

# Out of the dark

A qualitative field study of Kenyan reporters' role in the Somalia conflict

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## Abstract

The purpose of this study has been to find out how Kenyan journalists look at their own role in the development of the Somalia conflict and how they work to make sure that they have a positive impact on the situation. The empirical material consists of seven semi-structured interviews with journalists who work in print- or broadcast media in the Kenyan capital Nairobi and who specialises in conflict reporting in general and Somalia more specifically. The interviews were summarised, analysed and presented in a thematic order, based on the initial research questions stated below:

- Do Kenyan journalists believe that they can help bring peace and stability in Somalia and if so, how?
- How do Kenyan journalists look at their own role in reporting about the Somalia conflict?
- How do Kenyan journalists reason when choosing subjects to report about, angles and sources?

The result of the study is very clear: all journalists interviewed believe that they can help bring peace and stability in Somalia. Some even believe that without the media, there won't be peace in Somalia. However, they look slightly different at their individual roles as reporters covering a conflict in a neighbouring country where their own nation is militarily involved. Some look at themselves as objective messengers that report the truth no matter the implications. Others are sensitive when it comes to showing pictures of dead people or publishing the number of casualties, afraid that it might stir up emotions and cause retaliatory attacks. One journalist stands out as the only one openly supporting a patriotic line that he believes is needed for the Kenyan military to defeat the enemy and in the end achieve peace and stability in the region. They all consider it difficult to remain objective when reporting from Somalia, since they most often need to work embedded with the troops for security reasons.

African journalists need to highlight the plight of the Somali people and also report about the positive sides of the region, all journalists believe. It is important to paint a brighter picture of Somalia in order to bring new investments to the poor country. Also, they all emphasise the need to talk to the people of Somalia, to let them speak for themselves, because in the end, only Somalis can bring peace to their country.

## Acknowledgements

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## Abbreviations

Al-Shabaab – “The Youth”

AU – African Union

Amisom – African Union Mission in Somalia

EU – European Union

ICU – Islamic Courts Union

KDF – Kenyan Defence Forces

MFS – Minor Field Studies

Sida - Swedish International Development Cooperation agency

TFG – Transitional Federal Government (Of Somalia)

UN – United Nations

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# 1. Introduction

Somalia has been in conflict for more than two decades now, a complex conflict to which a solution seems distant. The faces of the conflict have changed and the warfront has been moved back and forth, but the people of Somalia have had to endure constant unrest since the former president and dictator Siad Barre was ousted in 1991. In August 2012, the mandate of the UN-backed Transitional Federal Government (TFG) is running out and it is still unclear who is going to take over thereafter.

The conflict in Somalia is to a great extent spilling over into neighbouring Kenya. Somali refugees are streaming over the border to Kenya and numerous grenade attacks, blamed on the Somali-based Islamist militia al-Shabaab, have caused casualties in Kenya. Al-Shabaab has also claimed responsibility for several kidnappings of foreign tourists and aid workers in Kenya, which has negatively affected tourism in the country.

In October 2011, the Kenyan military became involved in the fight against al-Shabaab inside Somali territory. Since then, the conflict in Somalia has become an even bigger concern for the Kenyan people and the coverage of the Somalia conflict in Kenyan media has increased. This study focuses on Kenyan journalist for that same reason. The Somalia conflict is no longer just the same old conflict that has been going on in their neighbouring country for so long. It is no longer 'other people's war', but more of their own war. I wanted to know how that has affected the Kenyan journalists' reporting and how they look at their own role in the conflict. Do they believe that their work can help bring peace and stability in Somalia?

I hope that the result of this study can make a contribution to a greater discussion about the role of journalism in a conflict. When journalists review their own reporting, it might lead to less polarized and simplified coverage about the Somalia conflict, which I believe can help bring peace and stability to Somalia.

## 1.1 Purpose and research questions

The purpose of this bachelor thesis is to study how Kenyan journalists look at their own role in the development of the Somalia conflict, to find out whether the journalists believe that they can influence the situation and if so, how they work to make sure they have a positive impact. The aim is also to find out how active and conscious the journalists are when it comes to choosing what to report about and how. My research questions are stated below:

- Do Kenyan journalists believe that they can help bring peace and stability in Somalia and if so, how?
- How do Kenyan journalists look at their own role in reporting about the Somalia conflict?
- How do Kenyan journalists reason when choosing subjects to report about, angles and sources?

## 1.2 Material and limitations

The empirical material analysed in this study consists of semi-structured interviews with seven Kenyan reporters working in print- or broadcast media in Nairobi, Kenya. All informants are specialised in conflict reporting in general and the Somalia conflict more specifically. They mainly work for major media organizations and are therefore influential when it comes to Somalia coverage in Kenya, which is why their work is particularly interesting to this study. All but one has travelled to Somalia since the Kenyan military started to operate within Somali territory in October 2011.

All journalists interviewed were men, between the age of 23 and 32 and born in Kenya. They all have an academic background, although not necessarily in journalism. The interviews were made between March 21 and April 16 2012, within the time frame of the MFS scholarship. They took place in the journalists' own newsrooms or in nearby cafés, depending on the wish of the journalist, and lasted between 35 and 70 minutes.

## 2. Background

Kenya and Somalia are neighbouring countries in East Africa, both with an important coastline by the Indian Ocean. This study focuses on the conflict in Somalia but is based on field studies conducted in Nairobi, Kenya. To fully understand the initial purpose and the final result of the study it is important to know some basic facts about the two countries and the relationship between them.

### 2.1 Somalia

Somalia is situated on the horn of Africa and borders Ethiopia, Kenya and Djibouti. The majority of the estimated 9,9 million people of Somalia are Sunni Muslims and their official language is Somali (ne.se). Traditionally there has been a high tolerance for various religious beliefs but in recent years Islamist militias, which are practising a more fundamentalist version of Islam, have gained influence (landguiden.se: a). At the same time clanism is a strong presence and a divisive factor in a country where local elders play an important role in decision-making. Although Somali governments have been campaigning against the clan-division, it has thrived and “proved to be even more resilient than the Somali state itself”. (Healy in Hoehne et al. 2010: 369).

Somalia gained independence in 1960 and has a rough history of violence and war. Since 1991 between 350 000 and a million Somalis are estimated to have died because of the conflict (globalsecurity.org). Severe droughts have further worsened the situation in Somalia where almost half of the population is estimated to live on less than a dollar a day (landguiden.se: a). There has been no election in Somalia since the 1960s and no stable central government since 1991 (ibid). As of May 2012, the Transitional Federal Government controls large parts of the country including the capital Mogadishu. The TFG is supported by a majority of western and neighbouring countries, as well as the United Nations, the European Union and the African Union (HRW 2012). In August 2012 the mandate of the TFG is expiring and it is unclear who is going to take over after the current president Sharif Sheikh Ahmed. The coming transition will be of great importance to the development in the country. Many of Somalia’s well-known problems such as terrorism, piracy and famine are ultimately due to the lack of an efficient central government (International Crisis Group 2012).

## 2.2 The Somalia conflict 1991-2012

The Somalia conflict is not a traditional war fought between states. It is a complex conflict that has been going on for more than two decades with different factions fighting each other for power. After being defeated in the Ogaden war against neighbouring Ethiopia in 1977, Somalia entered a long period of slow institutional and moral collapse. When the dictator Siad Barre was forced to leave the presidential office in 1991, political chaos followed in deeply divided Somalia (HRW 2011).

Throughout the 1990's Somalia was marked by violent rivalry between independent warlords and various clans aiming to control the capital Mogadishu and other important areas. The UN sent troops into Somalia in 1992 to put an end to the deadly violence and starvation and the United States engaged in peacekeeping efforts in the conflict-torn country. But the efforts showed to be in vain. When the UN and the US left the country a couple of years later, after several of their own troops had been killed, the situation had not yet been stabilised (globalsecurity.org).

Peace talks later resulted in the formation of transitional governments in 2000, 2004 and 2009, although they have all been too weak to govern the country and end the widespread violence (International Crisis Group 2012). In the summer of 2006, the Islamic Courts Union (ICU) seized power in the capital Mogadishu and forced the warlords to leave. For six months it was reported that the situation in Mogadishu was relatively calm, only to catch fire again the following year when the TFG overthrew the ICU. The TFG could do so with the support of Ethiopian troops and backed by the US and the EU who feared an Islamist take-over in the region (landguiden.se: a).

As of 2012, the fight mainly stands between al-Shabaab, an Islamist militia of young radicals who used to form the armed wing of the ICU, and troops from the Somali TFG and the African Union. In August 2011, al-Shabaab retreated from Mogadishu but still controls large parts of southern Somalia and continues to attack the capital (HRW 2012). The militia group is often blamed for kidnappings and bombings in the East African region, including Uganda and neighbouring Kenya. But al-Shabaab is not to be seen as the last enemy of peace in Somalia. Clans and warlords are a serious threat to stability in the country since many of them simply don't support a central government but prefer local self-governance (International Crisis Group 2012).

## 2.3 Kenya

Kenya is situated by the coast and borders Somalia, Ethiopia, Sudan, Uganda and Tanzania. The majority of the 41 million Kenyans are Christians although Islam is still the dominant religion in parts of the coastal area. There are around 40 ethnic groups in the country and more than a hundred native languages and dialects, while the official languages are Kiswahili and English (landguiden.se: b). Kenya gained independence in 1963 and started off on a peaceful path, but in recent years ethnic conflicts have resulted in violence. In the aftermath of the presidential and parliamentary elections of 2007, more than a thousand people were killed and half a million people fled their homes due to ethnic hatred (BBC World Service Trust 2008).

A majority of Kenyans earn their living on small-scale farming but tourism is also an important business sector. Although Kenya is the most industrialised country in East Africa, almost half of the population lives in poverty (landguiden.se: b). At the same time Kenya struggles to handle the constant influx of Somali refugees that have left their country due to the heavy fighting and severe droughts. In 2011 almost 700 000 refugees were estimated to reside in Kenya, mostly in camps in the northern parts of the country (HRW 2011).

## 2.4 Kenya in the Somalia conflict

Kenya entered the Somalia conflict in October 2011 due to a series of abductions of foreign tourists and aid workers within Kenya's borders. The mission is codenamed Operation Linda Nchi, "Protect the country", and aims to pursue the al-Shabaab militia and ensure peace and security along the Kenya-Somalia border (Kenyan government: a). In 2012 the Kenyan Defence Forces (KDF) became part of the Amisom force, together with troops from Uganda, Djibouti and Burundi. Since then, the Amisom has managed to further weaken the al-Shabaab and take control over significant areas in the south. The Kenyan government describes the military operation as a success story (Kenyan government: b) and a large majority, 82 percent, of the Kenyan people are supporting the KDF in Somalia, according to newspapers quoting a survey conducted by the Institute of Development Studies at Nairobi University six weeks after the Kenyan troops crossed the border (the-star.co.ke; nation.co.ke).

## 2.5 Kenyan media

Kenya has a vibrant media scene with around 90 radio stations, a dozen TV channels and several daily newspapers. As is the case of many African countries, radio is the most popular medium for news. Most of the news is distributed from the capital Nairobi in the official languages English and Kiswahili, but there are also stations broadcasting in tribal languages (infoasaid.org). Nairobi functions as a base for many foreign correspondents covering East Africa. Besides the many national news channels in Kenya, international media organisations such as Al-Jazeera, CNN and BBC are important sources of information (BBC World Service Trust 2008).

There is relative press freedom in Kenya although the government has restricted it since the post-election violence in 2007/2008, when the media was accused of fuelling violence and ethnic animosity in relation to the presidential and parliamentary elections. A new law that was signed by the Kenyan president Mwai Kibeki in 2009 allows for heavy fines and prison sentences for press offences and gives the government authority to control broadcast programming and licence journalists (Reporters without borders: a).

## 2.6 Somali media

Somalia is known to be the deadliest country in Africa for journalists, with six journalists killed in the first five months of 2012 (Reporters without borders: b). There is very little press freedom and because of the danger involved with the profession, many Somali journalists feel forced to resort to self-censorship (Nusoj 2012). Also, many journalists have chosen to or been forced to leave Somalia to live in exile in countries like Kenya where the capital Nairobi has long been a hub for journalists. Many of the media organisations in Somalia are linked to different political groups or clans (landguiden.se: a) and even the Islamist militia al-Shabaab has their own radio station and is active on various social media websites, such as Twitter (twitter.com).

### 3. Theoretical framework

There are many previous studies about conflict journalism and the impact of the media at war, but they mostly seem to be from a western perspective. This study focuses on Kenyan journalists and how they cover a conflict in a neighbouring country where their own nation is fighting. It is based on the notion that journalists have the power to create knowledge and influence people's perceptions about a certain situation. The study can be analysed within a theoretical framework of peace journalism described in the following chapter, which also discusses various notions connected with the study of conflict journalism.

#### 3.1 Peace journalism

One theoretical field that I find particularly interesting is called peace journalism. The idea of peace journalism was first stated by the Norwegian sociologist Johan Galtung in the 1970's and has more recently become part of a greater debate about the role of journalism in a conflict. Journalism should strive to actively and independently support peace initiatives instead of just acting as megaphones for the powerful actors of a conflict, Galtung argues. "In war, truth is not the first casualty. The truth is only the second casualty. The first casualty is obviously peace", Galtung wrote and paraphrased the probably most famous quote (see chapter 3.3) in the debate of the media's role at war. (Fogelberg 2004: 23, my translation)

Reporters and editors choose what to report about and how. By making more active and conscious choices, journalism can actually contribute to peace and stability in a conflict zone, according to those who advocate peace journalism (Keeble et al. 2010: 2-3). In short, peace journalism is about emphasizing background and context in conflict reporting, listening to all sides, unmasking propaganda and highlighting peace initiatives. It is journalism that focuses on why a conflict has arisen and how it can be solved, that also listens to the grass roots of the conflict and questions statements from the elite. "War journalism reports what power says it does; peace journalism reports what it does" (Pilger in Keeble et al. 2010: xi).

Peace journalism is described as a direct opposite of 'war journalism' – journalism that risks worsening the conflict. Polarizing news reporting that focuses on extreme events can have a self-fulfilling logic and cause revenge actions from any of the

parties in a conflict. “Dominant conflict reporting patterns emphasise official sources over ‘people sources’; events over process, and violence over peace. They construct conflicts as a ‘tug-of-war’ between two parties contesting a single goal” (Lynch and McGoldrick in Keeble et al. 2010: 91). Balance is not necessarily something to strive for; it can even promote war if presented in a wrong way. When balance is constructed as dyadic, ‘on the one hand, on the other hand’, it can produce the image of “a world divided into good and evil – and the last battle between the two, or Armageddon” (Lynch in Keeble et al. 2010: 73).

When it comes to academic research within the field of peace journalism, several content analyses have been made. I on the other hand wanted to focus on the actors, the journalists themselves, and in that way try to understand their situation. I wanted to find out how the Kenyan reporters look at their own role in the Somalia conflict, and whether they believe they can influence the situation in any direction. This study is based on the idea that journalists have the power to produce knowledge about the world and that the media is one of the arenas where modern warfare is taking place. The way that the media describes a conflict affects the perceptions and opinions of the audience. In the words of Karin Fogelberg who studied war reporting in Swedish television between 1960 and 2001: “The way that war journalism defines the background to a war, the actors, the processes and the outcome of the war, matters in a wide societal meaning.” (Fogelberg 2004: 7, my translation). This study suggests that the Kenyan media has great influence on the people and its conceptions of the current situation in Somalia. Due to limitations, it focuses on the individual journalists and not the underlying structures in the newsroom or in the society as whole.

### 3.2 Objectivity

Objective and un-biased journalism became institutionalised in the US and Britain during the 1920’s and demanded reporters to clearly separate facts from values. (Allan 2004: 23) Today objectivity is no longer a pre-accepted professional ideal in journalism. Some prefer a ‘journalism of attachment’ where journalists no longer act like passive mirrors of the world. Objectivity can be described as a peacetime luxury; when in war it is harder to stay objective because of the physical dangers involved and the propaganda that circulates. The harsh competition within the media industry and the demands on journalists to be constantly available and keep bringing updates

on developing stories also challenges objectivity. When time is short, it is easier for propaganda to ‘slip through’ the media filter and it is harder to make sure all sides are heard. (Carruthers 2000: 237)

Even if a journalist tries to balance different viewpoints and let all sides of a conflict be heard, dominant values are often reproduced in the reporting. The individual journalist chooses topics and angles that correspond with what is considered newsworthy and with the expectations of the audience. “Openly avowed partisanship may therefore be more honest – more ‘truthful’ in its willingness to make explicit judgements on the relative merits of competing truthclaims – but likely to attract damaging charges of ‘bias’” (Carruthers 2000: 18).

### 3.3 Terrorism

The traditional form of warfare, fought between states, has become less frequent. In the 21<sup>st</sup> century we see more of what is known as asymmetrical warfare, conflicts between “stateless, rootless warriors and their proclaimed enemy, which could be a state, a combination of states, or a competing civilization” (Hess & Kalb 2003: 163). Covering such conflicts is considered to be especially dangerous for journalists since bullets “don’t discriminate” in asymmetrical warfare (ibid: 164). The rootless warriors are often called terrorists and the US so-called ‘war on terrorism’ is considered a global war. Africa has become an important player in the war on terrorism, both as a target and as a place where terrorism flourishes. The “abject poverty and official corruption makes many parts of Africa a very attractive destination for terrorist organizations. Terrorist groups also see political, ethnic and religious as a favourable environment for penetration” (Davis 2007: 2).

There are various definitions of terrorism but most mention the intention of spreading fear. Terrorism targets innocent people and is often describes as a combination of violence and propaganda. A terrorist attack creates attention in the media since it fits the frame of newsworthiness as a sudden and violent disruption of normality. In addition, the attack is often followed by bold statements or threats. Some argue that terrorists are their own worst publicists as their violent acts would seem inexplicable to the public. Others mean that attracting attention is enough for terrorists as they want “a lot of people watching, not a lot of people dead” (Carruthers 2000: 171).

### 3.4 Propaganda

Terrorists are not the only ones trying to influence the media. National states involved in conflict also spread propaganda designed to fit their intentions. They will often try to highlight their own successes and portray the enemy as unpopular and weak.

“States beset by terrorism within their own borders will often attempt via the media not only to delegitimize their opponents but also to emphasise their own legitimacy” (Carruthers 2000: 194). Propaganda can be defined as systematic and deliberate attempts to create support for certain goals among a certain group of people. By this definition it is clear that all parts of a conflict spread propaganda, which means that conflict reporters are always surrounded by it. “In war, truth is the first casualty”, US senator Hiram Johnson said in 1917, a line that has been frequently cited since (Fogelberg 2004: 13-14).

There is a close relationship between the media and the military (Carruthers 2000: 6). The media depend on the military for information and security while the military wants the media to spread their word and preferably report positively on the military mission. The British government’s attempts to curb and control national media during the Falklands/Malvinas in 1982 war marked the start of an ongoing discussion about propaganda and embedded journalism in wartime. Only a limited number of journalists were accredited to report from the war and the selected few had restricted access to the actual scenes of conflict. Journalists had to rely almost completely on the military for information and were often handed ‘good news’ intended to boost the morale of the British people or false statements intended to deceive the enemy. The military would censor critical reports and replace journalists who engaged in reporting that was considered to be contrary to the ‘national interest’. (Allan 2004: 159)

### 3.5 The enemy ‘Other’

War sells, especially wars that are geographically or culturally close to the audience. A distant war often attracts limited media attention unless there are spectacular elements to it or . “Thus in order to become news, distant events often have to involve suffering on a huge scale or have to endanger or involve citizens ‘proximate’ to the media organisation: the fate of one or two of ‘us’ caught up in ‘their’ conflict” (Carruthers 2000: 232). If it is possible to domesticate news from a distant war, it is

more likely to appear in the media. Studies also show that journalists tend to be patriotic in a conflict situation and report in line with the own nations foreign policies. (Fogelberg 2004: 24). The media often uses a language of “national pride, honour and duty” and describes war situations as battles between good and evil, our own soldiers against a barbarian and faceless enemy ‘Other’. (Allan 2004: 157).

When a nation sends its troops to war, the media is likely to follow. But it can also be the other way around. Numerous studies discuss the so-called CNN-effect of the media at war. Televised media images of human suffering played an important role in ending the Vietnam War and sending home the US troops, many argue. The media is also said to have been central in catalysing both the intervention and withdrawal during the US military intervention in Somalia in 1992. One single image that caused instant public reaction is said to have ended the operation; the image of a dead US ranger being dragged through the streets of Mogadishu during the ‘Black Hawk Down’ incident. In the words of a US congressman: “pictures of starving children, not policy objectives, got us into Somalia in 1992. Pictures of US casualties, not the completion of our objectives, led us to exit Somalia” (Carruthers 2000).

## 4. Method

This study has a qualitative approach and is focusing on individual journalists’ personal opinions and values. The aim is not to generalize a group of people but to find out how selected journalists reason about their own role in conflict reporting. By interviewing journalists who work for the big media houses in Kenya, I will be able to answer my research questions stated in the first chapter.

