their presumably natural thievery as an excuse.

On the other hand, people involved in the production of comedy shows argue that stereotypes can be used to reflect deeper injustices in the society (Kan, 2004; Leda & Mark, 2009). This way, the society mirrors itself through the comedy. Thus, they justify the positive effects of ethnic stereotyping as they do not deny that the portrayals could harm some members of society. In the process, the comedy is used to ridicule ethnicity by pointing out some absurdities; or trying to ridicule members of an ethnic group by showing some absurdities in their behavioral pattern in order to make the portrayals understood as a falsification of truth; hence, they exaggerate ethnic behaviors or points of view, showing the true ridiculousness of those ethnic stereotypes. However, the problem with this is how many people differentiate this exaggeration from the truth? Like the argument of lack of proof, this argument is not convincing and they have to come up with a more convincing argument.

There is an accusation that these producers exploit ethnic stereotyping because they know people will laugh at them and love their shows, yet because people laugh at the portrayals does not mean they love the portrayals. Therefore, the entertainment industry is exploiting ethnicity for a big sale at the expense of hurting people. Moreover, the assumption that people will understand the comic stereotypes and differentiate them from truth does not hold. Ethnic stereotyping in comedy gives distorted images of people; the distorted image is mostly negative. Like the distortion in ads where people believe in them; and companies increase sales, they also believe in comedy images. Realistically, how can the media expect people to be influenced by distorted ads and then expect them to not believe distorted portrayals of ethnic groups?

Common Ethnic Stereotyping Jokes: Kenya Television Comedy

In this exercise, we can specifically analyze over a dozen examples of content from television comedy shows that air every Sunday on Nation Television (NTV) and Kenya Television Network (KTN) to give some light on the rampancy of ethnic comedy in Kenya television that many Kenyans are privy to.

It has been portrayed for over fifty years that members of the Luhya community are mostly watchmen or cooks as exemplified when one comedian on a Kenyan comedy show said:

Tuliweka sheria kuhusu job yetu ya kuiba... Sheria ya kwanza, hatutapora soja, anaweza kuwa ni mtu wa kwetu

We agreed on the rule of stealing...the first rule; we should not rob a watchman, he could be our person.

The comedian is a Luhya and derives his jokes from the stereotypes associated with the community, including his accent. In this joke, the comedian was trying to show that there is a higher possibility that a watchman is from Luhya ethnic group. The audience, being privy to this association, finds humor in the portrayal, and it acts as his punch line to deliver the joke.

Another comedian from the same show posed his joke that was meant to exploit another ethnic stereotyping joke:

Ukienda kwa night club, kwanza uliza mrembo utakayepata jina lake? Akisema Nduku ama Mwende mwambie acha nifike hapa kindogo halafu toweka. Kwa sababu akiwa ni bibi wa mtu, tutakusoma kwa magazeti.

When you go to a night club, ask the lady you will happen to dance with her name. if she says Nduku or Mwende, request her to excuse you and then disappear because if she is someone else's wife, we will read you in newspapers.

This joke sounds incomplete, but Kenyans laugh at it because they already know what the comedian was talking about is witchcraft among Kamba ethnic community. Nduku and Mwende are common names used in comedy to describe ladies from Kamba community. In most cases, ethnic jokes are hinted, and since the listeners have already inculcated the stereotypes, they decode the intended message, and laugh.

The power of comedy, like the power of any literary content lies in decoding and realizing that you have been told what you already know, but you realized it late; it's like you have been tricked and caught unaware. Thus, the following example can serve to emphasize the point regarding a coded joke:

Ukitaka kuoa, usiangalie Mount Kenya
(If you want to marry, do not face Mount Kenya).

It seems harmless to say this but for those who understand, they will know the sensational stories from Nyeri in Mount Kenya region and particularly in the central area where women are portrayed as men batterers. This joke is based on a long standing stereotype that women from Nyeri and by extension Kikuyu women, beat their men against the chagrin of the societal expectations where men are masculine and should dominate women.

In another televised comedy, a comedian joked:

Ukienda kundance na msichana Nairobi muulize jina. Akisema Wanjiku, dance like this... the comedian dances to the tune of a song with both his hands in his pockets.

This is a joke people will understand since the girl has identified herself as Wanjiku; definitely a Kikuyu. The audience is already aware why the dance involved plunging hands in the pockets — Wanjiku being a Kikuyu is likely to pickpocket him so he better watch his wallet, and not only watching, but practically keep his grip on it.

Not all jokes will come packaged negatively as exemplified by this other joke:

Yesu angekuja central afanye maji kuwa wine; the following day ungeona biashara 'Kamau and Jesus wine and spirits'

(If Jesus came to central province and turn water into wine, the following day you could have seen on business ads, 'Kamau and Jesus wine and spirits').

The audience will love one because central is a place for Kikuyu ethnic group, sourcing its content from the history of Kikuyu economic activity as business people. The joke is not only depicting Kikuyus as creative businessmen, but also exploring their tendency to exploit any opportunity to make money.