### 4.1 Qualitative interviews

I did semi-structured interviews where I defined an interview guide with general themes and sub-questions beforehand (see appendix). I opened up with a broad question and let the informants direct the interview from there. My most important role as a researcher is to listen to the informant to be able to ask important follow-up-questions. Such questions have several meanings: I can show or get confirmation that I understand the informant’s statements correctly and I can show interest in what he is

saying, challenge him and make him reflect on it (Östbye et al. 2003:105). A detailed question scheme can be a disadvantage if the researcher concentrates more on the questions than on listening to the person who is interviewed. (Fägerborg in Kaijser & Öhlander 1999: 63) I used my interview guide more like a checklist to look at when I ran out of questions to ask.

It can be hard to balance between talking and listening and the task can differ from case to case. Some informants are open and honest from the start while some are more cautious. When doing semi-structured interviews, the researcher must be prepared to either take a step back and listen or to work more actively to get a conversation going, maybe even provoke the informant to open up. (Fägerborg in Kaijser & Öhlander 1999: 59) It is the unpredictable that I find interesting with using qualitative interviews as a method. The informants are not a homogenous group even though they are all Kenyan journalists, but there lies interesting results in both the similarities and differences between them. I worked inductively with the empirical material and identified different themes discussed in chapter 5.

## 4.2 Method discussion

When judging a research method, three aspects are often discussed: generalisation, validity and reliability. (Östbye et al. 2003: 120) This study has a qualitative approach and does not aim to generalise Kenyan journalists, simply because it is hard to do that by interviewing a small number of them. Instead, the aim is to create an incentive for a broader discussion about journalism's role in a conflict. On the other hand, I believe that there is reason to discuss both the validity and reliability of this study. Validity focuses on the method of the study, on whether the researcher is able to answer the initial research questions by using the chosen method. Reliability discusses the data processing, whether one can trust that the informants are telling the truth and whether the researcher has processed and analysed the interviews in a credible manner. (ibid)

This thesis doesn't try to answer whether journalists can indeed help bring peace and stability in Somalia, it only talks about the informant's own perceptions. By doing qualitative interviews with a number of the most influential journalists in Kenya, I can get a feeling of how they look at their own role in the Somalia conflict and thereby answer my initial research questions. To find my informants I contacted the editor-in-

chief or the news manager of the major media organizations in Nairobi, and was then referred to a reporter who specialized in conflict reporting and the Somalia conflict. It became a natural selection of informants since the media houses usually had one person who covered the Somalia conflict. As it turned out, they were all men. It would have been interesting to also talk to female journalists, to find out whether there are gender-based differences in conflict reporting.

I increased the reliability of my interviews by recording and transcribing them. (Östbye et al. 2003: 120) This made it easier for me as a researcher to listen actively during the interview and the recorded material offered a second opportunity to interpret the answers. Also, other people can listen to and analyse the material. The fact that I am doing my interviews in English and not in my mother tongue is also a reason to use the recorder. There are disadvantages with recording the interview; for example the informant can become nervous or reserved due the very presence of the recorder. (Fägerborg in Kaijser & Öhlander 1999: 67-68) None of the informants seemed affected by the recorder, after all they are journalists and used to the interview situation, only that they were on the other side of the microphone this time.

Another important aspect to discuss is whether my presence as a researcher is affecting the informant and if so, in what way. Even if I tried to keep a low profile and let the informant direct the conversation, I was still part of the social situation of the interview. Differences and similarities between the researcher and the informant affect the conversation. (Fägerborg in Kaijser & Öhlander 1999: 60) The informants are all men and most of them are older and more experienced than I am. But we share the same profession, journalism, which I hope made the informants more comfortable, honest and supportive of my project. I noticed that many of the informants were thankful that I had chosen to highlight their work in my thesis and I believe that they took the task seriously and answered my questions truthfully.

### 4.3 The informants

All informants are born in Kenya, live in Nairobi and mainly work mainly for major Kenyan media organizations. To understand the result of this thesis, one must know some basic facts about the informants. I find it important to protect their integrity and therefore I have decided to leave out their personal life. None of them has wished to

be anonymous and since they are working openly in mainstream media, I decided to publish their names. They are presented in the same order I met them:

*Mohammed Yusuf*

23-year-old Somali/Kenyan freelance journalist at the radio broadcaster Voice of America. Also runs a blog with Somalia related news. Currently in his last year of journalism school in Nairobi. Has worked with newspapers, radio and TV.

*Obadiah Kendagor*

Kenyan reporter at the state owned public service TV channel Kenyan Broadcasting Corporation, KBC. Has travelled to Somalia several times and spent a month there in December 2011, covering all sorts of issues and producing live television.

*Yassin Juma*

32-year-old Kenyan reporter at the TV channel NTV. Has covered Somalia for eight years and travelled there “more than a hundred times”. Worked for the Nation newspaper before starting at NTV and sometimes reports for British newspapers.

*Murithi Mutiga*

30-year-old Kenyan reporter and opinion writer at The Nation, one of the biggest daily newspapers in Kenya. Has been to Somalia twice, most recently in Mogadishu in March 2012. Also does stories for British newspaper such as The Guardian.

*Bernard Momanyi*

30-year-old Kenyan reporter at the private radio broadcaster Capital FM. Has never been to Somalia, only to the Kenyan border areas. Worked at the newspaper Kenya Times for three years before starting at Capital FM in 2005.

*Cyrus Ombati*

32-year-old Kenyan senior crime reporter at the daily newspaper The Standard. Has travelled to Somalia once in November last year. Is currently working on his Master in Communication studies and has worked as a journalist since 2001.

*Mohammed Ali*

29-year-old Kenyan senior investigative editor and reporter at the TV station KTN. Has travelled four or five times to Somalia, independently and embedded with the KDF. Has worked in print- and broadcast media for 8-10 years locally and abroad.

## 5. Result and analysis

This thesis is based on qualitative interviews with seven Kenyan conflict reporters in Nairobi. In the following chapter, the empirical material is summarised, analysed and presented in a thematic order, based on the initial research questions.

### 5.1 Advocates of peace

There are many similarities between the theoretical field of peace journalism (see chapter 4.2) and the values and opinions of the informants in this study. All informants agree on the overall idea that journalism can play an important part in bringing peace to a conflict, if conducted in a conscious manner. They believe that their individual work has a big impact and is influencing many people, from the ordinary citizen to governments and non-governmental organisations. Information is power and without the media there will be no peace in Somalia, many of them argue.

The media is so trusted by the people. It's only the media that can change this world by showing what is bad and what is good... So without the media we are in total darkness.

Mohammed Ali

Keeping the story alive and making the Somali people's voices heard has an impact in itself, according to the informants. When journalists write about human suffering in Somalia it pressurises organisations and governments to act and people start donating food and money, informants say and describe how their reporting has had direct benefits for the Somali people. One informant reported about starvation in Somalia, a couple of days later it was declared a famine. Another one reported about large sums of piracy money being transferred from Somalia to Kenyan banks, after that Kenya introduced a limit of how much money you can bring into the country. The way that the informants describe their reporting coincides with the theory of the CNN-effect; what the media reports has an impact on policy-makers.

The media is very powerful, if the media doesn't report some of these things, sometimes they assume that it is not happening. That's why when something happens in the media and it becomes really a big thing, you see action within minutes.

Bernard Momanyi

But simply being a journalist and reporting about Somalia is not enough to help the conflict-ridden country. You have to be cautious when you decide what to report about and how, informants say, and they agree that careless journalism risks worsening the conflict. Talking to all sides and emphasising context and background is important for all informants, in line with the concept of peace journalism. However, the informants have different opinions on what to avoid and how to define responsible reporting. Showing pictures of dead people or even publishing the death tolls in raw numbers can be dangerous, some of them argue. It may fuel the conflict and cause retaliatory attacks from any of the warring parties.

So whatever way we deal with whatever is happening in the fighting between al-Shabaab and the KDF really matters. We see maybe an increase of the suicide bombings in Nairobi by their sympathisers. So we have to be very careful when it comes to numbers and showing pictures of dead Somali.

Yassin Juma

Other informants say that they report the truth of what is happening without censoring themselves no matter the implication. The media is not to be blamed even if there are revenge attacks, one informant argues. As long as journalists keep to the truth, they are not telling the people on the battleground anything new and thus not inciting anyone anyhow. And even if one journalist keeps quiet, the story will still be told by somebody else since “the world has opened up”. Another informant says that he is aware of the possibly violent consequences of reporting about military victories and defeats; every time his news organisation reported about territorial gains there were retaliatory attacks in Kenya, he says. But that didn’t keep him away from reporting.

...it is war and you must be aware that when you are fighting there will be losses, casualties. But there will also be progress; those two will have to go together. So we did not stay away from telling the truth just because we fear attacks. We just had to say it for the people to understand that we are at war and anything can happen in war.

Obadiah Kendagor

Although the informants have different opinions of what is ethically correct to publish, they agree that exaggerations and unbalanced reporting risk fuelling animosity between the parts of the conflict. That has been seen during the early years of the Somalia conflict, one informant says and explains how different Somali radio

stations were allied to certain clans and openly supported their motives. Another informant took the recent post-election violence in Kenya (see chapter 2.5) as an example of the possibly negative effects of journalism. All informants also mention propaganda and describe how both the al-Shabaab and the KDF are sometimes trying to mislead the other part and cover up for actual casualties and defeats. If journalists don't countercheck facts at all times, they might fall into a trap and publish false information which in turn can worsen the situation on the ground.

You can exaggerate the misdeeds of the al-Shabaab or claim that the African Union troops are causing higher casualties than they expect, which inflames tension. You can also make the situation worse by refusing to give a voice to certain sections, which means that they think about turning to other solutions when they get frustrated. Or by being very jingoistic, beating the war drums and saying 'let's attack' when you need a more nuanced solution.

Murithi Mutiga

## 5.2 The African reporter

There lies a great social responsibility in being an African conflict reporter, according to all informants. Not only do they have to consider the general duties of the profession, such as balance and truthfulness, but they also feel obliged to highlight the positive sides of the region. If Somalia is described as nothing but a big war zone with a starving population, then most people would avoid travelling there, the informants argue. But if the diversity of the country is accentuated, then people might see the possibilities of the country and with time Somalia can benefit from new investments and development. And if Somalia prospers, the neighbouring countries will too.

It's time people stop looking at Africa as a black continent. It's time to paint Africa in something different because there are a lot of positive things going on in this country and in Somalia. We can't afford to paint Somalia as a bad picture, to say Somalia is a rotten country, and just leave it at that. We can tell what the situation is about and ask if the situation is changeable. Yes it is.

Obadiah Kendagor

A story from Somalia is often an incident story about bomb attacks or acts of piracy. But it can also be a story about a wedding, a successful graduation or a sports event. Positive news might be harder to find in a country with such a long history of conflict,

but they are of great importance to the informants who give recent examples of peaceful progress in Somalia: early in 2012 an international airplane landed in Mogadishu for the first time in very long and the Somalis were free to go to the beach and to play football, something that would have been impossible when al-Shabaab ruled the capital. The informants want to highlight the persistence of the Somali people but at the same time also report about the suffering of the countless civil victims of the conflict. The world needs constant reminders about children who don't go to school and roads that need to be rebuilt, informants argue and hope that the situation will change for the better when people understand the situation in Somalia.

Over the years I've come to understand them, what they have gone through. I feel like I have a responsibility as an African journalist to highlight the problems that my people are going through, because I believe the Somalis are also my people as African.

Yassin Juma

Many of the informants feel that western journalists have a different agenda and tend to focus on negative news and incident reporting when covering Somalia, an almost exact description of 'war journalism' that risks worsening the conflict (see chapter 4.2). One of the informants describes the western perspective as "completely removed" from the African perspective and argues that western journalists look at the Somalia conflict through one single lens; the so-called 'war against terrorism'. African journalists need to also consider the social and economic context of the region and do more in-depth reporting about everyday life in Somalia. Many informants emphasise the need for background information to explain why the conflict has arisen and thereby make it easier for policy makers to find peace solutions. They also try to personalise stories to make the situation more comprehensible so that the audience get to understand and find sympathy for the Somali people.

It's a massive difference because when you get stories from the news agency, they come through a certain filter. They just focus on events. But when you go there you can focus on people and on life in general...I think it's very important because it brings a human dimension to the story that you can't get from raw numbers. Ten people killed, but what kind of people were they, what family do they leave behind?

Murithi Mutiga

Murithi Mutiga not only writes news articles about Somalia, but also opinion pieces. He is the only one who says that journalists should be allowed to write in their own voice and can “help intellectualise debate and offer proposals” for solution, as long as the distinction between news and analysis is clearly marked. This stand is in line with Johan Galtung’s vision of the journalist as an active key actor in achieving peace.

...it’s very difficult to see a completely military solution to a very complex conflict. So journalists can back the trend and put pressure on people to look both for a diplomatic and military solution. Journalist can say unpopular things and help to influence public policy.

Murithi Mutiga

Most of the other informants say that they consider themselves as messengers only. Their role is to give out information and explain the conflict in Somalia, not to share their own opinions or engage in actual peace building. By talking to all sides and presenting balanced reports about the conflict, the individual journalist plays his part in bringing peace to the country. When reporting objectively, the audience can decide for themselves what to think about the situation in Somalia.

You can’t carry a gun. You can’t be a president, a politician or a local elder. But it would be good to see that the people who make decisions consider all those voices that we write about. We give them a voice in the newspapers and the radio, and they can consider that and help them to live a decent life like anyone else.

Mohammed Yusuf

### 5.3 Embedded struggle

Somalia and Kenya are geographically close but culturally distant to each other. The majority of the Kenyan people don’t share the same faith, culture or language as the Somali people. In Somalia, Kenyan journalists feel like they are being treated with suspicion since many Somalis consider the military operation an invasion of their country. In Kenya on the other hand, many people see Somalis as potential terrorists. As one of the informants expressed it:

We are neighbours and we don’t know each other. All we know about Somalis is that they come here, they live in Eastleigh in Nairobi, they are refugees in Kenya, they do funny business, and they are pirates. That’s all we know about them.

Obadiah Kendagor

Three of the informants are Muslims and two of them also speak Somali, which they both see as a big advantage when reporting about and from within Somalia since they don't need to use interpreters. Mohammed Yusuf is of Somali origin and Yassin Juma has lived with a Somali family and still travels to Somalia every month. They both feel that they understand the Somali people better than most Kenyans and consider themselves experts on the Somali situation. They also share their perspectives and analyses with foreign journalists or politicians, in the role of experts.

They identify me with the Somali crisis. If a Kenyan viewer sees my report or compares my report with others, he would always believe my report because of my experience.

They have gotten used to Yassin Juma reporting about Somalia.

Yassin Juma

War sells. Therefore the Kenyan media has always had an interest in covering the Somali conflict but it has mostly been incident reporting from Nairobi, relying on second-hand sources such as international news agencies or local correspondents in Mogadishu. But covering the Somalia conflict doesn't necessarily mean reporting about incidents inside Somalia, it can also be news from Kenya where the al-Shabaab has been blamed for numerous deadly attacks and kidnappings. The media has a responsibility to educate the public in order to save lives in both neighbouring countries, some informants say. The people of Kenya know what a grenade looks like and would notice an abandoned bag at the train station. They have been taught by the media to be in charge of their own security, as one informant puts it.

When Kenya got directly involved in the fight against al-Shabaab in Somalia, the media coverage increased and the journalists started crossing the border more frequently. All but one of the informants has travelled to Somalia at least once since then, many of them stayed for a longer period to do more in-depth reporting. They have told the audience about the purpose of the Kenyan military mission in Somalia, about progress and territorial gains. And they have told it from one side of the frontline while being embedded with the Kenyan troops. It is dangerous to operate in Somalia, the deadliest country in Africa for journalists. One of the informants was badly hurt in a bomb attack in the capital Mogadishu and hospitalised for seven months. Others describe how they fear for their own life when reporting from Somalia and how they get psychologically affected by seeing death and devastation.

Covering Mogadishu has really changed me. When you are covering it you feel you are at the top of it, you can do whatever you want, you feel you're courageous enough to do that story. But after all has been said and done and you're back home, all these things come over your mind and it can be traumatizing.

Yassin Juma

Some of the more experienced informants have been able to travel to Somalia independently and hire private security firms for protection. But most informants have worked embedded with the Kenyan or Somali troops in Somalia. They consider it a necessity but at the same time a struggle that limits their journalistic aim for objectivity and balance. The stories have to be previewed by the military before being published and the reporter is not allowed to move freely; one of the informants described it as being "operated like a goat". Working embedded with the Kenyan troops in 2012 seems to be very much like trying to cover the Falklands/Malvinas war 30 years ago. Journalists are invited to come to Somalia but are not allowed to move freely, for what is called security reasons. The military demands to preview reports and allegedly asks journalists not to report about casualties. One of the informants entered Somalia without the military's knowledge and reported that a military chopper had been shot down by the al-Shabaab when the military said it was an accident. Later he found out that the military was profiling him and so he decided to leave the matter alone, at least for a while. If it is the only way of getting the story, then working embedded is better than nothing, the informants argue. But there is something important missing: the other side of the story.

Our operations mainly depended on the operations of the KDF. We went where they went, saw what they did... They wanted us to mainly rely on the information that they give and report according to what they say, quote them when it was necessary.

Obadiah Kendagor

After working embedded for a while, some of the informants tried to break away and managed to do more independent reporting. One of them even lied to the military to get some freedom. He said that he was going to buy some water in town when in reality he brought his television equipment to report live from where the soldiers were not around. Working embedded is simply not considered a privilege but a necessity and an impediment to the journalistic credibility.

## 5.4 Balancing propaganda

Reporters tend to be patriotic when their own nation is at war. The fact that the Kenyan military is fighting an enemy that is also causing conflict inside Kenyan territory, with grenade attacks and kidnappings, could possibly make the patriotism even stronger. Opinion polls show that the Kenyan people are supporting the military mission in Somalia, but only one of the informants openly chooses sides in the conflict. According to Cyrus Ombati, the overall policy in the newsroom is to support the Kenyan military and he and other journalists tend to be passionate with the Kenyan soldiers, “our brothers and sisters”.

Before entering Somalia, the Kenyan military invited editors and journalists to a breakfast meeting where they asked for support, Cyrus Ombati says. He describes the benchmark of the meeting as “We need to win this war and for us to win this war, you must support us”. So he believes he has no option but to support the military to boost the morale of the soldiers and the Kenyan people. Sometimes it is necessary to leave objectivity aside, he argues and describes how he has toned down events that would portray the military in a negative way and published military information even though he knew that there were elements of propaganda in it. According to Cyrus Ombati, the military mission against al-Shabaab is needed to bring stability to the region and supporting the military is his way of contributing. Also, he needs to consider the market and slant his reporting according to the mood of the public. Most Kenyans are supporting the military mission in Somalia and the media has to be on the side of the majority, otherwise they won’t buy the paper, he argues.

As much as somebody wants to criticise me and say that we are not fair and objective, it’s our duty in the end. It’s our country. If we try to be objective, as they want us to be according to the profession, sometimes the truth hurts to an extent that it can destroy. So it’s necessary sometimes to decide not to be objective. I think I’ve done much in informing the public about what’s going on. That’s most important for me, to educate them that these people are not good. These people have bombed us, they have killed people and damaged property. And they still pose a big danger.

Cyrus Ombati

Cyrus Ombati is the only one openly supporting a patriotic line. All the other informants claim to be critical towards the Kenyan military. Balance is a key word

when the informants describe their own role in covering the Somalia conflict. They all describe al-Shabaab in negative terms as a vicious militia that conducts violent acts against innocent people, but would still like to talk them and hear their motives. If people understand why al-Shabaab is fighting it will be easier to restore peace in the conflict-torn country, informants argue. All sides of the conflict have both good and bad elements that should be highlighted. Telling both sides of the story is a mantra that unites the informants.

I think it's important at the end of the day to respect the ethical demands on a journalist for balance, because that creates credibility. And you might be able to prevent things going wrong by also criticising your own side, which might lead to avoidance of excessive casualties on civilians.

Murithi Mutiga

Most informants consider themselves capable of seeing through propaganda but at the same time they all see difficulties in maintaining a neutral position from where they stand as journalists in the conflict. Even when being inside Somalia and at the actual warfront, they can't rely completely on their own eyes. They need to countercheck facts and the most convenient source is the Kenyan military – they are often available for the press and want to make sure their side of the story is heard. Elite sources such as the Kenyan government and military are important for all informants. They also consider what the al-Shabaab is communicating, via social media websites and their own radio station, but are extra cautious and always countercheck all information before publishing it. When the al-Shabaab says something, the Kenyan military gets to comment on it. Although it doesn't seem to be as important the other way around, mainly because getting information from the al-Shabaab is much harder. The majority of the informants have never actually met with or talked to members of the al-Shabaab. Their information consists of letters on a computer screen or an un-known voice on the radio, not a reliable source of information, according to the informants.

If you look at their Twitter page, they keep on posting propaganda. And when you countercheck it, you realise either nothing happened at all or if an incident happened, they usually try to exaggerate the death toll.

Bernard Momanyi

Al-Shabaab is not the only ones spreading propaganda. The informants also describe how the Kenyan military uses propaganda as a morale-booster or as a way of confusing the enemy. Both sides lie but al-Shabaab lies more often, informants argue. First after counterchecking facts by making phone calls to local Somali sources and independent expert or by reading reports from international news agencies, the informants publish what they consider to be the truth.

I think it's high time that those who try to practise journalism should try to listen to the other side of the story. To me there are three sides of the story: my side, your side and then the truth.

Mohammed Ali

## 6. Conclusion and discussion

The aim of this thesis has been to find out whether Kenyan journalists believe that they can help bring peace and stability in Somalia and how they act to make sure that they have a positive impact on the situation. The result of the study will be discussed in the following chapter.

### 6.1 Peace journalism in Kenya

The result of the study is very clear: all journalists interviewed believe that they can help bring peace and stability in Somalia. Some of them even think that without the media, there will be no peace but “total darkness” in Somalia. However, they look differently at their individual roles as professional journalists covering a conflict where their own country is fighting a war. Compared to international correspondents, Kenyan journalists are more likely to be personally affected by the conflict in Somalia and feel patriotic when reporting about it. But most of the journalists see themselves as objective messengers aiming to highlight the plight of the Somali people and balance the reporting by talking to all sides. Although the Kenyan military is the most easily accessible and main source for many, they also take al-Shabaab information into consideration. Conflict and propaganda go hand in hand and it is hard to trust both sides so the journalists also try to talk to local Somalis and independent experts. As African journalists many feel obliged to not only report about gruesome incidents

but also do more in-depth reporting about everyday life in Somalia. Positive stories are important for the development of the country that otherwise will remain cut off from international investments, they argue.

The conflict in Somalia has been going on for more than two decades and is not newsworthy to international media unless something extraordinary happens. Kenyan journalists on the other hand are closer to the conflict, even more so since the Kenyan military started operating in Somalia. The current mandate of the TFG in Somalia is running out in August 2012 and the months leading up to that date are of great importance to the development of the crisis. I believe that the media can play a key role to make sure that the coming transition leads to a brighter future for the country, and that Kenyan journalists are particularly influential since their audience is in many ways directly affected by the conflict. By contextualising the situation and explaining the processes of the conflict, journalists can have a positive impact. In order to secure peace and stability in the troubled region you have to understand why Somalia has been in political chaos for so long and what the Somali people actually want for their country. It is simply not enough to report about violent incidents without offering any background or alternative solutions.

Before travelling to Kenya and interviewing the journalists, I had the impression that most media coverage of the Somalia conflict was one-sided and incident-based, typical examples of war journalism that is spreading fear and inciting hatred. It was interesting and somewhat of a relief to hear from the Kenyan journalists that they were aiming to report differently. Some of their answers almost seemed to be taken straight from a guidebook describing the theory of peace journalism. They strive to unmask propaganda from both sides of the conflict, to talk to the actual people of Somalia and to emphasise background and context. With that said, I have not done any content analysis so I don't know whether their visions coincide with their actual reporting.

## 6.2 Objectivity as professional ideal

All informants agree that incautious journalism risks worsening the Somalia conflict but they have different opinions of how to define responsible reporting. Some of them avoid showing pictures of dead bodies and are sensitive when it comes to giving the

number of casualties, afraid that it might upset the large Somali community in Kenya and cause retaliatory attacks. Others report on these, because in war there must be casualties and there is no reason for journalists to hide it; the war will still go on no matter what information the media publishes. One of the journalists stands out as the only one who openly shows support for the Kenyan military and puts objectivity aside when he says it's needed. To achieve peace in Somalia, the Kenyan military needs to defeat the al-Shabaab and to succeed they need support from back home, he argues and describes how he sometimes publishes military propaganda although he knows that the information is not true. He calls it a duty to boost the morale of the Kenyan people and believes that he has done his part in order to help bring peace to the region.

All other informants talk about objectivity as something positive and desirable. None of them explicitly say that they are in favour of a journalism of attachment where the reporter is allowed to actively support peace initiatives, as in Galtung's vision of peace journalism. But at the same time some of them consider themselves experts on the Somalia conflict and gladly shares their opinions and predictions with fellow journalists, just not in news reporting. One journalist both writes opinion columns and news articles about Somalia but consider himself objective as long as the different sections are clearly marked. One can question if objectivity is something that they actually believe in or if it is just an idea they have been taught to adopt. Besides, even if most informants say that they strive for objectivity, they find it hard to achieve when covering conflict. Working in Somalia is dangerous and journalists feel obliged to work embedded with the Kenyan forces even though they consider it an impediment to the journalistic credibility since embedded journalists are restricted and can only report from one side of the battlefield. But it's better than nothing, better than sitting in the office back home in Nairobi, they argue. Considering what many of the journalists have gone through when reporting from Somalia - being hospitalised, threatened and in many ways psychologically affected by the violent conflict - I think that they are courageous and I trust their idealistic intentions to improve the situation for the people of both Somalia and Kenya. I believe them when they say that they want to help bring peace and stability to Somalia, although I am not trying to answer whether they actually have a positive impact on the situation. What they want to do and what they in fact are able to, might differ a lot.

### 6.3 Proposal for further research

To get an even richer result of the study it would be interesting to combine different analytical methods. For example, one could combine qualitative interviews with content analysis to find out whether the actual reportage corresponds with the vision of the informant. It would also be interesting to interview a larger group of journalists and include international and Somali journalists to further investigate how the nationality affects a journalist's reporting. Many of the Kenyan journalists talk about differences between African and western media. It would not only be fair but also very interesting to find out how international correspondents who cover East Africa reason about their role in the Somalia conflict. Is the western perspective really "completely removed" from the African, as one informant suggests?

One can argue that the traditional media no longer functions as the most influential medium in informing the public. Social media such as Twitter and Facebook has played an important role in the recent revolutionary uprisings in North Africa and the Middle East. All journalists interviewed in this study talk about social media as a source but it would also be interesting to find out how the public is using it to find information about the situation in East Africa. Many people have fled the conflict in Somalia and the Diaspora that is shattered throughout the world probably use various Internet sources to get information from back home. It would be interesting to study Social media and its impact on the development in Somalia. I believe that traditional media still play an important role in informing the public, but maybe not in the same sense as before. The media might not influence people on what to think anymore, but it certainly still suggests what to think about.

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## 8 Appendix

### 8.1 Interview guide

#### **Background**

What is your background as a journalist? Education? Work experience?

Tell me about how you work as a journalist covering the Somalia conflict?

#### **Subject and angles**

What is news about Somalia? Positive news / negative news?

How do you tell it? Why?

How much space do you give context, background and analysis in your reporting? In-depth reporting or just breaking news?

Who do you report for? Who is your audience? How do you keep the world interested in a conflict that has been going on for decades?

#### **Sources and method**

What is it like to report from a conflict zone? Difficulties?

What is it like to report about Somalia from another country? Difficulties?

What sources do you use? Why?

How do you handle second hand sources?

#### **Journalistic role**

Why do you report about the Somalia conflict?

What is your own role as a reporter? (Objectivity?)

Does your own nationality affect your reporting? Why and how?

What effect do you think your reporting has? What effect do you wish for?

#### **Journalism and peace building**

What is important to think about when reporting from a conflict?

Do you think that journalism can help bring peace and stability in Somalia?

Do you think that journalism can have bad effects on the conflict? (Spreading the word of one side, causing revenge attacks?)

## 8.2 Transcribed interviews

### **MOHAMMED YUSUF**

#### **Can you tell me about yourself and your background as a journalist?**

I am Student at the university of Nairobi and I have been working as a journalist for about four years now. I started working with Voice of America as a fixer, then I came into news producing and now I am a freelance reporter covering Somalia.

#### **Why did you start to cover Somalia?**

One of the key things, in a place like Somalia very few people speak foreign language. They speak their mother tongue, Somali, and I have the opportunity, as a Somali to speak Somali and the Kenyan national Swahili language and English. That made my work easier, I am able to do my interviews correctly, to ask questions that I'm supposed to ask and get answers that I need. Compared to when someone from western countries tried to interview a Somali person through an interpreter, it becomes a bit complicated but once you are a Somali you are able to understand the language and also their feelings and what they are trying to say. Another thing that is very important with being a Somali, most of the time you find yourself in a lucky situation because the Somalis see you as one of them and when they do they are able to share with you some of their secrets, some of the information that they won't share with a western journalist. And when you get such information, it's up to you to do your research and get to know if it is a fact or just an opinion that the person is giving to you. That's a privilege you have. People are more free with you, they see you as one of them, that you will tell their stories the way it is supposed to be told. And maybe they won't even question how you have written the story.

#### **What is your role as a journalist covering Somalia?**

Even though I'm a journalist, I talk to foreign journalists and give them my perspective. When certain things happen I make analysis of what's happening. You concentrate your work on doing Somali stories and that means you become kind of an expert because you really know what is going on. Even if someone wakes you up in

the middle of the night, you are able to tell what is going on, what might happen the next morning, what leader is going to cross over to the other camp and who is going to get killed. It all helps you because you are Somali. Even though you are Kenyan, you're born in Kenya, but you are able to understand when two Somalis are meeting. I do both, reporting and at the same time try to educate people, tell that this is what's happening now. Sometimes you find that they ask you questions, then I'm able to give opinion in line with what I've seen. For some people it's hard to keep such kind of background information, but you know how this person is as a leader, where he comes from, what clan, how many groups he is involved with and what he does in a battlefield. You leave the journalistic at side and go there, be a Somali like them and when you come out of that you are able to tell to the people what is going on.

**Do you see a risk that you can maybe get too involved?**

I don't get involved myself in the Somali conflict, in peace building. I always try my best to stay out of it. All I can do is share information with my fellow journalists, that's as far as I can go. I can't be in a situation where I share information with politicians, ambassadors, diplomats, where I share my opinion with the local people, with the Somalis. You have to be more professional when you are there, trying to get information is part of you research, but you also have to learn when to step out of that. Because when you get too involved, people will always ask questions. 'You're not acting like a journalist, you're acting like someone who is supporting a group'. But at the same time you also have to be someone who can talk to all groups of the Somali conflict, not only one group, and you try to balance that. And I'm really glad that most of the people see me as a person who is neutral, I try to tell the story the way it is. I can only get involved information wise but I can't get involved in political campaigning because that's not my job. My job is to go there and ask the questions I'm supposed to ask and tell people who don't understand Somalia what is happening. You become a middleman, telling the international community what is happening in Somalia. And it is up to the people who make policies to look at what's happening and to know the way forward. All we can do is just report. It's other people, international governments, who can make certain decisions about policies. They can do that when we are able to tell them this is what is happening in Somalia. It's very hard for them to make a wise decision, for the benefit of the international community

and for the Somali people, if we are not telling inside stories. We have the opportunity to tell those inside stories in a professional way. You balance things for the benefit of the Somali people and for the international community to make a wise decision, to know how this country can come out of this conflict. But when we are not telling these stories, when we hide information from them, keep it to ourselves as Somalis, it would be hard to find solutions.

### **Why is it important to write about Somalia?**

It's a country that has been in civil conflict for 20 years, that's very long. One thing that really drives me is to try to touch issues that are not being touched. Because a country like Somalia has a UN weapon embargo, but for 20 years people are fighting and they have AK46s. Where do they get these bullets from? It is important for the whole region because when a country has been fighting for all those years, it is spilling to the other countries. You can imagine someone born in 1991, now they are 21 and they have never seen peace. They are in so many parts of this world, Europe, the US, Canada and when they see what is happening in their country, they give up. The image they see every day in their country, the war, they tend to practise that even in foreign countries where they have been given asylum. The Somalis are losing patience. The important thing, the best way to get out of all this mess is to build the peace process inside the country. We need to tell the small stories so that people can make decisions about how to get justice and peace in this country. Because people are getting frustrated and some people are doing criminal activities in other countries, becoming terrorists. It's spilling to other people's countries. It's very important to tell the stories. So that the people who are making decisions, donors, international communities, can make wise decisions for the benefit of the Somali people and for their own benefit. Because we need to have a peaceful world and coexistence of people. Conflict is not a solution to the problems. I think it's important that I cover that.

### **Do you think a journalist can actually help the peace process?**

I never get involved myself in any activities, but I think we can help by educating people. Because even when we go to Somalia, it would be a very good thing to tell these people how people view them in the outside world. And also to encourage them,

national fighters who try to build the peace, you have to encourage them and ensure them that they are the only people who can bring stability to their people, that this country is waiting for them. To tell youths that this country is yours and you are the only ones who can bring peace, others can just help you but it's you who are inside. You can tell them, 'I'm going back, but the country still remains with you. You are the one who is sleeping here, I'm sleeping comfortably back in Nairobi'. The most important thing is to show them that this is your country. The role that you can play is to tell them, to give them a word of wisdom, encouragement. Even though you're not showing them what side you support, by telling them 'this is your country, it all belongs to you and this country is waiting for you', we are able to encourage them without picking one group and leaving the other. Most of the people that I see, people who support al-Shabaab, I tell them that 'we see what you do good, and what bad you do'. I tell the guy who is supporting al-Shabaab that this is his country, and I tell the guy who is fighting for the TFG that this is his country. No one can tell the other to leave the country, they both belong to the country. Whatever good the government is doing to bring peace is needed, whatever al-Shabaab is doing positively, violence and terrorism aside, it's needed because no one is hundred percent perfect. I tell them that they have to pick the positive and leave the bad aside and work together. That's the only way that peace can be. We tell them that and some people understand it. And you have to come from a broader angle because people are divided. But as a journalist you have to be very careful to tell whatever group A has done good, whatever group B has done good, it is all needed to build the country. And to assure them that no single group can achieve stability and peace in the country. And it's good to see that some people see that.

**So you talked before about telling the small stories, what to you is a story from Somalia? When do you report about Somalia?**

Whenever something big happens, we have to cover it. For example when al-Shabaab attack different places and whatever the government says. Al-Shabaab is trying to show that the government is not right by doing some action. For example if the government say that Mogadishu is safe, and al-Shabaab attacks it becomes a story. And whenever journalists are killed, aid workers. And another story we tell is when the Somali people are suffering or when the international community has set certain

funds for the Somali people and it's not getting to them, we have to tell the story. And at the same time, any positive story. For example when you see ten students graduating it becomes a very big story and also having Somali youths competing in international sports becomes a story because it has that uniqueness in it. And sometimes also piracy stories. It's important, we see violence in Mogadishu every day but maybe tomorrow we tell that students are graduating from medical school. That becomes a very good story. They have worked so hard and you can imagine how many of them have lost their friends, their classmates. Maybe since they started that class six years ago, ten have been killed, ten have been seriously injured and now you see the other ten graduating. When you're graduating after six years, it's a very big story.

**You said before that you cover when the government says something and then the al-Shabaab attacks. Do you think that journalism actually can cause bad actions too, like when you mentioned revenge attacks?**

What we do basically is all about reporting, for example if the government is saying that Mogadishu is safe, after one hour al-Shabaab attacks the presidential palace. Then you have to balance the story, it's very important to get back to the government and say this is what you told us an hour ago. The important thing is to balance the story and let the audience make their own judgement. If you are travelling to Mogadishu you are able to know if it is safe or not, because when we say that the government said this and the al-Shabaab did this, it's up to you to make decisions. We can never make judgement because we have to keep ourselves out of the story other than just writing it. Now we can't make decisions for the audience.

**But also when you write about al-Shabaab. Do you think that there is one side of seeing it, that now you are spreading their word? Because when they are doing an attack, they want the world to know that they are doing it.**

That's a very tough question. What is important is to tell both sides of the story for fairness, because there are two parties in that conflict. When you just tell the government side, you are not fair. I will imagine for example that the international community are supporting the TFG. When you don't tell these people what they are doing you may find that maybe tomorrow they want to make some improvement, and

this is how we can counter this and this is how we can bring peace and stability to Mogadishu. When we don't tell them that and only the government side, it's very hard for people to make decisions. It's very hard to know what the Somali government needs, it's very hard to know the kind of situation that civilians are going through. But all in all it's all about fairness, about balancing the story and being able to tell the story. At the end of the day it just goes to that line.

**So when you're doing a story about Somalia, what sources do you use? Who do you talk to?**

Government is a good source and certainly also al-Shabaab sources. It's very hard to get them but sometimes they send a press release, they try to call and speak to the radio stations that they use as propaganda. It's their own radio, they run their own stuff and it's up to you to be very careful and listen to their radio and visit their websites. It's also a source of information, it's very hard to get them but when they broadcast their own news there, what their spokesman is saying, it's very important to listen to what they are saying, listen to their side of the story. And if they say something interesting, something new, you can still call the government and ask what they make of it. You can also call experts, it's always good to talk to those people. We also use the lawmakers, politicians, NGO's, the clerics are very important if you need to educate people. When someone picks a version of Islam, this is what al-Shabaab is saying, it's up to you to go to the clerics and ask them what Islam says about it. Sometimes he's just interpreting the verse for his own political will, political gains and political advantage. We see some people using religion as a weapon of political gains. Some youths are being lied to, being told that they are going to heaven, that this is a jihad. Ask clerics what they are doing about it, when hundred of youths are being lied to.

**How much space do you leave for explaining context and background?**

There is always a short story that is quick to cover, but we always do an in-depth story. When you have for example al-Shabaab margin with al-Qaeda, you need to do analysis about it, you need to explain to people what it means. We give more details into it, we tell people that this has happened because of this. And the sources we mostly use are experts. Why is this happening, what is going on behind the scenes,

why is this happening now, is it a good thing, what are the other people saying about it? We always do in-depth reporting for the people to understand, particularly with Somalia.

### **Why is that important?**

It is very important for the audience to understand and it also helps because there is so many people involved in trying to bring peace and stability to Somalia. It's also important to them to know what is happening behind the scenes. When we do in-depth reporting they are able to see the bigger picture and to plan.

### **How do you keep the audience interested in a conflict that has been going on for so long?**

We try to give new information to our stories, other than just the breaking news. Because you find that things are changing, it's a conflict that is changing. In 1991 we had a civil war, we had clan rivalry, then the warlords came and sometimes we had Islamists trying to come up, we had a clan rivalry again, warlords again, Islamic court union. You find the faces keep on changing and I think people are very interested about the situation. It's various systems, it's always changing. It's temporary, it's happening because there is no stability so anyone can shift anywhere they want.

### **Is it hard do cover Somalia from here?**

It's not that hard, because I am able to read local radio stations websites and understand it. Every morning I wake up and read it and in case something has happened in Mogadishu we have all the contacts here, and we also have journalists there who can tell us what is going on. When you have been working for three years you have contacts, the people to talk to. One lucky thing is that we have most of the Somali lawmakers here, they stay comfortably in Nairobi.

### **Can you talk to the actual people of Somalia?**

One thing we miss is talking to the ordinary people. If we want a reaction we can get it quickly in Nairobi but the reaction for someone actually living there is very important. But Somalis are always attached back home, they are aware of what is going on in their village, even though they are in Sweden or Norway. And they give

free information. Someone will tell you four people have been killed, and as a journalist you don't even know, but these people they come from this place.

**How can you trust them?**

You can trust them in one way. You look at the person, if he is from that clan and lives in that place. Then you try to give a call to someone who lives there. You never get tired trying to get those facts because you don't want to lie to the audience because credibility is very important. It's up to you to make sure you clarify the situation. You start from the headquarters of that region and try to reach the elders in that region and then you call them. And then after talking to six seven people you have something to share. When they all say four people were killed, it becomes a fact, otherwise it's an opinion.

**What effect do you hope that your reporting has?**

Sometimes the stories are hard to get. You're trying your best to tell the stories, sometimes you visit Somalia in such a conflict situation. Even though I'm not involved in Somalia politics or peace building in any way, one thing I would like to see is people making wise decisions for the benefit of the people living there, for the people of the world to live in a coexisting world where we have peace. That's the most important thing I wish to see my stories do. I would be glad, more than happy. The people who plan the future of their people's countries, they can bring stability to different parts of the world. Maybe if I write more about Somalia, they can check and also can put the voices of people that I write about, their worries and their wishes, into consideration. That's one great thing for a journalist to feel proud of and achieve. And that is how much you can do, that's how far you can go. You can't carry a gun, you can't be a president, a politician or a local elder. But it would be good to see that the people who make decisions consider all those voices that we write about. We give them a voice in the newspapers and the radio, and they can consider that and help them to live a decent life like anyone else.

## **OBADIAH KENDAGOR**

### **What is your background as a journalist?**

I am a reporter for the KBC. I basically do politics and human-interest stories. It ranges from anything that affects human life; hunger, war, peace issues and general lifestyle for the people of Kenya. That's why I got involved in the Somali conflict because Kenya got involved in some way.

### **Have you been to Somalia?**

Yes, I've gone to Somalia several times.