For Gusii and Meru community members, they are depicted as violent, brutal and quick to anger. One comedian once posed:

Mkisii hawezi kukomentate mpira...kwa sababu ya hasira
(a gusii cannot commentate football game because of anger).

Another one depicts members of Meru community as inherently and unconsciously violent as he joked:

Mmeru akikwambia nitakukata; anakuanga ashakukata tayari
(When a member from Meru ethnicity tells you I am going to cut you, he already has cut you).

The stereotype is meant to mean that Meru's anger is so uncontrolled and that the action goes before their decision. This way, they are to be understood as inherently violent and that the violence has been naturalized.

Another ethnic narrative targets people from coast province in Kenya dominated by the Swahili community. A televised comedian once posed:

Wamama wa coast unakutanga wameketi chini ya muembe, ukiwauliza wanafanya nini wanasema tunangojea embe lianguke; 'hawawezi kupanda mti wakachume'

(When you go to coast, you find women seated under a mango tree and if you ask them what they are doing they will tell you that they are waiting for the mangoes to fall; they cannot climb and pluck the mangoes).

This is meant to reinforce the portrayal of the Swahili community members as lazy. Everything has to happen for them and they take no initiative to act in situations, and the other common response to their inaction is:

Tunafanya kwa raha zetu
(We are doing at our own pace).

Modeling the joke in the way Isaac Newton discovered the law of gravity; another comedian reasoned that whenever such a mango falls and finds Swahili women under the mango tree; they discover that the mango is ripe, hence, the idea is that they have not discovered the law that can be of any help to the world. Hence, this joke is trying to express their plasticity of mind derived from their depiction as too lazy to discover, invent or innovate.

People from the Luo community are not spared either. A comedian once posed this joke:

Do you know it is only in Luo nyanza where a person can tell you that there is a difference between the car you ignite and the car you start?

Yet, another one was posed as:

Mluo afathali anyeshewe kuliko kukumbali lift from a probox; patia yeye lift kwa Mercedes Benz atakubali.

(It is better to be rained on than for a person from Luo to accept a lift from a probox, but from Mercedes Benz, they will accept).

This is based on class definition. The Luo are portrayed as proud people who associate themselves with expensive and classy things like Mercedes Benz and not cheap Probox cars. In fact, many comedians have found a rich content when portraying people from the Luo as conspicuous consumers, who can spend all they have, and not build a house in their rural areas.

A comedian who comes on stage as an archetype of Luo community once accused the leading mobile provider of discriminating against the Luo in their “Bonyeza Ushinde” promotion. He removes a touch screen smart phone from his pocket and asks:

Sisi tunabonyeza nini hapa? wangesema guza ushinde

(What are we being told to key in from this? They could have said touch and win).

“We” in this context meant members of the Luo community. The idea is that keying in numbers is only possible from old low class technology phone and with the classy touch screen phones, which all the Luos presumably own, thus they should not be associated with key phones. They belong to another class, and therefore, they have been discriminated against by the promotion, because they do not have low class phones.

However, Luos are not spared of negative ethnic jokes:

Mawe yana kazi tofauti Luo Nyanza; kuna ya kuita mototo na ya kupiga adui

(Stones have different tasks in Luo Nyanza, there are stones for calling children and for attacking enemies).

This joke is meant to portray the Luo as an unruly community that uses stones as it has been believed for long in Kenya. In fact, the football team Gor Mahia, named after the Luo legend is believed to have fans throw stones every time they are defeated on the field. The joke also instills a stereotype that communication in the Luo community is done by stones, and thus, it is part of their inherent behavioral pattern.

For Somali people, a comedian after the 2013 Moscow Marathon was at it saying:

Somalia haijawahi kushinda medal kwa sababu wakati gun imepigwa waanze wanawachwa kwa start point, kisha wanauliza; aye; kwa nini msirushe kitu mzito; hiyo mlio ni environment yetu; nothing to show me nianze kukimbia

(Somalia has never won a medal in athletics because when a start gun is fired they are left at the starting point and they demand that the game be started by blowing a powerful weapon because guns are their environment).

Some ethnic Somali are portrayed as people who are used to war, and by extension inherently violent and terrorists.

The Kalenjin has recently been depicted as long distance runners and as people who are not threatened by distance. A comedian recently joked:

Jana nilienda Kitwek night mlienda? Wawa wawa packing ilikuwa empty! Kesho yake wakale wanatoka dance, unawauliza Chepkorir unaenda wapi; akiwa Nairobi anakwambia hapa tu Eldoret.

(Did you go to Kitwek night yesterday, the car park was empty. Today morning I was asking Kalenjins as they came out of the dance, where are you going Chepkorir, he said just here, Eldoret).

First, the impression is that the car park (parking lot) was empty and given the distance between Eldoret and Nairobi town, they came running, thus they never needed vehicles. Asked where they are going after the ceremony, they confessed, ‘just here Eldoret’, meaning that they never consider long distance an issue. They reduce a long distance to be ‘just here’. This is associated with the Kalenjin as athletes and given that they have represented Kenya in long distance races worldwide, they have come to be accepted as inherently athletic and talented.