### **How did you report from there?**

First of all, we had SNG, satellite equipment for live broadcast. We did live coverage for a whole month and went to the coastline, Ras Kamboni and Bur Gabo, a hundred kilometres from Kismayo. The situation there was so hostile that we couldn't go alone so we had to be embedded with the Kenyan Defence Forces. Our operations mainly depended on the operations of the KDF. We went where they went, saw what they did. At some point we had to walk alone without them, but that was after sometime. When we got there first the Somali people were so suspicious about us being there. It is their country and they were wondering why Kenyans came there. Even the president of the TGF at some point said it was wrong for the Kenyans pursuing the al-Shabaab into Somalia. But after that was resolved and the Kenyan forces stayed put, we engaged with the people, the local community. There was a lot of human suffering and every time I went, there were some relief because we elevated some of the problems that they had. And so we build friendship with them, we started building relations. As a journalist the best thing that you can ever do in a hostile place is to be friendly to the people. So I slowly detached myself from the KDF in terms of facilitation, but stuck with them in terms of security because we needed to be protected. The local people started gaining some confidence on what we were doing, at some point I had to show them exactly what went on air on the monitor screen. I invited the local community, the local leaders, to come and watch news and they actually saw what we were doing live. And so in that way they trusted us, they knew that we were not there to undermine them but to resolve a situation that has cost a lot of suffering to the people there. So soon, the TFG sources, the Somali forces, became

friendly and we started working with them. So we were not so much detached to the KDF, but they were responsible for us working there.

**You say that you were there to resolve the situation; do you think that journalists can help the peace process?**

Information is power, that is what I believe. What we can do is inform correctly, give the correct picture on the ground. I can tell you that once we received appeals from the KDF, they were saying that the situation is so critical; we need food, money and medicine. That was just information on paper. But when we went there as journalists and reported about the situation in Somalia, I tell you it only took a week before we started seeing food aid and medicine coming in. The people of Lamu were the first to make donations after they watched our stories on TV, they responded urgently. So to me as a journalist, reporting is critical, it is giving people information. Especially when you are doing it objectively, people get to see the situation firsthand. People get to respond through the appeals that we make so it is not just information from the forces but it is coming from journalists, credible information, they watch it happening. That's how I believe journalists can facilitate things.

**So how is it to report on the Somali conflict from here in Nairobi, to use second hand sources?**

I did that before I went to Somalia, but my information was so limited. I relied mainly on other sources and sometimes that information is not correct, sometimes people report with different motives. Because it is war there is a lot of propaganda going on, war and propaganda goes hand in hand. So you risk giving incorrect information when you are a second hand informer because you have to rely on the wires and social media, which is also misleading at some point.

**So when you were in Somalia, who did you talk to? What sources did you use?**

It was very difficult the first time for us to interact with the local community. The KDF was also a bit strict on our movement because they wanted us to mainly rely on the information that they give and report according to what they say, quote them when it is necessary. We had to go out of our way to start creating relations with the local people, just to feel whether we and the KDF are welcome or not. At first they were not friendly, they said that it was an invasion of their territory by Kenyan people. 'We

are aware that you are coming to take part of our land and make it part of Kenya.’ So we had difficulties in the beginning, but once we interacted with the people they saw what we were doing so they opened up and started talking to us. So we relied mainly on information given to us by the local people. But I also interviewed the local soldiers from the Somali TGF. I also interviewed local leadership, the chief of the area. We also visited schools, madrases and interviewed children at school. And we were also lucky to find an ex al-Shabaab soldier, only ex soldiers because it was hostile and we couldn’t get them. Even if they were willing to talk to us they would risk their life because if they would talk to us they would have their necks hacked, believe me.

**So why do you think it’s important to talk to the people inside Somalia, actual locals?**

This is the only way you can have the correct feel of the situation. If you talk to a person who has not gone to school because of the situation in Somalia, they would tell you exactly what they have gone through. I found the best way is to get first hand information from the sources themselves. We talk about the people of Somalia, let them talk about themselves, that is what I believe in. The importance of this is that you get the feel. If someone tells you that there is no medicine and you talk to a sick person that has no medicine, that is the only way you can get credible information. If you are a girl, after seventh grade all you do is go back home and wait for a spouse to come and propose and you get married and that’s how your life ends. So I went to the school to understand whether these kids had ambitions in life. Most of them are saying that they want to be a doctor or a nurse and treat their mother, father and siblings. They have a need and they want to address it, but there is no means to address these needs because you don’t have that formal education. All they teach is the Koran and the Koran can’t give you knowledge to treat even simple wounds. I wanted to hear from a girl whose life literally ends at the seventh grade.

**You being a Kenyan, since Kenya is involved in the conflict, do you think that affects your reporting?**

First of all when you’re a Kenyan, they suspect you. That affected the entire reporting from Somalia. Half of my stay there was totally a struggle to be accepted. Back at

home, the people would appreciate that information and accept that it is correct information because I am their own and I am going there as a Kenyan to report to them as a journalist doing my own duty. Being a Kenyan, the entire work with reporting was difficult. But again it was so helpful for the people of Kenya to understand why Kenya is at war with the al-Shabaab in Somalia. They had to understand that and no other person is better informed than a Kenyan journalist.

**How important is that kind of in-depth reporting, with context and background?**

We have always reported about grenade attacks, then nothing more about it. The in-depth reporting helps Kenyans to hold people responsible of their actions, or missions. When we report in-depth, it not only helps us to be sensitive but also gives information on how to handle situations. If there is an explosion, how do you behave? Those are the kinds of thing that we started reporting on. How do we relate to people we don't know? There is a new person in the neighbourhood, you don't know what they do. They sleep in the house the whole day, you see them go out at night but you don't ask questions, that is irresponsible. It is not just enough to report that there is an explosion, but it is also good to show Kenyans and foreigners in Kenya that we should be in charge of our security ourselves and that the police should also be responsible for ignoring. Very simple things. When we do that we make a wake up call to everybody to start looking at these issues. We also go to the background and see when did the rain start beating us, when did our youth start going in to join the al-Shabaab, what really happened? We go to the background to create a situation so that Kenyans can build a foundation of their own security. So next time you see youths forming groups and you don't know what they do, you start asking questions and action is taken. Because the al-Shabaab snowballed many years ago. Young people go and come back, someone changes names. You were Peter last week, how come you are now Ishmael, you are not a Muslim? So in-depth reporting helps us to first of all understand the situation, understand how these people work and understand how to take care so that we don't fall victims again to this kind of malice.

**When you report about Somalia, what is actually news about Somalia?**

First of all we were looking at the purpose of the KDF fighting this war. Number one was to reduce the capacity of the al-Shabaab militia and after that restore the situation

in Somalia. Because in every war situation there is human suffering, the second aim was to reduce the suffering. And finally bring back sovereignty to a country called Somalia, and give Somalia a legitimate democratic government. News to me is when you make progress towards these goals. News to me was not that ten al-Shabaab were killed or two KDF were killed by the al-Shabaab. That wasn't news to me because I was looking at the purpose of this operation. Are we making any progress in terms of reducing the capacity of al-Shabaab? So when we made territorial gains, that was news to me. So when we moved from Ras Kamboni to Bur Gabo, captured the town and started addressing the human suffering, that was news to me. At least we are moving. Once we are stuck and don't move ahead, it also makes news. We have to tell that, we are not moving, what is the problem? They had to give us an explanation. We had to report about loss of lives anyway because people have to understand that we are losing soldiers.

**When you report about territorial gains, do you ever think about the fact that your reporting might cause revenge actions?**

We were quite aware of that because every time we reported that we had captured a town, there were retaliatory attacks in Kenya, they would revenge. Because their capacity to revenge in Somalia, they are in a precarious position because of the heavy machinery that the KDF has. They are stronger than them. So what they might do is ambush attacks, attack convoys and run away. For sure there were those consequences from reporting but we couldn't stay away from that because it is war and you must be aware that when you are fighting there will be losses, casualties. But there will also be progress, those two will have to go together. So we did not stay away from telling the truth just because we fear attacks. We just had to say it for the people to understand that we are at war and anything can happen in war.

**Do you listen to the al-Shabaab's own information?**

They have a very strong social media network and a radio station that is also very strong. We monitor them and we compare with what we have. I am on the ground and if al-Shabaab reports that they have killed 20 KDF soldiers and the situation is true, I would say the same. What we have been doing is to let KDF respond at their military capacity. But as KBC, a national broadcaster, we also have our own duty to report

correctly. We own this war but it helps to report correctly. If we keep on saying that we haven't lost any soldiers and you're still saying that we need more soldiers, then you're contradicting yourself. If you are winning this war, why do you need more soldiers? You should be able to win with what you have. We can't win war by lying. You will win a war by saying the truth and prepare accordingly.

**You said that you can only talk to one side, the Kenyan forces and the government. Does that affect your objectivity and balance?**

If al-Shabaab were willing to meet and talk to us and give us their side of the story, then the story would be balanced. So what do I do? I look at what they have reported as al-Shabaab, and I look at what I have. This is the situation, however this is what al-Shabaab is saying via this media. I have to quote the media that I use, al-Shabaab spokesman has said that this is the situation. So at the end of the day, your story should not be seen as you don't regard what they are saying as anything meaningful. So I would say what al-Shabaab had said but I would also say that this is what I know.

**And the fact that you were embedded with the forces, do you think that they took for granted that you were on their side and wouldn't report critically?**

Our first reporting, every story had to be previewed by the commander. They did that for the first week, then they realised that our objectivity was being questioned, even by Kenyans themselves. People were asking, how do we know that what you're saying is not what you have been told to say by the KDF? So they had to loose us at some point. I told them that it is not a crime to say that we lost a soldier. We also have our own morals in the media. We would not show pictures of dead soldiers because we have a responsibility too as a media house. So as much as we are saying the truth, there are some scenes that we will not show. For example, while I was there the forces captured five al-Shabaab suspects and brought them to the TFG for trial. But the TFG forces said 'once you are an al-Shabaab we don't try you anywhere, we just execute you'. So the following day when we came, all those guys had no heads, the five of them had been hacked. We saw that but we could report about it. We were not allowed to take the cameras there. I said it wasn't fair that these guys were executed without trial, but what do you do in a war situation when they know that if they were caught by the al-Shabaab, 'they would chop our body parts into pieces'. The way of

doing things is so uncivilised, I avoided getting pictures of those headless bodies and just went back to say that five al-Shabaab were killed. That is true, they were killed, but how they did it was a bit gruesome and I didn't want to talk about it. So yes, at some extent, being embedded with the KDF was an impediment to our credibility. But we had to do it because we couldn't be in Somalia on our own, we couldn't protect ourselves. I would go to Mogadishu alone and rely on the police and the security, but at the warfront in Kismayo, where your life is always hanging, you can't go alone. So we had to balance between our credibility and objectivity in reporting versus our security in Somalia. That was a bit difficult but, believe me, everything we reported were factual. That is after we started building relations with the local population. We would even say to the soldiers that we were going to buy some water in town and they would let you go with the TFG forces and then you would bring your machines and report live from where they are not around. Once in a while they would call and say 'you are being too explicit in your reporting, there are things you should tone down'. So, it is a struggle but at the end of the day there has to be a way out.

### **How did this affect you personally, seeing these things?**

I wasn't affected because I come from a conflict-ridden community. I'm a Pokot myself, we are always at war. It's not strange to wake up one morning and find ten people dead in your compound. So it didn't really affect me because it wasn't even as rampant as it is back at home. Sometimes I ask myself if it is worse fighting Turkana, that's the neighbour community we have conflict with, than it is fighting the al-Shabaab because you don't get to see the al-Shabaab. You only find maybe two, three or five of them because they split and walk in groups. It is a militia group, not a conventional force at all. So, I didn't see much, not more gruesome situations than I have seen in my place in western Kenya. My first reporting when I started doing TV in 2004, there was a huge attack where people from my community attacked Turkana. And I had this challenge of reporting from there, being a Pokot and reporting in favour of the Turkana who had been killed. I came back and told people, 'you should see this'. I came to a big fenced home, got inside and saw about 40 dead people and vouches feasting on their carcasses. They are eating people who were alive two days ago. So when you go to count these bodies, because you have to report, it's a bad scene. You don't want to be there. But it has helped me as a person to go back to the

people and say that what we do in this war is not good. Even when I saw the five hacked al-Shabaab militiamen, it didn't really affect me, I had seen worse. But for my cameraman, it was his first time to see that kind of thing. We had to stop working the following day because he was so traumatized. He kept on yelling at night and had to go through counselling with the soldiers before we could start work again the following day. But after that, whenever we had an incident, I would take the camera myself and film it, because he was affected. Mine is a different case because I've been involved in war.

**How do you keep the audience interested in a conflict that has been going on for such a long time?**

It's like updates, when you finish your story you leave your audience waiting for something to come. You say 'tomorrow we will be doing this' and it has to look very catchy. It has to make someone want to turn on the TV the following day. It wasn't easy for me as a person to keep my audience for a whole month. I had to really risk my life, to move from land and go by sea in the operations in the Indian Ocean, witness the shooting of an al-Shabaab skiff that was transporting fuel. So the change of the kind of stories you air is what keeps the people watching. 70 percent of my reporting was mainly on the people of Somalia, the humanitarian crisis, the suffering. Since the fall of Siad Barres government in 2005, there has been no single school in the lower Juba region. Telling people their story is interesting, and to look at their livelihoods. The Kenyan government banned fishing along the coastline of Somalia and these people depend mainly on fish. You look at their suffering and want to tell people how they are suffering now that we have cut off their livelihood. We need to see how we can support them so that, as the war goes on, they survive. So when you change the type of stories and dwell mainly on the humanitarian crisis stories, it keeps people interested in watching. And I also had to show the positive side of life in Somalia, the wealth these people have. They have a lot of cows, they have beaches, more beautiful than the ones we have in Kenya. So I had to show that, and I also showed a wedding. Even with the war, there was a wedding. And when you do that, it's not all about ten people died. People would get bored, it's not nice to listen to. Sometimes I bring a guest who is an ex al-Shabaab soldier who told us exactly what they do. People want to hear him, not me, because they had me for too long. So

changing the context and angle will always keep your audience watching. And please, show people something positive, you don't have to let people see death. They might even associate you to death. Every time they see Kendagor Obadiah, they know its death.

**Back in Sweden, we mostly rely on the wire services and almost never hear anything positive. How can you make us Swedish people interested?**

That would be very difficult. First of all you don't know what interest the Swedish people have in Kenya or Somalia. But now the world is a global village where we live together and see each other. It doesn't have to be bad news all the time. It's time people stop looking at Africa as a black continent. Its time to paint Africa in something different because there are a lot of positive things going on in this country and in Somalia. We can't afford to paint Somalia as a bad picture, to say Somalia is a rotten country, and just leave it at that. We can tell what the situation is about and ask if the situation is changeable. Yes it is. We have to give that side of life.

**What effect do you think your reporting has, on the Kenyan audience and the political elites?**

First of all, people responded to the crisis in Somalia. That is effect. When the people of Lamu donated food and hired a ship to carry that food all the way to Ras Kamboni to feed these people, that was a positive response of the stories that I did. The people of Kenya also got to appreciate the fact that life in Somalia is not all about war. There is a population that actually lives in Somalia and they need peace in order to progress. I would say that my reporting gives Kenyans a clear picture of what Somalia is all about. It's not just about the war. That is a positive kind of effect, at least people got to appreciate what the other world is. We are neighbours and we don't know each other. All we know about Somalis is that they come here, they live in Eastleigh in Nairobi, they are refugees in Kenya, they do funny business, and they are pirates. That's all we know about them.

**Did you go to Eastleigh to talk to Somalis?**

No, I don't like stereotyping Somalis. If you go to Eastleigh to interview Somalis, they will ask you why you are doing it. In some way they got their citizenship in Kenya and many of them are Kenyans. While I was there, there was a lot of response.

Some would say I was lying, they say that a Somali can't kill a Somali. Mostly on the human-interest stories there was a lot of appreciation from Kenyans and Somali and everybody else. It is hard to report about war. Deep inside a Somali TFG soldier, he really feels that even when you kill an al-Shabaab they are deeply hurt, but they just have to do it to restore peace in the country. So they rather do it themselves. When they see a Kenyan doing it, they feel so bad about it. It's their country at the end of the day, these are their people at the end of the day. Even the soldiers within the KDF who are Somali by origin, they are the ones who helped us translate, they think Kenya has invaded their country. They have a lot of heavy thoughts about what they do so they even forget that they are soldiers in Kenya. You are a Kenyan soldier, you are Somali by origin but when Kenya is going to war they would rather sell us out to the al-Shabaab. But the KDF is denying that soldiers are acting like spies. So as much as we are friends, there is a heavy thought that we are not friends anyway.

**The last question, was it difficult to be a TV-reporter? How did the camera affect people?**

In a war torn country, a camera is just like a gun. If someone points a camera towards you, they almost think that you are shooting them. Nobody knows why you are holding that camera, you can't assume that these people know that you are a TV-reporter. You have to understand that the equipment you're wearing gives an impression that can go either way. Somebody can think that you brought a machine gun that looks like a camera and they might shoot you. So before you move with your camera you do a lot of consultations. You have to send people ahead, people must be told that we are coming. You have to do a lot to convince the local leadership, but you can't just show up with a camera, they don't understand it. So that is how challenging it is to be a TV-reporter. You have to carry the equipment, the tripod also looks like a weapon. We were required to switch off all light because lights are so revealing, they are seen from a distance. So we had to tone it down and put it inside a tent and create a small live studio inside the tent you are sleeping in. In war the camera is a weapon, it can either kill or heal.

## **YASSIN JUMA**

### **Can you tell me about your background as a journalist?**

After graduating, I always wanted to do journalism so I used to have my own newspaper, called Muslim news. Basically my readers were Muslims and I sold them outside the mosque on Fridays. I also used to write articles for Daily Nation. It was difficult to be taken in to journalism school so most of the journalists have another background or degree. I've been working at NTV since 2004.

### **Why did you start to cover Somali issues?**

Because of a number of reasons. First, in 1990 when the war erupted in Mogadishu and Siad Barre was ousted, there were many refugees who came to Kenya. There was a major influx of refugees. Somehow I got to make friends with the refugees, before university. I got closer to them, to understand them, their way of life, how they think, how they treat each other. I actually used to live with a Somali refugee family for two years because I was an orphan, I had no parents. So I got to understand them, their food, their language. It was only Islam that connected us, we are from two different communities but because I lived with them for two years, I understand them. How does a Somalia react when he is happy or angry, what does a Somali like, how do you communicate with a Somali? It's something that the rest of the Kenyans do not understand. They profile Somalis in a war that most Kenyans do not understand. The other reason was that I was invited by the transitional government to go and cover their return to Somalia, in the year 2005 if I'm not wrong. The TGF was established in Nairobi but they had to go back to Somalia so I was invited by the government president, who just died last week, to go and cover Somalia as part of a battery of journalists. We were supposed to be a group of six journalists from different stations, BBC, Al-Jazeera, NTV, KTN, Reuters and AFP, but all the journalists declined that offer. The same week there was a British journalist who was killed in a hotel there, so nobody was willing to go. So I enjoyed exclusive coverage of the Somali crisis. All the time, the TFG would say that 'you went all around Somalia at least we can depend on you'. So I used to have that advantage from that first trip because we travelled to all the regions of Somalia. After visiting Somalia for the first time I got attached to the Somali story. I got to understand the Somalis more and more and I got to

understand how the clan division is important to the current crisis in Somalia and how to deal with different clans, how to deal with a particular warlord, how to deal with the local Somali people. So with time I got experienced with the Somalia crisis and I would say that after one year I had already become an expert on the crisis. Journalists from different international agencies would come and interview me as an expert, what I think about a particular issue that was going on in Somalia. So I've covered Somalia through different stages, after Siad Barre was ousted, when about 14 different warlords were in charge in Mogadishu with 14 different roadblocks across Mogadishu. I also covered Somalia when the Islamic Courts Union had taken over from the warlords and I also covered Somalia after the ICU was ousted by the Ethiopians, and I was embedded with the Ethiopian and the TFG troops from Baidoa to Mogadishu until they took over. I covered Somalia when it was under the TFG and also when it was under the Islamist militant group al-Shabaab and until recently, after the Amisom troops entered Somalia. The last eight years, I've been there more than hundred times, according to my boss.

**And how do you think that affects your reporting? How does that give you an advantage?**

If you're a journalist and you go to Somalia for the first time you have a set mind that Somalia is all about devastation and war, that's what you have in mind. And most importantly, most people would fear for their life going there, security is a major issue when you're going to Somalia. I've had bad experience in Somalia over the years, I've been bombed twice, I've had two nasty accidents and I was in a hospital for over seven months, in these years. So that has hardened me as a journalist and I believe it has made me report about the Somalia crisis as a more experienced person. For me, if I go to Somalia, I know exactly how to deal with the people. I know their language, I speak Somali, and understand their culture because of travelling to Somalia for many years. Also I have many sources, that's an advantage for me. In Kenya, if you talk about Yassin Juma, what comes in mind among local and Somali viewers is the Somalia crisis. They identify me with the Somali crisis. If a Kenyan viewer sees my report or compares my report with others, he would always believe my report because of my experience. They have gotten used to Yassin Juma reporting about Somalia. He

has been there, he has almost been killed there, he has gone there and come out surviving.

**What happened when you almost got killed?**

It was my birthday 2005 or 2006, the TFG had not yet been to Mogadishu. It was the Prime Minister, professor Muhammad Ali Gede, who had invited me. It was his first time in Mogadishu. This was my first time in Mogadishu and we had a major event, a rally at the stadium of Mogadishu. There were so many local residents of Mogadishu that had come to see this new government and, according to the analysts, there was anticipation among the local residents that at least they were going to have a government in their country. Everyone looked happy, they were singing, there was anticipation. It was great and we saw it as a really good story. So while the prime minister was addressing the crowd in the stadium, I think one person might have masqueraded as a journalist and put a grenade under the Prime Minister as we were holding our microphones there. All of the sudden it just blew up. 15-20 people were killed so we were very lucky we came out alive. We almost died, that was one of the events that took place in Somalia.

**So when you're doing a story from Somalia, what's news from Somalia?**

I usually travel to Somalia once or twice a month, depending whether I feel there is a story to cover. Maybe I go to do a documentary or a feature, or if there is a story that I feel is pressing or could go anytime. For example, if I am told that people are starving I'd rush there and do a story as a news story. At the moment, the pressing story has been about the ongoing Kenyan military operation. The KDF are now fighting the al-Shabaab to oust them and that has been a major story from Somalia. And the ongoing talks within Somalia ahead of the election, this is a very important stage in the Somali crisis because the mandate of the TFG is coming to an end. Those two are the major stories at the moment. But in the years that have passed I've gone there to cover piracy up in Puntland and other pirate havens. I've travelled to all those places to do documentary, feature stories or hard news.

**So you do both short and long stories?**

Yes. Exactly.

### **Do you ever do any good news?**

That's the advantage I think I have over other journalists. I have come to understand the Somali people to a point that I feel I am obliged as an African journalist to do all the stories that relate to Somalia, not only the negative stories as most of the western journalist would want to cover. All through these years it's only been negative coverage of the Somali crisis; the piracy, kidnappings and all that. But if you look at the stories that I've done over these years, I've looked at the potential of the Somali people. This is a country that has been at war for more than two decades, but I've done stories about how resilient the Somalis are businesswise, how enterprising they are, how the Somali economy has been able to survive over these years. Such interesting stories. I've done stories for example about the Dahaabshil which is one of the many money transferring companies in Somalia, just a good example of how resilient the Somali people are and how tough they have become as the war goes on. I've also done stories about agriculture because we have this perception that Somalia is a desert and that there is so much war that the people is only thinking about guns and fighting and so forth. But if you visit other parts of Somalia, life goes on as it used to.

### **Why would you say that you are obliged to do these kinds of stories?**

First of all, as a Muslim I feel obliged because I feel attached to these people. Over the years I've come to understand them, what they have gone through. So I feel like I have a responsibility as an African journalist to highlight the problems that my people are going through, because I believe the Somalis are also my people as African.

### **Do you think that it can be a problem, that you get too involved?**

Yes, I'd say there is possibility about getting too involved but then on the other hand somebody has to keep the Somali story alive. Somebody has to tell that there is somebody who is dying of hunger somewhere in Baidoa or in Puntland.

### **Why is it important to tell their stories?**

It is important because if you don't, then the international community will just forget about Somalia. So we have to remind them all the time that we need to help Somalia.

### **So do you think that journalists can help the peace process in Somalia?**

Journalists have an important role to play in this whole crisis, because in the past we have seen that in the first decade of the Somalia crisis, journalists played a negative part in the crisis and actually fuelled clan animosity by airing or writing stories that were negative on a certain clan. Somalia has many FM-stations, there is so much freedom there when it comes to having banks, Internet, radio stations and so forth. Some warlords would take advantage of this.

...(Short break)

### **We talked about the effect of warlords..**

Yes, I was talking about how warlords used to use journalist and we had Somalia stations that were allied to different warlords or that were clan based. That fuelled the animosity between clans in the first year of the Somali crisis. But with time journalists are now becoming more aware of how crucial the profession is to the Somali crisis and we have not seen much of the stations being used by warlords after they went through different courses and training on how to become professional journalists. So it is very important, journalism and the Somali crisis are basically linked. Just how the journalists do the stories really impact on what happens on the ground?

### **How do you mean? Can you explain?**

For example, I'm a reporter and I'm going to do a story about al-Shabaab. They have invited me, because we get invited by all people, the government or the rebels. Then I go do a propaganda story about the al-Shabaab, that the al-Shabaab has maybe killed two KDF troops and are demanding this and this and they have this video. Before I take the story on air I have to ask myself certain questions, what is the significance of this story, what is the message that I'm getting through, is this story a link for the al-Shabaab to propagate whatever their motives are? I have to ask myself those questions as a professional journalist. Because in certain incidents we might be used by the rebels to send their message and that would have negative impact.

### **And how can journalists have a positive impact?**

First, as a told you, by keeping the Somali story alive. And secondly, just avoiding stories that could fuel the crisis more, like propaganda stories. We have to be professional and level-headed when we are doing a story. This is a conflict area and

when you are covering conflict you have to be very careful of how you are covering it, who you are dealing with. We have to be very careful.

**And how do you do that? What is important to think about?**

First, what is important is we have to be fair to both sides, whether it is the government or the rebels. To be professional I give all the sides a chance for their voices to be heard. When I'm doing a story about al-Shabaab, for example al-Shabaab has bombed a particular place, I have to get reaction from the TFG also, what they think and also what the local Somali thinks. I'm trying to be fair to all the sides that are concerned in the crisis. Also I have to avoid as much as possible to feed people a picture that it's all about fighting and killings, so I avoid as much as possible on TV to show footage of dead people. A good example is when I covered the military operations for a whole month, I was embedded with the Kenyan army. We avoided showing dead al-Shabaab for a reason, that it might see the Kenyan Somali population being affected negatively. It would have an impact on this other side, even giving a number of those killed. We avoid giving such information.

**Why? What effect would that have?**

It is our understanding with the KDF, that we shouldn't give the number of those dead. It was just to avoid the impact it would have on the Somali population in Kenya, which is a considerable number.

**What effect could it have?**

Of course we have al-Shabaab sympathisers in Kenya. This is where they learn, this is where they invest, this is where they live. So whatever way we deal with whatever is happening in the fighting between al-Shabaab and the KDF really matters. We see maybe an increase of the suicide bombings in Nairobi by their sympathisers. So we have to be very careful when it comes to numbers and showing pictures of dead Somali.

**Because that could maybe cause revenge attacks?**

Exactly.

**What sources do you use?**

My sources vary. For example when I'm talking to the al-Shabaab, I could talk to the spokesman. I could talk to the people who live in the regions that they control. When I'm talking to the pirates, my most important source is the elders. For example in Puntland, let's say we have a British couple that has been kidnapped, I want to know who kidnapped them and if it's possible for me to go and meet this couple and interview them, see how they are doing in Somalia. Then I have to talk to the elders first.

**Have you been able to do that sometime?**

I've done that several times, but I had to get a go ahead from the elders. If the elders say yes, the pirates, the kidnapers or the militia can't say no. It's the elders that have the last word.

**When you go to talk to people who are kidnapped, how do you handle that, not spreading propaganda for the pirates? They say that pirates may raise the ransom when journalists talk about the kidnappings?**

When I do a story about kidnappings, first of all it's just to assure the people and the government that indeed these people are alive. That's always in my mind when I'm doing such a story. Usually different stations and print media have approached me. For example when a British couple was kidnapped two or three years ago, I actually went there as a reporter for a British newspaper. What was important was to give a picture of how they are surviving there, are these people alive? It might as you said maybe make the bargaining power bigger but for me it's just to give to the world the picture that these people are still alive. And for the families, I believe that's important.

**So you talk to everyone, from government sources to actual people?**

Exactly, as I told you.

**Why do you think that's important?**

Because I can evaluate the story and get to know the truth. It's also fair to give all those who are concerned a chance to give their part of the story. So that at the end of the day, whoever is watching my story can also evaluate himself or herself and get to know where the truth might be lying.

**You also do stories for international papers, do you have a different approach when you are writing for an international audience?**

In the early years, 2005 to 2007, it was meant for local viewers but nowadays because of satellite TV, Internet and Youtube, you also have to consider that people from other countries are watching us. So that has not been a problem for me, when I get an assignment from any international news agency. But it depends on what they want, for example the Sunday mail would want a story that is less political and more about the lifestyle of the pirates and so, that means you have to cover it in a different way from what you do locally here.

**You've been to Somalia like a hundred times, you've gone by yourself and you've been embedded with the Kenyan troops..**

Most of the trips to Somalia, I've been there with a crew independently. With the KDF I only went once since they invaded Somalia. A couple of times in the first years with the TFG and also with the rebels as, they invited me.

**How is it to work embedded with the troops?**

Its more like, this is the best way we could get the story of what is happening instead of not getting the story at all. You've got to have an understanding with them, that this is your line. I believe that is what happens anywhere in the world when it comes to embedded journalism. If that's the only way we could get the story about what's happening in the war right now, then that's the only way.

**But you see a negative side of working embedded?**

I'll just give you my example of what we went through when we were there for a whole month. I think we had more say on what we could write and what we could air, but at the end of the day the KDF would go through our stories just to make sure that whatever we had agreed upon while at the department of defence, was being done. But that was only the first week. Second week, third week I believe we were free to do whatever we could report.

**So you could do critical stories about the forces?**

Yes, we could do that. In Kenya you could do that. But their concern was, as I told you, about not showing dead people and trying to negatively impact the Somali community back in Kenya. But you could criticize the KDF.

**How is it affecting you personally to see dead people and killings?**

When you become a war correspondent, I'd say you become hardened but at the same time I think it affects your life personally. It affects your life to a point that relating to people becomes a problem. How I relate to people has changed over the years and how I go about walking in the city of Nairobi after coming from Mogadishu. Covering Mogadishu has really changed me. When you are covering it you feel you are at the top of it, you can do whatever you want, you feel you're courageous enough to do that story. But after all has been said and done and you're back home, all these things come over your mind and it can be traumatizing. I have personal experiences that I sometimes do not like sharing, because of what I have gone through in Somalia. I have had two nasty accidents in Somalia and I underwent surgery in hospital. So it could affect you. If the company doesn't have the system of trying to counsel journalists who are covering war, I think one could professionally collapse. It affects you psychologically.

**You're doing TV, how does that fact that you have a camera with you affect your reporting?**

Whenever I go to a place, especially when I am in a warzone, I have to get a permission and when we get that we can start. I usually leave the cameraman in the car, just talk to the leaders or the elders, and after I am sure that they are ready to have their photos taken, I can start. But it's challenging and in some instances we have been chased away and been threatened to get killed because of that camera. Especially when you're doing an investigating piece in a warzone, it's challenging compared to print.

**My last question, what effect do you think your reporting has?**

From my personal experience, because I get to meet different people, Kenyan and Somali government officials and rebels and Somali refugees living here in Kenya, I believe my stories has a lot of impact. As I told you earlier, in Kenya when you talk about Yassin Juma, what comes in mind is the Somali crisis, the fighting in Somalia.

So I believe I have a lot of impact, on the Kenyan government, on international organisations who are based in Nairobi and on the ordinary Somali people. In many instances, some of the international organisations have approached me. For example before the famine was declared in Somalia, four different organisations approached me and said that there are many Somali people who are going through hunger and they are moving to Mogadishu, it's a desperate situation and the international communities are not aware of it. We believe that if you, as Yassin Juma, go and do a story about it, we will have a lot of reactions about it. And I went and did a story about it and afterwards there were many organisations that were interested to go and try and help the desperate people. I was the first journalist to go there before it was declared a famine. I think after two days it was declared a famine. It has impact. Foreign affairs ministers or the Kenyan government usually approach me and ask me what I think about this, how do we go about this, what do you think about the Somali president move to this and this.

**So you are both expert and journalist?**

Yes, when it comes to the Somali crisis I have become an expert, like an analyst, I can evaluate from what I have been through all these years. For me it's easy, it's not something I have started with right now. Maybe there is a new minister who has come to office and doesn't know anything about the Somali crisis.

**So I guess also you think it's important to also give background and context?**

Exactly, it's important to have a background. Exactly.

## **MURITHI MUTIGA**

### **How is it to report from a conflict zone?**

You go in with expectations and formed by all the coverage you've read, but the reality in the country is very different. You find that people, because they have known conflict for so long, just get on with their lives. You find people trading at the market, people selling and just going about normal life. That's the most surprising aspect, because you go in expecting a full-blown war but in reality this is a city with more than a million people and the war is not everywhere. So people are getting on with their lives and that's always very striking. When you're going to a conflict zone you can end up being quite touched by the plight of the people who have known nothing but war for a very long time. There are those who are lucky enough to survive and can carry on with their business but when you talk to the victims, it is something that stays with you. Especially those who are just caught in the cross fire.

### **When you've been there, what kind of stories have you made?**

The most recent trip was just to examine the situation after the withdrawal of al-Shabaab from fixed pots in Mogadishu. It was an attempt to chronicle what has followed in the wake of al-Shabaab's withdrawal. So I just wanted to tell readers about how life is in Somalia now that most parts of Mogadishu no longer has daily battles between al-Shabaab and the African Union. In the past most of Mogadishu was a frontline. Your house would be a frontline one day, you would have people fighting in very heavily populated residential areas, but now the fighting has gone out of the city. And basically I wanted to see the reconstruction and see whether indeed there is relative calm in the city.

### **So it's not only negative news about attacks?**

No, it's more about the people, about the situation, about life for ordinary people. You know the stories about attacks, we get them from the news agencies and The Nation has a correspondent. But sometimes we want a feature or more in-depth reporting

### **Why is it important to have in-depth reporting?**

I think it's important because the news reports just creates a perception that does not drill down to the ordinary individual life. It's a big city with more than a million

people. Yesterday for example there was a very serious suicide bomb attack in the Somali national theatre. A reader from outside Mogadishu would think that the place is a complete warzone, that every place is a battleground. But then you have people carrying on with their lives and I think its important to highlight that and also highlight the plight of victims because that might mean that they could get some aid from the outside world.

**What sources do you use?**

I use a wide variety of sources. In my latest trip in Somalia I would talk to local scholars, ordinary people, elders who play a very important role in Somali society. We had an interview with the government including the president so it is a broad variety of sources. But when I'm not in Somalia I rely on Somali websites, there are a number of fairly good websites and then of course the major international news agencies, like BBC, AP, AFP and others.

**What's the difference between covering Somalia from here and from inside Somalia?**

It's a massive difference because when you get stories from the news agency, they come through a certain filter. They just focus on events. But when you go there you can focus on people and on life in general.

**But why is that important?**

I think it's very important because it brings a human dimension to the story that you can't get from raw numbers. Ten people killed, but what kind of people were they, what family do they leave behind? It makes the story not just about numbers but more about people living in a very extraordinary conflict that has been going on for two decades.

**What about context and background, can you leave space for that?**

Yes that's very important and we try to do that, especially because our readers just know Somalia through a very mono-eyed lens, they just know war. But the context is important, you can put context about what can be done to bring peace. What are the factors that hold back peace process, how efficient is the government? And so context is really important.

### **Is there something you would not tell about Somalia?**

I'm not sure whether there is something particular that I wouldn't tell. Sometimes as a journalist you get sensitive information, let's say that the Kenyan military plans to make an advance on a certain region or town. It's probably classified information and releasing it may lead to some danger. That's very rare but you might think carefully about information that is of a classified nature, because it's actually against the law.

### **Did you go to the war front in Somalia?**

We were in Mogadishu, which is controlled by the Ugandans, and we requested a trip to the war front. There were a number of reporters from around the world who were there at the time, so they allowed us to accompany them for a brief look at the front.

### **How was that?**

It was quite interesting, because the language of soldiers is different from what we are used to, a lot of technical stuff and they talk casually about war and death. But it was quiet because they mainly fight at night. But it was an interesting experience, just the fact that they are saying that the frontline is just there and that's controlled by the al-Shabaab, so it was an interesting experience.

### **Was it safe for you?**

It is never one hundred percent safe but it was completely without incidents, nothing happened. They mainly fight at night because al-Shabaab doesn't want to confront a conventional army.

### **Kenya is involved in the conflict, has that changed the way you report about the conflict?**

I think it has increased the volume of conflict in the news because obviously there is now proximity, people understand that Kenya is directly involved in the theatre. But in the early days there was criticism that we were being very nationalist, which is a criticism that accompanies almost every country that goes to war. The media tend to reflexively cover what they see as a patriotic line. But since then, we try to balance our coverage. If you read The Nation, a lot of the stories about the conflict quoting the

military spokesman also include what the al-Shabaab spokesman is saying. So we try to improve on that.

**But it must be much easier to tell this side of the story?**

Absolutely, especially because according to the opinion poll there is very strong support for Kenya's involvement in Somalia. A lot of people see that this is not a war of choice, but a war of necessity for Kenya because of the potential of al-Shabaab to strike at the tourism industry, the effect of piracy on the Mombasa and Lamu port. But I think it's important at the end of the day to respect the ethical demands on a journalist for balance, because that creates credibility. And you might be able to prevent things going wrong by also criticising your own side, which might lead to avoidance of excessive casualties on civilians.

**So do you think that journalists can actually help the peace process in Somalia?**

I think they can because the problem with this conflict, as in many parts of the world, is that there are many hardliners on all sides and it's very difficult to see a completely military solution to a very complex conflict. So journalists can back the trend and put pressure on people to look both for a diplomatic and military solution. Journalists can say unpopular things and help to influence public policy.

**And how do you do that?**

For example by learning from other conflicts, like the Afghanistan one, and saying that it's important to understand the need to fight. It's important to talk to these elements of al-Shabaab that are willing to agree to a peaceful solution. So you can look at how other conflicts have ended and try and propose solutions. For example study the Chechnya war and look at how it ended and propose solutions. So you can help intellectualise debate and also offer proposals.

**So, in your eyes, the journalist is allowed to actually have a voice?**

Absolutely, yes. But the thing to do is to mark the difference between the news and the analysis section.

**How is that for you, because you do both?**

When I go to the news arena I try to be completely neutral, attribute to all the facts, listen to both sides. And then when I do opinion I have a freer hand. And then of course in the news paper it is clearly marked what section is for news and what section is for opinion.

**But if I read your analysis one day and then the next day you are in Somalia writing a news story, then I would know what side you are on or what you think.**

No, in the paper it is marked, the news sections are marked.

**Yes, I know. But yesterday I read your analysis.**

Exactly, yes, that's a difficult one. I think the thing to do is to just do your best to retain the trust of your reader.

**So a journalist can be both, objective and neutral in the news stories and still write analysis pieces?**

Absolutely, yes. I think so.

**Do you think that journalists can also make the situation worse?**

Yes, certainly they can. One, by exaggerating the situation on both sides. You can exaggerate the misdeeds of the al-Shabaab or claim that the African Union troops are causing higher casualties than they expect, which inflames tension. You can also make the situation worse by refusing to give a voice to certain sections, which means that they think about turning to other solutions when they get frustrated. Or by being very jingoistic, beating the war drums and saying 'let's attack' when you need a more nuanced solution.

**Being a Kenyan and reporting about your neighbouring country, do you think you have a responsibility when writing about the conflict?**

Yes absolutely. It's very important because very often we have relied on reporters from the west to come and cover conflicts in Africa. But then their perspective, the way they process information about the conflict, is completely removed from our own perspective. So I think it's very important.

**How do you mean, completely removed. What is the difference?**

They will bring the lens of the so-called 'war against terrorism' at a time when, in the local context, you have a lot of things to think about. You have to think about the economics of the conflict, the cost of the war to the Kenyan economy, the potential to disrupt tourism, which employs nearly a million people and brings in a huge amount of revenue. You have to differentiate between various Somali factions and their interests. You will for example be able to tell the difference between pirates whose motivation is economic and Somali al-Shabaab militants whose motivation is religious. So you are able to look at it very differently, rather than from the single lens of international terrorism.

**What effect do you think your reporting has?**

That's a tough question, I'm not sure really. I hope it enhances understanding and I hope it helps influence policy towards the Somalia conflict.

**In what way?**

Especially in getting government officials to think about the situation in a more nuanced way, to understand that it's a complex conflict, and to shape their policy prescriptions more carefully.

**I understand it's very important right now when the TGF's mandate is about to expire, do you pay special attention to the conflict?**

I hope to. It just that I don't only do Somalia. Right now I am looking at Sudan and South Sudan because it's a potentially explosively situation. But as we get towards August I will do a lot of stories.

**There are a lot of Somali people in Kenya. Do you sometimes think about not making them angry?**

Not really. I am sensitive to their concerns but I am guided by objective coverage. You don't want to write things that label Muslims, but if a cleric issues a firebrand and someone cites his religion as motivation, then you cover it. We are sensitive to their concerns but not to the extent that we would censor ourselves.

**So in what way are you sensitive?**

You avoid stereotypes for example. You can't say that Somalis are warlike people and things like that. But if the police conclude that the people who abducted a tourist are of Somali origin, then you report that.

**You are writing for both Kenyan and international newspapers, does your reporting change?**

Yes it does slightly. When you write for an international audience, it's not really the same as for a domestic audience. You put in more context and sometimes you accommodate the fact that they want a bit of their own local interest.