Ethnic Jokes: Harmful or Just Humorous?

The best way to look at ethnic jokes is to first understand that they are being mediated by the mainstream media; and worse the most influential of all media — television (Limon, 2000). In this case, stereotyping theory is the best perspective of evaluating these comedic contents. In the view of stereotyping theory, mass media reinforces the dominant segment of society’s existing patterns of attitudes and behavior toward minorities by perpetuating rigid and usually negative portrayals, which can have the result of keeping minorities in subordinate positions (McGarty, Yzerbyt & Spears, 2002; Meyer, 2000). Therefore, where a minority group is stereotyped the majority groupthink towards the group remains and is assumed to be true. And worse is when a majority group use the same ethnic stereotypes for political purposes which then becomes dominant ammunition for them to fuel each other’s anger.

Therefore, the theory views ethnic stereotyping as a way of reinforcing dominant attitudes by perpetuating untrue characteristics regarding an ethnic group, whether majority or minority (McGarty, Yzerbyt & Spears, 2002). The case of ethnic stereotyping in Kenya is either perpetuated by the communities themselves so as to create a situation favorable to their survival or by others with an aim of de-popularizing another ethnic group. And as mentioned above, ethnic labels were used in post-colonial time as a political weapon in national politics as a strategy of divide and rule.

In order to buttress the point for those who argue that stereotyping through comedy is harmless, accumulation theory can be a useful evaluation tool (Morgan & Shanahan, 2010). The theory contends that the impact of any one message on any specific person can be minimal but consistency, persistence and corroborated between different media messages, may result in minor changes among the audience (Morgan & Shanahan, 2010; McGarty, Yzerbyt & Spears, 2002). Thus, these minimal impacts gradually add up over time and produce significant changes in society's culture. And in the case of ethnic stereotyping, it is clear that in Kenya, the media has corroborated and almost every television channel has a comedy program where ethnic stereotypes are repeatedly and consistently aired as no one particular audience of the mainstream television channels is spared of the stereotypes mentioned above.

Therefore, if applied to the case of ethnic stereotyping on television comedy shows, the two theories have some shocking agreement regarding the effect of media content regardless of form. It is true that in entertainment industry and in other industry contents, the mass media repeatedly negatively portrays various ethnic groups. In ethnic stereotyping in Kenya, the media, like media elsewhere, focus their attention on some characteristics of a group and transmit messages about specific problem, situation or issues that demean or praise a group.

The next level in this discursive construction and socialization of ethnic stereotype is when the portrayals become the basis of meaning construction for the audience, especially those who have limited contact with the people being stereotyped (Kerrigan, 2011). And the last stage is when audience members inculcate particular inflexible meanings in their memories that form stereotyping interpretations that people use when dealing, thinking about or responding to individuals of a portrayed category without regard to their actual personal characteristics. In fact, some comedies are actually directing people on how to behave when dealing with a member of a stereotyped group (Limon, 2000) For example, keep your hands on your pockets when dancing with a Kikuyu woman — meaning she can steal from you at any time. So, as the media supplies the message through comedies, the comprehension increases and the meaning supplied begins to form and modify meanings, beliefs, and attitudes that serve as guides to behavior for members of the audience.

Conclusion

From the foregoing discussion, it is clear that ethnic stereotyping is common in Kenya. In analysing the impact of stereotyping, there is no study that has been done to prove whether ethnic stereotyping in comedy shows in Kenya is harmful. However, it is agreed that stereotyping in itself has a negative impact on society, and whereas there is no scientific prove of the negative impact of ethnic stereotyping in comedy; there is no study to prove that it is harmless. Yet, in Kenya, scholars have proved that negative national ethnic stereotypes has contributed to the 2007/2008 post-election violence that left over 1300 people dead and over 3000 others displaced.

The truth justice and reconciliation commission report recognized that ethnic stereotyping was rampant during the violence, and thus it was a key contributor to the violence. Although the society is not keen on the effect of ethnic stereotyping, the labels used in comedy aired by the media are retained in people's minds. These experiences and stereotypes regarding other ethnic groups are inculcated and institutionalized so that people handle, react to people from stereotyped groups in the way they are represented. Moreover, the stereotype labels used against a certain group are used and (mis)used by politicians to create hate speech as exemplified in the case of Kenya. The effect of hate speech is ethnic intolerance, ethnic clashes, ethnic violence and ethnic hate which obviously create a society wherein it becomes difficult for people to respect each other and live cohesively.

Given the above speculations, media in Kenya should rise to the occasion and censor ethnic jokes in comedy television. There are better jokes than ethnic jokes, thus, the media should not rely on ethnic jokes or exploit its comic relief for commercial gain while society becomes prone to violence and long standing ethnic conflict. And finally, like other stereotypes steeped in racial and religious conflict, ethnic stereotyping jokes, should be abandoned.

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