## **BERNARD MOMANYI**

### **How do you work here at the radio station?**

I joined the station in 2005. I had been working at a newspaper called Kenya Times and while there I used to write mainly on crime stories. So I got an opportunity to join the radio and I am still a crime reporter, crime that affects the country and sometimes across the border. And with time with the conflict in Somalia, we realised that much of our stories that had to do with conflict were from Somalia. So we got to cover issues to do with the kidnappings and with al-Shabaab, who not only pose a threat to Somalia itself but also in Kenya. Barely a month goes without us reporting an incident that has to do with al-Shabaab throwing a grenade somewhere. They have shot at people at the border, they have raided a police station, they have raided a police post, killed people, killed policemen. You know, they throw grenades, all manner of explosives, so we are always alert on those issues. And for the station, currently I'm doing issues to do with crime related stories that's to do with conflict and that covers incidents with al-Shabaab and all that. So every time that happens, people want to ask me what we have from the border, from the border towns. So late at night and during the day I get wake up calls and I find myself doing these stories about whatever it is that has happened.

### **And you also cover what happens in Somalia, but you do it from here?**

Yes, we do it from here. In October last year Kenya sent its troops to Somalia, so since then most of our news has been about what happens in Somalia. Our focus is on Somalia, in terms of what our Kenyan troops are doing there, how many al-Shabaab they have killed, what their encounters are, what their successes are, their failures and all that. So we get to collaborate with the commanders that are leading the operation, both from here and in Somalia because we have their contacts. We get to speak to their spokesman and we usually talk every time something happens there. So even without going to Somalia, really, we get to cover what happens in Somalia in real time.

### **So then the KDF is your main source?**

Yes, The Kenya Defence Forces is our main source. Also whenever al-Shabaab does their crazy things, they usually communicate. They have a website, they have twitter,

they have really improved. So whenever KDF issues are stated, for example that we have killed 78 al-Shabaab militia in Somalia, we will get al-Shabaab saying no, they have only killed 16 of our people and we have killed this number of theirs. So it's upon us now to try to substantiate this and know which is which. So our source is both al-Shabaab and the KDF and we also subscribe to a couple of international news agencies, for example the AFP. And they have correspondents even inside Somalia so we get to pick their stories and try to localise it to fit our audience.

### **How do you know who to trust?**

Considering we have the KDF to speak to, we have to get what al-Shabaab themselves are saying, because they also speak. And we get in touch with correspondents who are there. We have correspondents from local media and we subscribe to AFP, and some of them are there. So we collaborate all this information and in the end, after analysing all of it, we are able to know what is the truth and what is not the truth. Because sometimes both try to do propaganda, both KDF and al-Shabaab. Al-Shabaab in most cases, they like posting propaganda. They may post and say we have killed one of the KDF soldiers when indeed nothing like that has happened. So we are usually very careful to ensure we don't broadcast, or post on the website, news that are sensational, news that are not confirmed. We are usually very careful because we know there is an element of propaganda that is likely to come from any side. Sometimes news broke on twitter, twitter is very powerful nowadays in breaking news, so when you read something on twitter you can't ignore it. We used to ignore it before but we realised we can't ignore it, because you may learn hours later that indeed what I have seen in the morning is what I'm hearing now. So twitter is also a source of news. But we don't pick whatever it is that is posted on twitter and broadcast it immediately. We have to countercheck at all times.

### **Why do you have to be careful about what they are saying and what the KDF is saying, how can it be bad to post what the al-Shabaab is saying?**

I guess you are asking about the implications. Well, we are credited as a credible news station and most people around rely very much on what we post on our website and what we broadcast. Because after bulletin you can get a lot of calls. People want more details because radio news are very short, about three to five minutes. So we

may not be able to tell all in radio news. For example, it is 11 am and we have a bulletin, then we are likely to do a webstory that we post on the website with much of the details. So before we post these news items on the website, we realise that there are lot of the things that the public out there is not aware of, because of the short bulletin that we have on the radio. So they rely on the website to get much of the developing story and more of what is not said in the radio. So we have to be very careful because we don't want to say something on radio, or post it on the website, and then later start apologising. We don't want to say 200 al-Shabaab militia have been killed in Somalia and then two hours later say that it was only 16 who were killed, or none was killed at all. We don't want to report an incident that has not happened, or report an incident that has happened but without the correct facts. Because this has an implication, it can really put us in a bad situation, loosing our credibility before our listeners or readers. And you realise most of our stories go with a name. So if we are posting a story today and we are apologising hours later or the following day, if you then read my story two weeks from now, you may not be sure, you may say maybe they will apologise later. So we usually guard against this. Another thing that makes us need to ensure we counter check all our facts, is because of the competition. We are not the only news station or radio station, we are not the only people who run news on the website. We are competing with a lot of other local or international news agencies and news stations, TV stations, radio stations and all that. We don't want to be the only ones who are talking about something else and everybody else is capturing things right. So we usually make sure that what we have is the true position. Because if you read on Capital FM for example that there was an incident where an explosive has killed 26 people, and CNN post on their website that it is 72 people who have been killed, and all the other people are saying the same, definitely there is something wrong with us. It is not possible that 16 media houses can get it right, can have a different toll, and its only us who are saying something else. Either of us must be wrong, or must have a problem.

**Yes, but can you also see a danger in posting what the KDF or al-Shabaab is saying? In terms of, if the KDF is saying something, the al-Shabaab will do a revenge attack or something like that. Is that also why you have to be careful?**

Sorry, I didn't get that correctly.

**If you post that the KDF has killed 20 al-Shabaab, then the al-Shabaab would do a revenge attack, is that also something you would have to consider?**

Well, well, well. Our consideration is not based on that completely because we want to report facts. We want to report what has happened, whatever the implication. In terms of, if we say 20 al-Shabaab have been killed, would we fear reporting that because al-Shabaab may do a revenge attack? We don't put that as a consideration because, before we report it, the KDF already knows what has happened because they were at the scene. So we are not informing KDF of anything new that they don't know. So, with or without our reporting, if the al-Shabaab wants to do a revenge attack, they will do it. Because in any case they were at the scene, they were the ones involved in the attack. We are not telling them anything new that they didn't know, so we are not inciting them in any way.

**But why do you think they are trying to do propaganda then?**

The reason why they usually want to do propaganda is because they've always positioned themselves as winners. They don't want to appear like they are losing the battle. So whenever KDF says it has killed 20 al-Shabaab for example, al-Shabaab doesn't want to admit that. Even if it is true, they want to position themselves as the winners. They want to say 'no, none of our troops has been killed', even when it is true. So al-Shabaab has always wanted to position themselves as winners, they don't want to appear like they're losing the battle, they don't want to appear like there are troops in Somalia that are defeating them. Because, as we all know, they are not well equipped in terms of weaponry and all that. It's just a militia group, well it has backing of al-Qaeda lately. But as it is, because of the border issues, they don't have a way of shipping in weapons. So the troops that are fighting in Somalia, be it the AU-backed troops and the Kenyan of course, they have proper equipment to fight al-Shabaab. So this is part of the reason why al-Shabaab doesn't want to appear like they are losing the battle at all. That is why they resort to propaganda every other time, and this has been confirmed from some of the incidents that have occurred since KDF moved into Somalia, that is October last year. If you look at their Twitter page, they keep on posting propaganda. And when you countercheck it, you realise either nothing happened at all or if an incident happened, they usually try to exaggerate the death toll.

**So it's not a very reliable source then?**

Yes, they are not a reliable source at all. That's why I told you, whenever they post on Twitter we have to countercheck it. We usually look at it with a clear eye.

**Kenya is in Somalia now since October. Can you tell me why the conflict in Somalia is important for the Kenyan audience to hear about?**

The principal reason why the Kenyan people would want to hear about what happens in Somalia is because of the proximity. It is right at the border. Due to this fact, before KDF moved into Somalia, a lot of al-Shabaab infiltrated into our border and most of them were right in the country, including in the capital Nairobi. The incidents that happen in Nairobi, police usually say they have investigated and al-Shabaab is to blame. So every Kenyan would want to know what happens in Somalia, now that the KDF has moved there. They want to know what is happening. Other than that, the KDF troops that are in Somalia have left families back home and the families would want to know what is happening in Somalia. Whenever there is an incident, whether it involves fatalities or not, there are families in Kenya that want to know if their sons and daughter that are fighting in Somalia are safe. Other than that, there are people who are just interested in getting the news because of the incidents that occur around town every other time, at the border points, the kidnappings. So this one generates a lot of interest to the Kenyan public. Before, when the KDF had not moved into Somalia, there was little reporting on the side of the local media. We used to report very little about Somalia. The international news agencies were the ones who really focused on Somalia, but in Kenya we had very little reporting. But since the KDF moved into Somalia and since the kidnappings started increasing, it has really generated a lot of interest. Every time you flip through the papers, the websites and you listen to radio and TV, you will get to hear Somalia news.

**So what would you say is Somalia news? What kind of stories?**

The most common ones are when there is an incident, when KDF has had an encounter with al-Shabaab, which is very common nowadays. Most of them result into injuries or killings, so this is what I call Somali news. Other than that, there are also the kidnappings. Despite the security that has been beefed up along the border, we still get a few of them crossing into the country and they really cause evoke. Less

than two weeks ago we had an incident in Mombasa where there was a twin attack, two incidents where grenades were thrown upon people and two people were killed and several injured. The police and the interior minister blamed this on al-Shabaab. This is also Somalia news, once it has been blamed on al-Shabaab. Al-Shabaab is known to be a Somali militia, based in Somalia. So whenever you're writing that story you will end up writing a background story about KDF entering Somalia. I could add that since they crossed into Somalia we have had very little incidents in the country and specifically along the border. Part of the reason why they crossed, according to the government, is because of the persistent kidnappings, including foreigners. KDF moved in to Somalia immediately after that, because it reached a point when Kenya said 'no enough is enough'. These people are coming into town and they are going to kidnap everybody. At the beginning of this year, they kidnapped two government officials who are still in captivity, one immigration official and one district officer based in a border town. They are still there and KDF keeps posting their photos and lately they posted an interview where they were appealing for Kenya to help them come back home. So despite KDF having crossed in to Somalia, we still have incidents that occur in Kenya. But at least the incidents have reduced.

**Do you ever do any positive news about Somalia?**

Well good news, yes sometimes we do. The times when KDF has said that, apart from fighting in Somalia, it is assisting the displaced families, the millions of people that are displaced in Somalia. And sometimes they engage in humanitarian assistance, they are giving food and all that. I call that good news.

**Do you think it's important to show good parts also?**

I think it is, because we don't need to demonise Somalia. Whatever is happening in Somalia, it is an unfortunate situation that occurs to people. Most of them do not wish it to continue. Lately, since the AU increased the number of their troops and they have captured most of the towns, there is peace. Recently we were told that the Somali people were going to the beach for the first time. To walk around the beach and get to swim in the Indian ocean for the first time, because al-Shabaab had banned this for the more than twenty years that there has been conflict in Somalia.

**When was this?**

Early this year. There were really good photos coming in from Somalia where we see people at the beach, bathing, just happy in the beach. We could even hear from the interviews that this has never happened for the last 20 years. The al-Shabaab had banned them from going anywhere close to the beach, had let them confine themselves to the villages. So this is some of the good news. I call them good because it shows that life is becoming better in Somalia. Earlier this year, an international plane landed in Somalia for the first time. I call this good news because it could not happen before. It would have been brought down by missiles by the al-Shabaab. So apart from the bad news we report about the killings, the attacks in Somalia by the al-Shabaab and the KDF, we also get to report about good news in Somalia.

**And you said you didn't want to demonise Somalia, why is that important?**

Somalia is one of the countries in the world, it has neighbours. Today there are Somalis in most of the countries, including the US and including Kenya. Because we are neighbours we host the largest number of refugees that are fleeing conflict in Somalia. They are here and they get to interact with people every other time. There is a danger of us demonising Somalia, if we do we will be demonising the people we interact with here, who are Somalis fleeing their country. They are all over Eastleigh, all over the refugee camps, they are all over. So if we demonise Somalia as a country, you are likely to look at it as a demon, which is not good at all. Somalia is a country and I think what is happening there now is good, to try and bring back peace to Somalia so that they can continue with life and so that we don't continue having refugees streaming into the country. We shall have Kenyans visiting Somalia, to do business or just visit.

**So do you think that journalists can actually help the peace process?**

They can a lot. In terms of what they report and how they report it.

**How do you mean?**

For example, at some point there was a misconception. Whenever you say al-Shabaab, people want to think that every Somali is al-Shabaab. That is not the case. Al-Shabaab is a militia group, a very small militia group out of the entire Somali population. So when we are reporting as journalists, it is good to explain to people what al-Shabaab is. And what the Somali people is, and what the situation in Somalia

is. Let people know that not everybody who is carrying a Somali passport, or is known to be a Somali, is al-Shabaab. Also, other than reporting about the conflict that is happening in Somalia, let's also tell the untold stories in Somalia. Let's get people to know what is happening on the ground. Other than the fighting there is a lot happening. Children have not been going to school. By telling this, I'm sure it can send an appeal to the international community to know that there are children and women suffering in Somalia. They need food, they need to go to school, Somalia needs to be rebuilt, and there is poor road network. If we do much of these stories, I'm sure it can give the correct picture of what is happening in Somalia. By so doing, Somalia will start being developed. I saw a really nice article yesterday in the newspaper that was talking about how Somalia has changed since last year when AU increased their troops when the KDF moved in. Things have really started moving, people can go to the beaches and play football freely. Al-Shabaab had banned this, I don't know what the reason is. Roads are being built, some of these stories are good for the country and the international community as well. It is good for the Somali people and for other people who want to know Somalia more. Because when you mention Somalia, most people think of war in Somalia. So as a journalist, I'm sure we have a chance to change people's perception about Somalia.

**You mentioned that it is good to explain what is happening. Do you pay a lot of attention to background, context and analysis? Because radio news is very short, how do you make it not only about the actual incident but also the context?**

I agree, radio news is a very short bulletin because of the time. Also people don't have time to listen to radio the whole day so usually we do a very short bulletin but we try to capture all the facts. Other than the incident, we also assure that at least one paragraph tells somebody who is hearing about Somalia for the first time. We can put a paragraph or two just to explain the latest incidents and what led to this, like Somalia has not had peace for the last twenty years and since the troops moved in they are trying to change things. So somebody can get to know this. But usually at the end of the bulletin we say 'for this news and other news, please go to website [www.capitalfm.co.ke](http://www.capitalfm.co.ke) to get more on this'. And if you go to the website you will get a story that is more defined, that has all the facts and all the background you need. Our website stories are not less than 300, 500 sometimes 800 words depending on the

story. So that is a really analytical piece that gives background and explains everything that somebody needs to know.

**And why is that important?**

I think it is important because I don't think that we address the same audience every day. There are people who are reading the story about Somalia for the first time, and this person need not to start from the middle. He needs to get all this packed into one piece, so at the end of reading he doesn't need to flip into yesterdays news. After reading that particular article he is able to understand what is happening in Somalia. And even between our story on the website, we usually link to other stories. We say Somalia has not had peace for the last twenty years because of this, you will get a link there and if you click on that it is likely to tell you a different story that explains specifically why Somalia hasn't had peace. I think this really helps people, to not only get to know the incident that we are reporting, but also the background.

**Being a Kenyan reporter, because Kenya is very much involved in the conflict, does it affect your reporting? It's not just watching other people's war, but also your own war now in a way.**

I don't think it affects us much. The only way it affects us is that we become a part of it because we have watched it developed. We have watched the KDF move in, we have seen what they're doing. We've become part of it. But in the end it doesn't affect our objectivity at all, because we have an obligation to tell people what is happening. So as much as we are Kenyans, we are not obliged to hide our audience from what is happening because we want to defence the KDF or our country's image. We know that we have an obligation as journalists to fulfil, because journalism is a profession and it has ethics. We know that we are obliged to respect those ethics, for the sake of our profession and for the sake of our audience.

**But you say you have a good connection to the KDF.**

Yes we do.

**So it must be very easy to tell the KDF side of the story?**

As I told you, whenever KDF tells us what they've done or what they are doing, we usually make sure that we also speak with people on the ground. Because I told you

there is the fear of reporting something and then you're forced to retrieve it the following day. So we usually say what the KDF is saying and what the people on the ground are saying. You see?

**So it mostly affects you so you cover more, since October?**

Since October we have developed more interest in it because initially, as you said, we were watching Somalia fighting. The news did not generate a lot of interest for our audience until the KDF moved in and until al-Shabaab really increased their attacks on Kenya, when they started detonating explosives, targeting police stations and congested areas. Now we started developing that interest because we realised these news is something that people really want to know every other day. Whenever it did those things even inside Somalia, we started to have an interest in it. The interest got even bigger since the KDF moved into Somalia.

**Is there something you wouldn't tell?**

Something like what?

**I talked to other journalist and one of them said that 'I'm not always telling how many al-Shabaab got killed because I have to be sensitive towards the Somali population here and in fear of revenge attacks'.**

I will disagree with that because, as I told you, the world has opened up. If I don't tell you, it would still be told and I would be lagging behind. If we sit here and something happens in Somalia, the al-Shabaab has killed a big number of people for example, and we say we don't want to report it at Capital FM. Within minutes you will see it on CNN, on AFP, AP, in the Daily Nation and other local and international media. So what justice will you be doing for your own media house when you're not reporting it and its' all over? In the end you will be forced to have it. So I will disagree with that. Because of competition, it has reached a point where people say 'who is the first person to report it'. I've heard that 10 people have been killed, I want to confirm that and post it as fast as possible because of the competition. If I don't post it, there is somebody who is rushing against time to post it or broadcast it on radio. So I will disagree with that.

**Do you think that this rush against time can sometimes be dangerous?**

It can sometimes be dangerous, I agree with you. Especially if you don't have enough sources, if you don't take your time to countercheck. I told you, most of this news sometimes brakes on twitter. For example, 16 al-Shabaab has been killed is on twitter and maybe 20 people have posted it, so it becomes a very big topic within minutes. If you decide you want to pick this and broadcast it and turn it around and make it a big news and post it on the website, you are wrong. Because it could be just hot air, nothing has happened at all, or it is not 16 people that have been killed, it is a hundred. So you need to confirm and get more facts. But because of competition, I don't think there is anybody who would say 'I don't want to report this because of fear'. Once you have established it is true, you've got all the facts and reason to believe that indeed this has happened, you want to post it as fast as possible. Because if you don't, somebody else will post it.

**What effect do you think your reporting has, on the audience and on the international community?**

I think it depends on what kind of reporting and what kind of news. For example, if it is something to do with the good news we have been talking about, it has an effect. If it is good news about Somalia, people get to know that, other than the war, that is happening in Somalia. There are people who are suffering, there are roads that need to be built and schools that need to be developed, they need humanitarian aid and all this. This has an effect for the implementing agencies, it get's to pressurise the world to act on it. The media is very powerful, if the media doesn't report some of these things, sometimes they assume that it is not happening. That's why when something happens in the media and it becomes really a big thing, you see action within minutes. So it has an impact, that is one of the impacts. If we report news on the al-Shabaab killing KDF for example, whatever number it is, it has an impact because the rest of the world is likely to see the threats these people are posting. If they keep on killing troops like this, next they will start killing civilians. Then we need to do something, the United Nations need to act. Okey it is acting already but the persistent reporting, the persistent occurrence of these news in the media, it has an impact. Because it really gets to remind the world, the people, that things need to be done better than they're being done now. And for the Kenyan audience, it also gets to tell them about Somalia because, as I told you, since Kenya generated interest in Somalia, people

really want to know what is happening in Somalia. So we help people understand what is happening in Somalia. We help people understand that other than the fighting that is happening in Somalia, Somalia is a country just like Kenya. It is only that in Kenya we are lucky that there is no war. We also get people to have sympathy for the people who are streaming in from Somalia every other day. Like I told you, Kenya is hosting the largest number of refugees today, we have been told it's more than 500 000 that are in the camps now in the northern part of the country. So we get people to know that these people are not here by their choice, they are here because there is war in their country. We get to remind them this every other time, so that they get to have sympathy with these people. Because sometimes people would want to say 'why are they coming here, why cant they stay in their country'? With the persistent reporting of the explosives, the bombs that have been thrown there and of how vicious this al-Shabaab militia is, we get to tell people 'listen, these people are not here because they want to come and enjoy the climate that is around here. These people are here because their country is burning and it needs to be cooled down. So let's accommodate them until something has been done in their country'. Other than reporting, earning us a salary and fulfilling our obligation as journalists, yes it has impacts in all aspects.

**Do you ever describe al-Shabaab as anything other than a vicious militia?**

I don't know any better word to describe al-Shabaab because I've never been told what good they have done. All the news I've written about al-Shabaab, all that I've heard about them, is that they are throwing bombs at people and making even their own people of Somalia suffer, chasing them from villages, taking over towns, executing people.

**But there are people who are supporting them, why would they do that?**

I've heard some of them are forced to support them. Some of them support them out of fear. 'If you don't support them, you move out of this village'. Some of them have nowhere to move to so they are forced to support them. You see. I mean, people of Somalia haven't known a government for 20 years. Yet here is al-Shabaab that has come with their own laws, they seek to collect taxes from the villages, they are banning charcoal for example, that is one of their activities. Some of the people of Somalia have been forced to know this is just like a government, they are forced to

respect them and to obey their rules. I do not think many of them support them by their own choice. If they had alternative, like if there existed a government that is powerful and strong enough for the people, I don't think people would support al-Shabaab in the country of Somalia.

**You said before that journalism can help the peace process. Do you also think that it actually can make the situation worse sometimes?**

Yes, if we report it in a wrong way it can make the situation worse.

**How is a wrong way?**

If we focus our reporting on the negative side, on the fighting only and not on the human-interest stories, we will not get people to understand Somalia better. Even the people who are in Somalia themselves will get to hate Somalia. They will realise that journalists are not helping us anyway, they are not reporting our plights, they are only reporting about the war. So I think that this can also bring a conflict.

**Do you think that African journalists make different reporting than Western journalists, like in terms of Western journalists mostly describes Somalia as a conflict zone whereas African journalists feel more obliged to also tell the good stories. Do you see any differences between Western journalist's reporting and your own for example?**

Well I don't think it's all the Western journalists because I interact a lot with the Internet and not all of the stories that are written by Western journalists are depicting Somalia in a wrong way. Actually most of the human-interest stories I've read, the ones I can remember, are written by Western journalists. I also see some of the Western journalists writing only negatively about Somalia, so it is not all of them. Even African journalists, not all of them are trying to write good stories about Somalia. There are still those who really depict Somalia as a place where people are not supposed to go to. And there are those who are in the middle, who tell you that, other than the war, Somalia is a good place to invest, once peace is restored there. So I wouldn't say that all the Western journalists are reporting negatively about Somalia. That's my honest opinion.

## **CYRUS OMBATI**

**Could you just tell me about your background as a journalist, your studies and where you've worked?**

I'm ten years old in this industry. I went to the university in Nairobi where I attended my undergraduate degree in communication. I am now doing my thesis for masters in communication studies. I have worked at KBC and at People Daily before I joined the Standard in 2006. Right now I'm a senior crime reporter.

**What does that mean?**

I specialise in conflicts and war you could say, internal and external.

**And what about Somalia, do you report about Somalia?**

I do report quite much about Somalia. Whatever happens in Somalia, as much as we are not there, we usually get information all the same.

**Have you been?**

I went there once when the war started last year, when Kenya invaded Somalia.

**And you were there for how long?**

I was there for two weeks. It was hard to survive.

**Hard to survive? How do you mean?**

It was expensive to stay there because all the time you have to depend on the military to move around. I don't think there is any media, locally, that can sponsor somebody's being in Somalia currently because life there is so expensive and you have to be embedded with the military to be able to survive.

**How do you mean expensive? Is it the security?**

You know you have to hire security to be able to operate in the area. You have to hire an interpreter because those people don't know how to speak English or Swahili. So all those logistics require a lot of financial implications, which many find so expensive and necessary. Unless you want to go there for a week or two or three days

and then come back, which most guys do here. But then they have to rely on the military.

**How is it to work embedded with the forces? Do you see any difficulties?**

Yes, because you don't have freedom. You can't do what you want because even when you want to put things they way it's happening, the military has to see what you are reporting. Because if you report something negative on them, they don't want to see you the following day, you have to come back.

**Ok, what happens then?**

So you have to check with them, to obey by their rules. They say 'you don't go this way, you don't report this, you don't take a picture of something'. So you have to live by that.

**And all the time you we're embedded?**

Yes, you have no option actually, it's so expensive to be there alone.

**And what is it that you can't do according to them? What can't you take a picture of and what can't you write?**

For example sometimes there is a contact, there is a fighting between the al-Shabaab and the local military somewhere, you can't report directly. You have to wait and they send the information to the Nairobi headquarters, they weigh the situation and they have to tell you to go ahead and do it.

**How does that affect you as a reporter?**

I mean it compromises you. Your stand is always probational.

**And how is it to report about the conflict from here, in Nairobi?**

Even here in Nairobi now you have to rely on your sources. The military itself first, then the contact we've made in the area. The reliability is another problem now in that case.

**Because you can't see it on your own?**

You can't see, you just hear it on the phone or you just get an e-mail telling you such and such a thing has happened.

**And how do you know who to trust then?**

I mean, for example the operation military spokesman is the one who usually sends the information saying such and such a thing has happened. And maybe from there, there are those locals, local leaders and militia gangs. There is a militia group patrolling the area. We made contact with them, kind of a gang which is backing the TFG, Transitional Federal Government. They're the ones actually being used to fight al-Shabaab. So whenever such a thing happened they send e-mails, they have their own command centre where they use their own laptops to send information to newsrooms. So from there you can now verify, you can call the military and ask them 'have you heard such a thing has happened' and they say yes or no. Sometimes al-Shabaab themselves, they're on Twitter. Whenever they tweet something, they're the first ones to add some propaganda in it. When they tweet, you'll want to confirm with the military. As much as now they want to keep quiet they are forced to clarify and they say no.

**They say no then?**

Sometimes they say 'yes there was a fighting' but sometimes you find al-Shabaab is exaggerating the number of people who have died. They say that they have killed ten or fifteen Kenyan soldiers but when you call the military they say 'no, there was a fighting and we had injuries, no one died'. For example last week they killed around 90 al-Shabaab militia, al-Shabaab say they have killed 15 Kenyan soldiers. But the Kenyan sources say 'no, no Kenyan soldier has died, there are only five injuries, but we killed an adequate number of them'.

**But maybe both sides lie then?**

Yes both sides. But now you see, you have to rely on the military, which is now reliable here. Because al-Shabaab is on Twitter, they're facebooking but you can't see them. There have been infighting within al-Shabaab and that we learned on Twitter.

**So when you do a story about Somalia, what is it usually about? What is news about Somalia?**

Currently we are focusing on the war, because Kenyan military is involved there. Whenever there is fighting, of course there are casualties. And because al-Shabaab affects Kenya directly, we now focus on that.

**How do you mean affect Kenya directly, in what way?**

Al-Shabaab has been in Kenya. They came to Kenya and abducted tourists, and they have been blamed for so many security incidents in the north-eastern province and the coastal region. We have had so many incidents of blasts in Nairobi and Mombasa where people have died. Especially hear in Nairobi, when you hear about a blast in the city, that effects even business itself. So at least every Kenyan knows about al-Shabaab currently. Some of the al-Shabaab members are in Nairobi now, they have run to Kenya.

**So is it mostly negative news would you say?**

Mostly yes. Unless you find a good feature. Maybe you find someone who has defected from al-Shabaab itself, he comes here and says what has been happening. That's when I can do such a positive story. But most of the things we do are just incident reporting.

**Even when you where in Somalia, was it mostly incident reporting?**

Yes, mostly incident reporting. What's happening on a daily basis or what is supposed to happen.

**Do you see any problems with that?**

The problem with incident reporting is that you don't get time to cover much, rather to get in-depth, a deeper story on what's happening. You just report shallow because you rush to report on what's happening today and then you don't make follow-ups. There are so many things you leave out, which compromises the whole.

**And why is that not good?**

For example if you go somewhere, a whole village has been bombed for example by the military, you need to go there and talk to the people. How does that affect their life, what has happened. And then you are able to get an insight on what is going on, how they are perceiving the whole war for example. You can go there and report that

40 people died, but when you take your time there, sit with people, you can hear what they are feeling. Are they supporting the war itself, are they finding any positive things out of the war?

**And why can't you do that?**

I told you, you can't operate on your own there. When you are there you're being operated like a goat, you're told 'let's go this way, let's go this way.' Period.

**Ok. So it's because of the expenses?**

Yes, expenses and time. Because even the people there are not happy that the military is there, of course. When you are there you want to live with the military because you would be abducted. Currently they are holding around five Kenyans as hostages and they are making demands for ransom.

**So when you were there, were you scared?**

You are scared, yes. You can be abducted too. You can become a gift to them.

**You talked a little bit before about the sources. You use the military source and al-Shabaab on Twitter. What else?**

Sometimes we use the links. In Somalia there are so many media houses that have links, which usually reports on the same. Whenever you see that they have reported something, you want to confirm with the military who are on the ground. Because we have that feeling of trust, that they don't lie. So out of that you will be able to confirm what has happened, whether it's true or not what you have read on Twitter or on other online channels.

**But do you ever make phone calls to Somalia, talk to people?**

That's a problem, no. Because of the language barrier. I believe that there are people who know English who do the posting. They speak in Somali and Arabic, that's another barrier, language.

**So you're mostly doing incident stories. But do you have space for background and context?**

The context and background is not deep. If for example people have been killed somewhere, the much you can do is just say 'Kenya invaded Somalia last October because of increased incidents of security which were attributed to al-Shabaab, after they came to Kenya and abducted tourists from Lamu and Dabaab. So at that time Kenya decided to venture into Somalia'. That's that.

**So that's two or three paragraphs?**

From there you say, since the invasion took place, we have had so many internal blasts, which they have claimed.

**Have you increased your coverage since October?**

*Cyrus Ombati answers the phone..*

**Where were we? The fact that Kenya is now involved in the conflict, does that affect your reporting?**

Yes, in a way.

**In what way?**

We tend to be passionate with the 'us', with our soldiers.

**You are?**

Yes, I am in a way. Not only me but in the newsroom there is that policy that 'lets support them'.

**How do you support them?**

For example there is an outcry that they had bombed a refugee camp in southern Somalia, we toned it down. We didn't write so much on that.

**The KDF did?**

Sure. Because we have so many Somalis here who are passionate about the whole thing. So we tried not to highlight on the same so much.

**Ok so you have many Somalis here so you don't want to write about it?**

Well as much as you want to report on the same, there is a sense of caution among us journalists. It's all individual but collective in a way. These are our soldiers who are going into war, they are our brothers or sisters. They are our people. Even the Somalis that are here, they are so passionate about the whole war there and they feel that the whole al-Shabaab war is affecting them in a way, because of business. The Somalis like a lot of, there is a black market of woods and they are usually passing through Kismayo port coming and they come here. Most of the Somali shop, they operate using those woods. Now since the KDF invaded there, there is a big shortage on the same. So I believe they are not happy, or rather I know that they are not happy.

**So you mean that the Somalia people are not happy with the KDF being in Somalia?**

Yes. In fact we even did a voxpop to hear what they are saying. They are not happy.

**And in what way are you cautious about that?**

When you are reporting you don't want to injure the military. Because the military, they are driven by moral there. Even before, when they went there to war, the chief military officer called a meeting with editors and reporters covering the same. And they asked for support, saying 'the whole thing is driven by moral. This is our war that has to be won, by hearts and by physical confrontation'.

**So you feel that it's your war too?**

Yes, most people here feel that it's our war. But when you talk to Somalis who are in newsrooms, you find that they have a different view on the same.

**So because you feel that it's your war and your brothers who are at war..**

Yes, even if it's propaganda. There is a report that just comes from the military, when you look at it you see it's propaganda in a way. Then you say 'lets go' because it's just an agenda.

**What do you mean?**

I mean, sometimes the department of defence headquarters can send a statement on an attack somewhere in Somalia. But when you look at the statement itself you can see some form of propaganda in it. Because in a war there must be casualties. You can't

say you have killed a hundred people and then they say you have not killed any. From that perspective, we just let it go because they have an agenda. They want to boost the moral of the people.

**You just let it go, what do you mean? You publish it?**

Yes, you publish it. When it comes to families of those who have died or been affected by the war, I have not seen much coverage locally. I don't encourage it because that is supposed to release lots of emotions locally. I don't think we are mature enough to sustain that.

**So you don't want to write about Kenyan casualties as much?**

Yes. There have been casualties of course but that is limited. Not as much as it could be, because there are so many stories to be told by their families. When you lose 25 soldiers there that have been killed, every family has a story to tell. If I came to your family, it can tell one has been killed. So we have not seen much local coverage on the same, it's kind of minimal. But there is that belief that it's going to affect some more moral of those soldiers that are locally here.

**And is it important not to affect the morale, because I know that the Kenyan people support the KDF mission, do you think that the Kenyan media has something to do with that?**

Yes, that's another fear they have. That even the public themselves may view us to be negative about the war. So we have to be cautious about the market itself also, surveys have been done showing that the majority is supporting the war, however it's going. Whenever you're posting something online, for example on Twitter, the number of response you see on that and the comments that are coming up, show that they are supporting the whole thing. So from there you can be able to get the mood of the public. So you have to slant your reporting in a way.

**To keep the public happy?**

Yes sometimes, for the public interest.

**And you said that the military kind of asked you to be supportive. How did they do that?**

We had a breakfast meeting.

**You and others?**

Yes, the media industry as a whole. Explaining the genesis of the whole war and why it needs to be supported. The dangers of not going there, of not winning the war and the benefits of winning the war. So the benchmark was that 'We need to win this war and for us to win this war, you must support us'. And you have no option because you see the danger posed by these criminals. They are able to bomb things in Nairobi, many of them have been arrested. There is a mosque right there and we believe there are many there who are terrorists. Are you a Muslim?

**No**

I believe Muslims are so emotional and so passionate about their religion. And given what has happened in the past, terrorism and Islam is kind of twined.

**So would you say that journalism, if it's not handling it in good way, can actually make the situation worse?**

Yes, if it's not controlled. If everyone decides to report what they want, things can be bad in terms of moral. The soldiers who are there need to be changed; the first group that are there comes back and then they refer another one into war. The one that is here of course, reads the papers, listen to radio and watch news. So as much as they are being hidden from the truth they need to see positive things on the same. And every time the prime minister or the president speaks here, they praise the operation in Somalia.

**So do you see that as a journalist's obligation to keep the morals up?**

Well in a way because it's our country and we have no option. When you weigh the pros and cons on the same, and you try to be objective on the whole thing, you may loose in the end, in the eyes of the public.

**So objectivity is not necessarily a good thing?**

Sometimes yes. Because when you rely on the military statements, do you think they are objective? If you know how military operates, you can't wholly say that whatever they are feeding you is true or objective. If they tell you that four soldiers are injured,

probably ten or so are injured. They may not want to say ten because that would affect the moral of Kenyans themselves and soldiers who are now involved in the war.

**Are you also afraid that when you write something, it may cause revenge actions?**

Yes, even the military itself can decide sometimes to refuse to give you statements. They are the ones who are on the ground. They are the only authority that you can rely on. Al-Shabaab says on Twitter, which you can't rely on. You don't know where they are sending from, I believe even the Twitter account has been run from Nairobi but then they have to communicate with the people on the ground. Because there are so many Somalis who are here. You need to go to Eastleigh and see. Even now if you go down to the mosque here, the majority are Somali. They are so passionate about this thing and they are rather negative.

**So how would you describe your role as a Kenyan conflict reporter?**

I think I've done my part well. As much as somebody wants to criticise me and say that we are not fair and objective, it's our duty in the end. It's our country. If we try to be objective, as they want us to be according to the profession, sometimes the truth hurts to an extent that it can destroy. So it's necessary sometimes to decide not to be objective. I think I've done much in informing the public about what's going on. That's most important for me, to educate them that these people are not good. These people have bombed us, they have killed people and damaged property. And they still pose a big danger.

**Why do you think that's important to tell?**

It affects every person's security because Nairobi has been a victim of terrorism more than twice. It can happen, every day if you go to a market or to shopping malls, there is screening going on because they are fearing that some people are trying to get into a supermarket and throw an explosive where there is a crowd. Or if you go to places where there are lots of white people like you, you see a lot of screening. They have to check if people are carrying explosives, grenades, which are being used locally for bombings. So screenings are meant to scare terrorists, the sympathisers of al-Shabaab that are here. Whenever you talk to the police who are involved in these operations, they tell you they have intelligence that these people are planning to bomb some

shopping mall, to bomb some church, to bomb some centre. So that's why you see that every time the police is saying 'please, educate the masses that they need to be cautious whenever there are crowds. These al-Shabaab, they are up to no good, they may bomb those places.'

*Cyrus Ombati answers the phone..*

So, if you try to say that these al-Shabaab need to be free and then they bomb people the following day, what do you think people are going to do? Are they going to buy your paper? They can't. So we have to be on the side of the majority. And the majority of Kenyans are against them.

**So you're not afraid of stereotyping Muslims and Somali people?**

Well, they are the minority. If you understand what Islam is and their agenda, there is no way you will be able to support their goals.

**How do you mean?**

I do understand and I've tried to understand how they operate. Wherever they go they want to impose their law, their rules, Sharia law. They don't allow freedom, some forms of freedom. If you understand Islam, how they originate and spread, there is no way you can allow them to go on. If you go to a madrasa to hear what they are being taught. I've been there, there is no way you can come back and say that they should go on. Because theirs is destruction. Even the preachers themselves say 'we need to destroy the enemy, and the enemy is the mzungu, white people'. And I believe white people have no problem being here, they should have their freedom. Islam doesn't allow some forms of freedom.

**If you say that your role is to inform and educate the public, and sometimes you have to leave your objectivity on the side, what effect do you think your reporting has?**

It has. When I walk around I see people being alert. People are taking responsibility for their own security.

**In what way?**

When they go to shopping places, you have to be keen on what is around you. If there is an abandoned bag, you need to call security and tell them 'it's something here, can you check what has happened'. People know how a grenade looks. If somebody sees a grenade on the floor, he can tell that it's a grenade. Out of that education.

**And when we talk about the peace process in Somalia, do you think that journalism can help the peace process?**

Yes, with the laws.

**What do you mean?**

If there are laws that are being followed, if they are implemented. In Kenya, the press is generally free but then there are so many interests here and there which affect the whole issue of professionalism and standards in general. People do what they wish to do. Then we have not had those kinds of strong laws to counter, to check, to monitor the operations of the media. Like the social media. I don't know if your country is being monitored, like if you're posting something negative on somebody, can they trace it to you?

**There is freedom of speech but you can't say something really negative about a group of people. It's hard to find the people because online everybody is anonymous. But there are laws against it, yes.**

In your country there is a kind of maturity and responsibility among the masses, but here we have so many issues affecting the whole thing. Tribalism, ethnicity, lack of information, lack of knowledge, ignorance. All those things affect the whole thing.

**So how do you mean that journalism can help the peace process, in the Somalia case?**

They need to push authorities, they need to push the masses in Somalia. Highlight on the same and encourage the locals to understand their need to have peace in their country and move on by themselves, for them to denounce violence.

**How do you do that?**

You have to highlight on the same. There is no other means of spreading the message, other than the media. As much as they may not want to read what we are writing here,

there are those who understand, those who are supporting it, a few of them. So from there they need to be indoctrinated, for them to understand. There is need for you to be free, there is need for you to denounce violence, move forward.

**But as you say, the Somali people are not really your audience?**

That's another hinder that we are facing here locally. Because there is kind of resistance, they don't support it.

**So what can you do when you have a Kenyan audience?**

They have to live with that, there are guns there and they have to live by those guns for now. And before Kenya invaded Somalia, they weighed so many options, the pros and cons of invading. Are we going there to win, are we going there to loose? What will happen? We believe they have sent people there who collected intelligence on the ground before they ventured into that country. So out of that we believe that now we have to support them. They said they went there, they marked the region, they said the majority of the people want to be free. So from there you have no option. You have to support them.

**So what you can do is to inform the public and support the military so that the military can win the war?**

Yes and most of the time the military is saying that they have taken control over a bigger region, let's say south Somalia, which had been under al-Shabaab command. Then you highlight on the same and say that the region that has been taken over is now flourishing, in terms of business, infrastructure. So those who are here can now think twice and say 'guys can we go back to see what is going on. Is it true?' There are so many Somalis who are here who originally came from Somalia.

**So you mean that they might be going back?**

Yes, they might go back because now there is stability in their country.

**So is that a goal?**

It's kind of a positive way forward because whenever you write that a region has been liberated from al-Shabaab and the locals are now free, they are doing their business

well, they are growing A, B, C, D. That encourages those who are here to go back and say 'let's go and develop our country'.

**And you mean that's good for the Somalia peace process, because good people are going back?**

Yes, they can go back and continue their business, because many are now in refugee camps in Kenya or in Nairobi. By highlighting that these areas are now liberated from al-Shabaab and their Sharia laws, they can go back and do their business.

**Are you planning any trips to Somalia?**

The military is planning for us. We are waiting. They will tell us 'we are moving tomorrow', be ready. Period.

## **MOHAMMED ALI**

### **Can you tell me a little bit about yourself and your background as a journalist?**

My name is Mohammed Ali Mohammed, I am a senior investigative editor with KTN. I've been in the media for eight to ten years and I'm so much into crime and investigation. I've worked with different media houses, starting with KBC, Citizen and the newspaper Standard and now I'm doing TV and radio for the Standard group. I've been too much into issues regarding Somalia, covering Somalia a lot of times. I've done the pirate story, the al-Shabaab and so on.

### **And how come you started doing Somalia stuff?**

Somalia is a neighbour to Kenya and since the fall of Siad Barre a lot of Somalis have been coming to Kenya. We have been giving them a place, especially women and children at refugee camps. Many of them have been passing through Kenya going to other countries. So there is no other country that can understand Somalia better than Kenyans themselves. So we started lightly covering the humanitarian angle, the influx at refugee camps, the UN was so much into it. And it was a first experience for Kenya to assist a neighbouring country that has been going to war. And this is how we started covering it, only to realise that it's not what we thought. We are now focusing on different things, the rise of al-Shabaab, the militias fighting each other, everybody wanting to control the territory. And this war was taken from Somalia to Kenya, now Kenya started falling victim to it. So we wanted to go deeper and understand why they were doing this and yet we are assisting them. That's how I came to cover the Somalia thing.

### **And how do you do that, how do you go deeper to understand them?**

The first time I did that, I did it without any assistance. Mostly journalists are embedded with either the UN, NGO's that are there or security firms. But we took the risk and went on our own. We left from here in Nairobi to Ethiopia, from Ethiopia to Djibouti, Djibouti into Somalia. It was a very crazy experience, we were detained in Djibouti. You know they don't want to see journalists, journalists are forbidden to be in their country because of their rule of law and the state that they have. The president is the final man, he says what he wants and does what he wants. We managed to get into Somalia, first of all into Puntland. We were doing a pirate story, Kenya is most

affected by the pirates issue. And we wanted to know how these things are taking place.

**When was this?**

This was in 2009.

**And this was your first trip to Somalia?**

This was my first trip on the ground alone. The others I have been doing with chartered flights. You land in Mogadishu, you cover and come back. So this was the first major assignment going alone. So we went there, we had security like any other journalist and we started looking for information about the piracy. Fortunately we were lucky because we met one of the ringleaders, he was arrested by the US marine and taken to the US. He is the organiser and the one who actually started all these things. We got an interview in Puntland and an interview with the vice president of Somalia, with the police boss and with those people who used to do piracy stuff but has given up and is living a different life. It was crazy and difficult because everywhere we go people are armed, people are fighting over a cigarette, people are shooting in the air. That's a normal thing to them, for us it's not a normal thing. So I got this interview and I got to understand how these things are operated. The funny thing is that it's not the pirates alone who do this. They are being assisted by professional lawyers here in Kenya. These people are going to drop the money, well-trained pilots. Don't be shocked; even the Americans are dropping these things. We got to learn a lot of things about these people. Actually it's a business. Once they hijack a ship, they demand a ransom, lawyers will go in between and organise everything. And then everybody will get their cut. So it's like a business. Kenya was massively affected because of, one, the prices of the houses were going up. I own this small room, you come and ask me 'how much did it take you to build this house' and it took like 5 million Kenyan shillings, you tell me 'I give you 35 million, get out of this place'. So it was madness the way people were buying property in Kenya. And the house rent was shooting up, Kenyans were complaining. The government was saying it was the economy but in reality the piracy money was penetrating. So even those Kenyans who had a small farm, when they want to sell they hike the price simply knowing that it's pirate money, they don't care. So we wanted to stop this

madness. By the time we came back, after two weeks of investigating and talking to all these guys, we realised that the Kenyan bank was receiving a lot of money from outside, without a limit. After the story, there was a limit; you can't send more than 700 000 in Kenya now.

**So your story had a direct effect?**

Yes, it really changed everything in Kenya. There were some people who were not happy about the story so we had to sneak and run away. I think I have left this country more than three times. I've gone to Germany in exile, I was in Norway recently after doing another story on drugs. I just came back recently, last year I was in Norway. So that was it. After that is when I started to venture into the al-Shabaab thing. Apart from doing other human-interest stories, sometimes a minister is killed, sometimes a member of parliament is killed.

**How many times have you been?**

On the ground alone, that was two weeks. With the chartered times there was three to four times.

**And then you were embedded?**

Yes, you were embedded with the AU, the Amisom, you can't go alone.

**And how is that to work embedded?**

There is no guarantee that you are going to come back. That is the worst thing about covering conflict. These people, you want to tell their stories, they don't understand. They don't tell a difference between a journalist and a military man. Once they attack, they attack all of you. Somalia has this reputation of killing a lot of journalists, they kill their own and they also kill foreigners, but mostly they kill their own. So once the plane lands in the Mogadishu airport, everybody is for themselves. The Amisom guys are telling you 'everybody is for themselves and God for us all'.

**And how does it affect your reporting to be embedded, besides the danger?**

First of all, you don't feel the yeast of the story because you want to hear from the other side. You know, there are two sides of the story. The Amisom are saying that these people are bad, they are attacking us. But we would also love to hear from them.

But because we can't reach them, you feel like your story is not complete. You need to be with them to hear what they are fighting for. So that is the thing that is missing. You can see journalists over the world, you see CNN journalists are embedded with the US marine, they will tell you about the US, how they are striking, bombing the al-Qaeda. But you never get to hear what the other guys are doing on the other end. If an American dies or somebody else dies in a battlefield, you will hear friendly fire. What is this friendly fire that we keep on hearing about? So we would love to be on the other side, to be with them, walk with them and hear their side of the story.

**And why would you love that?**

I would love to understand. I'm a journalist, my role is to give out information. I can't give out information that is half cooked. So I would like to understand why they are doing this madness, why they are killing each other. You know, it's amazing that this country has only one tribe, Somalis. They speak one language. This country has only one religion, they are Muslims. But you wonder, they speak one language, they kill each other and they are Muslims. So what's wrong with this country? There are some countries like Kenya, if you hear they are fighting each other, because there are 42 tribes. One tribe wants to conquer. You go to Rwanda, there is Tutsi and Hutu, two tribes fighting. Every tribe wants to conquer. But if you go to Somalia, there is one tribe. So you ask yourself, why? That's a question that I would love to know, why exactly they are doing this.

**And what effect do you think that would have, if you were able to understand that?**

The perception has been created already by the journalists who were there before us: that these people are dangerous. Even the viewer will be caring about your safety, that you should not go to the other side. So this perception is there and there are some journalists who are breaking these things. I love Christiane Amanpour, when she used to work for CNN. I love Nick Roberson. These are the guys who go on the other side and listen to their story. This is how the story should be told. It's a standard that once two people started killing each other, the side that is supported by the majority is always the good side. I would love to hear also from this side. It is difficult to change the minds of people around the world. That is why when a journalist crosses over and

talks to al-Qaeda or al-Shabaab, or has a one-on-one interview with someone who is alive, it's exclusive. Nobody in this world believes that a journalist can talk to this man. You play with the story for five days, exclusive. CNN exclusive, KTN exclusive, Al-Jazeera. Why don't we have these exclusives all the time? Why don't we allow a journalist to go to the other side and listen to these people? In some circumstances I understand, there are some people who don't want to talk to journalists, they kill them for no reason. But I think it's high time that those who try to practise journalism should try to listen to the other side of the story. To me there are three sides of the story: my side, your side and then the truth.

**That's interesting. So when you do a story about Somalia, what kind of stories? You mentioned piracy, the al-Shabaab.**

The al-Qaeda connection. You know Kenya is used as a breeding ground, as a passage. When they attacked Uganda, everything was made here. I had to travel to Uganda, collect the intelligence from Kenya to there, how the bombs were smuggled in. They were transported from Mombasa to Nairobi, Nairobi to Uganda. So Kenya is used by a lot of people, not only in drugs but also in terrorism. Because it's easy to penetrate, maybe because of the culture and the way people are. You know they are humble, down to earth, they talk to you a lot. And people mind their own business, they don't think that you're going to attack them. And again they have this heart of 'they are from Somalia, they have a problem in their country so let them stay'. But some of the elements take advantage of the innocence and they get in under the name of refugees and then they do their stuff. That is how we normally suffer and they use Kenya a lot. If they want to hit on another country, they use Kenya first. We have been suffering, they have been killing us with grenades, throwing grenades at a crowd. Recently there was one at a country bus and there was one in Uhuru Park. They throw and are killing people. They don't fear God, they don't fear anybody in the name of jihad. I'm a Muslim but I wonder which jihad? You are killing people. So that is why Kenya now is pushing to protect it.

**Yes, since Kenya now is very much involved in the conflict, has that affected your reporting as a Kenyan reporter?**

As a Kenyan reporter, yes it has affected me in one way. The government says that the Kenyan military is moving forward, heading to Kismayo, they are attacking, they have killed al-Shabaab. But I would love to see these things, I don't want to hear it. When Kenyan troops were sent to Somalia, I was the first journalist to be in Doble, even before al-Jazeera and CNN. In fact, reporters from al-Jazeera were calling me to ask how I sneaked in. I was the first journalist to go to Doble and I made an interview with a spokesman there and after that we came back very quickly because the people don't want to see the media in the area. So after that is when we put a lot of pressure on the Kenyan military, telling them that we need to know what is going on. And that's how they took us in and we were embedded with the Kenyan military. But at the end of the day that question mark is still there. I want the other side of the story.

**Can you trust them, when the Kenyan military says something, like today we have killed 10 al-Shabaab?**

For a journalist, like I myself with an experience, there are those that I trust and those that I don't trust. It's like when they pulled out a picture of al-Shabaab somewhere in Mogadishu. I think they dug a deep hole and then they put somebody there and covered him with sand and they were stoning him to death. So the Kenyan military, through the media spokesman, put that thing on Twitter and Facebook saying 'this is what they are doing to people, they were doing it recently'. And for those people who understand these things, I tweeted him back saying 'hey my guy, that photo was taken in 2009 by an AFP reporter and he was rewarded for it, so I don't know what you're talking about'. So he had to apologise to the whole Twitter, journalists started writing that it was propaganda. So sometimes you trust them, sometimes you don't trust them. Like when they think that people are not educated. People are following keenly the Somalia issue and they can remember the murders that were taking place. So if you lie to me by pulling a picture showing Kenyans these people are very bad, in the name of propaganda. I agree, when a country goes into war there is propaganda most of the time but 'hey, sometimes you don't have to do that openly'. So we feel like sometimes they are lying to us.

**So you are very critical when it comes to what they are saying?**

I really listen and I am very critical to them and I have sources in Somalia. I will call the son of the vice president, he is a good friend of mine. I will call a lot of people, I will also call some of the militias that I know.

**What else are your sources?**

My sources are different people, it can be a soldier, it can be a militia, a Kenyan who is in al-Shabaab. You know, there are a lot of sources.

**What do you think is your role as a reporter?**

My role is to give out information, I'm a messenger. I'm there to tell people the way it is, I'm there to tell them this is what is happening on the ground. Mine is all about information. When I give out that information and I get a feedback about it or something is done about it and people's lives are saved, I feel good about it. So I'm just a messenger, I just give information. You take it or leave it but I'll tell you the reality about what is on the ground.

**So what effect do you think your reporting has?**

I'm an addict now, I can't go back. I used to be outgoing, nowadays I watch my back all the time. My life has been changed; I'm not the same Mohammed Ali I used to be. You see blood every day, I report about murders, death. You see old women crying, children without fathers, orphans crying, people dying at the camps, people with bullet wounds. People are crying at you to help them, you wonder what you are going to do with them. You can't afford to charter a plane to take all of them to a safer place. So these things affect you and I think that's because most journalists end up drinking a lot, smoking or killing themselves for no reason. Where I've reached, I can't go back. Everywhere I go I'm very careful, drinking something I'm very careful because I don't know who is watching me all the time. If you go back to my record, I have left this country three times. I've gone to Germany, Norway and other African countries to hide.

**Where you threatened?**

I was threatened and the Norwegian government took me in and the other time the German ambassador here in Kenya took me in and they took me to Germany where I stayed a few months until everything cooled down and I had to come back. Last year I

went to Norway. I did a story about drugs, the connection of ministers, MP's and first family, and I had to leave the country because the threat was too much. The Kenyan national human rights came on board, US embassy, Netherlands embassy and Norwegian embassy. And the Norwegian took me very quickly. You can imagine living such a life, watching your back. You go to a restaurant and have to look for a corner so that you can see everybody who is getting inside. Despite being loved at home by a lot of people. You walk the street people shake your hand, people say 'thank you for the good job'. But you have that thing that is not yours, that fear that there is somebody watching you all the time.

**What effect do you think your reporting has on the audience?**

I fight for the audience. Sometimes I feel like I'm an activist. Because I have received a lot of bribes and I have refused, I have been bribed like 5 million Kenyan shillings not to tell about a cartel of car trucking, smuggling cars to Tanzania and Uganda. So Kenyans see me differently. Apart from being a reporter, they know that they can only trust me with their information. They don't go to the police, they come to me and that's how we have a special desk of crime and investigations. Right now I'm working on a story that should go on air at the end of this month. So Kenyans have this trust on me and I don't want to break this trust. I have agreed that I'll work on whatever they will be giving me and I will die with whatever they are feeding me. So that is why the bond is there. I belong to the majority, I don't belong to the few that destroy this country.

**And you said before that your reporting had a direct effect with the limit of money, have you seen any other effects concerning the Somalia issue?**

The Somalis who are in the country, those who have established themselves and brought property and I have exposed how the money is getting in, how the chopper has been hidden from Wilson airport, how the money has been channelled. People were so mad, they wanted to kill me. For them killing is not a big thing. Unfortunately they wanted to poison me. There is a regular hotel that I usually went to take lunch, a Somali hotel. I loved their food and I'm a regular there, as they see me they know my order and just bring it. There was an order that they were going to poison me but thank God one of the cooks just passed by and told me 'listen, whatever that you have

ordered, don't eat it. Something has been done with your food'. And since that day I never went back to that hotel. They have already poisoned my food as I was about to have lunch, and that was the end.

**Did you expect your life would become like this when you started?**

I didn't know that I would come to live such a life. My car is tinted, if you're outside you can't see me. I choose pubs to go to and drink beer where you can't mix with a lot of people. I don't do a lot of stuff in Nairobi, I do it in the outskirts. If I do it I go to the big hotels, once you go to a small hotel you don't know. Sometimes I bond with the thugs, they love to sit with me and they tell me to go tell the government that they are poor. They tell me a lot of stories. There are some places where I can walk like a president in this country. In Kibera, the biggest slum in Africa, I'm like a president.

**When you are reporting about Somalia, do you think that journalists can actually help the peace process in the country?**

Yes, I think their contribution matters a lot. That is if they listen carefully.

**How do you mean?**

You know, you don't have to listen to one side all the time. You need to understand, they can bring a big change. Maybe these people are fighting for something that you don't understand. When the Kenyan military was giving amnesty to the Kenyans fighting in Somalia to come back, journalists were on the frontline telling the Somalis to 'please, surrender your weapon'. They are communicating to us on Facebook and Twitter, telling us that 'I want to come to Kenya, this fight is not a good fight, I've been lied to, I want to go back home. It's not my war but I'm afraid the Kenyan military will shoot me when I come back'. Then we will tell them 'No, we will talk to the major and tell them there are some Kenyans who are willing to surrender, will you please take them in'. We make sure that we are here because we have agreed we take them on camera, so that they are taken in safely. Some of them are here now, walking on the streets of Nairobi. They have reformed, they have changed. The media is so trusted by the people. It's only the media that can change this world by showing what is bad and what is good. People trust the media and that's why they have agreed to surrender through the media, not through the police or the military. They tell the media people 'we are willing to do this but we are afraid'. So the media people will

go to the military or the police and say 'hey, this most wanted criminal wants to surrender. But he can't surrender because he is afraid he will be shot dead'. So the commissioner will tell you 'tell him to surrender in front of camera, we are ready to take him'. One has done that in Nakuru. We went there, he came with his guns and gave it to the police and said 'I have surrendered'. So without the media we are in total darkness.

**And do you think that the media can actually worsen the situation, if the media is not careful?**

It can for sure. Like the good experience in Kenya. We have never had war in Kenya so during the 2007 we didn't understand covering conflict. This was the first time that Kenyans were covering their own problem in their own land. People were so moved and it was a time when Kenyans wanted a change so everybody was supporting Raila Odinga. Including the media houses. What we didn't understand was that there were some people dying on the other side. By the time we came to realise that, people started changing and saying 'hey this is our country, we can't let it burn down'. So sometimes we do a mistake. Somebody provokes you, you are on air, talking, you are carried away and you start talking. You give out your opinion without knowing that your opinion might affect a lot of people. Maybe you say that 'oh these people are stealing our votes' and then you say that these people should be punished, beaten, they should not steal our votes. So people down there will start beating these people, killing these people, simply because you are a trusted voice. People love you for who you are, they know 'this is a journalist that we listen to, whatever he says is true'. So if you tell them to beat people, they will end up killing people. So sometimes the journalist do that mistake.

**So you are not supposed to bring your own opinion?**

Yes, you should not bring your opinion in board.

**Why is that?**

I think once you bring your opinion, you will lose your credibility because people will know that you belong to this party or you support so and so. It's like when Obama was elected president of the US, when there was a press conference he was asking where the Fox TV crew was because Fox was against him. People can even tell if you

have an issue against one person. Americans are trying to play it very nice and sometimes you learn from them and sometimes they also do some mistakes. During the 9/11, did you see any blood on TV, on CNN? No. Did you see any dead body? No. They were protecting the image of their country, as journalists. But look at what is happening in other countries, Afghanistan or Iraq, Kenya during the 2007. They will show you blood on TV, they will show people hacking each other to death. That is irresponsible media. We were having a seminar and they were asking, why didn't they show us dead bodies in 9/11, why are they showing other people's problems too much? This is what we are experiencing. During the 9/11 we didn't see anything but they are good at showing other countries that are on fire, in turmoil. So simply we are learning from them that they are protecting the image of their country. And now it's difficult for journalists to say something bad about their country. Before, if you meet a Kenyan and asked how Kenya is, they would say 'Kenya is corrupt, the leaders are thugs, I hate this country'. Everybody used to hate this country, but now it's a darling to all because we have come together to rebuild it. To tell other people that this is the Kenya Hakuna Matata, the one we had before, let us bring it back to where it was. So yes, sometimes we might screw up everything and destroy our beautiful country, in a day.

**And when you report about Somalia, do you also report positive news?**

Yes, yes we do. If a Kenyan military was killed, if there is something that has happened, al-Shabaab has warned or done something, yes we say.

**But positive news, like the economy is flourishing again?**

Yes, I did that about the education in Bosaso. I reported about how the ministry of education is doing a wonderful job trying to bring education as a way of fighting all this. People are fighting because they don't have brains, they have not gone to school, they don't think. They wake up and think about a gun every day. How many bullets do you have? Me I have twenty, mine will finish first if I fire, I need more bullets. That is the madness that they are thinking. When I was going with a security team that I was paying, they took half a sack of bullets and I was asking them where we were going. They were putting like six AK47 and they were telling us, 'if anything happens, you need to save yourself'. So you wonder what they think, all the time it's

all about bullets. So yes we have done some positive stories about education, about fishing industries. Now that Somalia is not a stable country, a lot of foreigners are coming in to fish in the area and the Somalis are loosing a lot. We have done a lot of things about the good side of Somalia.

**And why do you think that's important?**

I think it's important, it's good for people to understand that Somalia is not as bad as they hear people saying. I'm very sure if you go to some parts of Somalia, you will enjoy it. You wont believe it is Somalia. If you go to Puntland, you wont believe that this is Somalia. There is electricity, there is telephone, Internet, hotels and food. The only thing that is not there, if you drink beer like me there are no pubs, no women. So that's the only thing that you will feel that you are missing. But the rest of the things are in order, there is a police check. We need to show people that it's not as bad as they think?

**Why do we need to show people that?**

We can't change this country if you don't show people that. We need to say that 'hey you can come and invest here, you can come and save people here and things will work out. Together as one we can change this place'. But if you keep on telling people that it's bad, it's worse. It's like during the Gadaffi leadership, people were saying that 'it is bad, he is a killer' but nobody was saying what Gadaffi used to give this people: free water, free electricity, once you get married they give you some cash. It's the only country in Africa that gives people money at the end of the month, those people that don't have work. If I'm not employed, at the end of the month I have something that I can retain from the government. People didn't say anything about the good things of Gadaffi, they only did that after he was killed. After a few weeks people were saying that Gadaffi was doing A, B, C, D. So I think it's up to us not to accuse somebody because we end up as accusers, not journalists. So let us be balanced. Even is somebody is a dictator, he has a good side of it. I'm very sure nobody is an angel in this world. You, yourself, the way you are, there are some people who are going to say 'she is humble, down to earth' and some people are going to say 'she is a crazy woman, I don't like her, she is bad'. You will get a positive and a negative feedback. So let us change it. Let us know you, the good side

of you and the bad side of you. Let's not only talk about the good sides, like in funerals. When somebody dies, everybody will stand up and say 'she was very good', everybody will cry. But when you were alive nobody will ever tell you that you are so good.

**And since October when Kenya went into Somalia, how has your reporting changed? Have you reported more extensively?**

It has changed a little bit. I have left the issues of Somalia because I was a marked man. The Kenyan military was doing a profile about me and I didn't know which profile they were doing. I was tipped off by some intelligence guys and I left the matter alone. Maybe because I entered Doble without their knowledge and I reported about what is going on; the Kenyan military chopper shot down by the al-Shabaab and the military said that it was an accident. So after that maybe.

**So you were too criticising according to them?**

Yes, so since that that day I've hung my boots in Somalia. I'm waiting for them to reach Kismayo, that's when I'll go, for the full battle.

**So when where you there last?**

I was there in November last year. In fact I was in Somalia before the KDF reached the border. I reported from the ground, the fighting between the al-Shabaab and the TFG, fighting for the strongest pillow of al-Shabaab, Doble. I was there before they reached it and then when they came in they found us and later I had to move out after receiving this information.

**So now you are working on something totally different?**

Very big. At the end of this month I hope, God willing. I hope I won't run away this time.