



An examination of ethnic stereotypes and coded language used in Kenya and its implication for national cohesion

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Abstract

Kenya is a highly multi-ethnic, multi-linguistic and multicultural country. In spite of extensive co-existence and interactions between citizens, who largely communicate using Kiswahili and English, most Kenyans are not able to understand indigenous Kenyan languages other than their own. This paper therefore, interrogates the ethnic stereotypes and coded language used by ethnic communities in Kenya and how they are perceived by the users and target communities. The study adopted qualitative survey design and it involved 1223 participants sampled from 39 counties using purposive sampling technique, spread over all the regions of Kenya. Data was generated primarily using interviews, focused group discussions and document analysis. Open ended questionnaires were used to supplement these sources, where necessary. Data was analyzed using descriptive statistics by use of mean and standard deviations and trend analysis. The findings are presented in form of tables and figures. The findings show that there is use of stereotypes and coded language amongst all Kenyan communities and stereotypes and coded language bring out both positive and negative perceptions about the communities referred to. The implications for this study are that, there is an urgent need to educate Kenyans on the unique features of different Kenyan communities. The study also provides the necessary database for reference and intervention aimed at curbing, monitoring and correcting opportunistic use of stereotypes and coded expressions for malicious reasons.

Keywords: Coded Language; Stereotypes; Target Community; Kenya

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1. Introduction

In Kenya and Africa at large, it can be established that ethnic communities have formed code names and phrases used to make reference to other ethnic groups based on their physical, biological, behavioral and other characteristics. In many incidences, this is common with ethnic communities sharing geographical boundaries or frequent interactions (Feely, 2008). Stereotypes are a class of schemata containing generalised ideas about the qualities and characteristics of individuals within particular groups (Kadida, 2010). Beliefs by some members of particular ethnic communities (*inner communities*) about or in reference to members of other ethnic communities (*target communities*), generally or specifically, are what we refer to in this study as *stereotypes*.”

Stereotypes however, are not necessarily a depiction of an accurate picture of the categories of people it may be assigned to, but are rather, generalisations which are ascribed, basically to assist in processing certain information (Somerville, 2011). Nieto (2006) describe stereotyping as “a psychological process used by humans to assist in the categorisation of the complex world of information which surround us” insinuating that, the behaviour of human beings as individuals or group towards others are assumed to be influenced by the kind of stereotypes they have formed towards that particular group or individual.

Unfortunately, negative characteristics or attributes are often exploited and assigned to the target group, and those which are positive and exaggerated are ascribed to the in-group, and further still, people use negative stereotypes when they are cognitively aware of other un-stereotypical information available about the target group or situations which they tend to assign stereotypical information to. Nieto (2006) believes that the consequences of attributing incorrect characteristics are extremely negative and may result to blocking out of accurate perception of individuals or situations and most of the time leads to potential situations for discriminations and prejudice. Indeed, Somerville (2011) noted that stereotypes narrow and restrict our interpretations of, and response to what others are or do. Hence, in that respect, the use of stereotypes may not escape being associated with inter-group conflicts and sentiments expressing hate.

Coded language are words, phrases and terms used by a group of people to make reference to an object, person or groups of people that can only be understood by the said group. Coded language is often manifested through the use of imagery, proverbs, and idiomatic expressions, giving words their opposite meanings and/or writing or pronouncing words backwards, etcetera (Holtgraves and Kashima, 2009). The Kenyan communities use coded language to exclude those they regard as enemies because they do not speak their Language. The implication here is that people may interact freely physically and socially for inconvenience but harbor negative feelings about each other. Politicians have also been known to use coded language for political gains. The use of coded language for the purpose of security or for any other reasons aimed at protecting humanity is quite in order.

The social identity theory illuminates the interplay of the two dimensions of personhood, the personal and the social. That is, identification with a social group is rooted in the basic human tendency of cognitive categorization, and the membership in, and identification with, an ethnic group renders the individual an emotionally significant aspect of the individual’s self-concept. Collective interests are of concern to the individual, above and beyond their implications for personal self-interest. Ethnic identity, in effect, is deemed

an extension of the self; it entails a shift towards the perception of self as an interchangeable exemplar of some social category and away from the perception of self as a unique person (Tujfel & Turner, 1987).

2. Methodology

The study utilizes the descriptive survey method and adopts the qualitative survey design. It further employs the mixed methods approach in data collection and samples out 15 of the 47 counties in Kenya. Both the quantitative and qualitative methodologies is in recognition to the fact that the weaknesses and strengths of each method are combined to provide valid data. The quantitative methodology was executed through administration of open ended questionnaires while the qualitative methodology was fulfilled through interviews and focus group discussions and document analysis.

Purposive sampling was used on sets of participants representing different groups that the author believed would be aware of the stereotypes and coded language of the resident communities. In order to arrive at the sample, the target population was 10 sets of participants that is; Provincial administration, organised groups, council of elders, Politicians, retired MPs, councillors, political aspirants, journalists, Professionals, Students, Religious organizations, NGOs and related workers where possible, Peace workers in multiples of three (districts/towns/sub-regions/sub-ethnic communities), making 30 for each county. Therefore the 30 spread over 39 counties provided a total target population of 1170. However, while in the field, the research assistants were advised not to restrict themselves to the proposed participants. Again, in some of the cadres of participants identified above, focused group discussions were conducted; hence the actual number studied rose to 1223 participants spread over the 39 counties. Data was generated through the use of questionnaires, interviews and focus group discussions. Analysis was done thematically and by use of SPSS package and presented under various themes and by use of totals, frequencies and percentages.

3. Findings

The findings are presented under sets of counties where there are generally shared stereotypes and coded language. For the purpose of this paper, the findings will only highlight five of most common stereotypes and five of coded expressions, along perceptions of users on stereotypes and perceptions of target communities.

3.1. Mombasa, Kwale, Kilifi and Taita Taveta counties

These counties belong to former Coast province. People in this county are from the Mijikenda and Waswahili ethnic communities.

Some of the stereotypes noted here have ancient etymologies so that current users may not know their denotative meanings and the perceived implications when such terminologies are used. For instance, many of the respondents did not know what *baara* actually meant despite the fact that this is a commonly used stereotype among the coastal people. Generally, this study observed that the use of coded words are quite

limited as opposed to stereotypes. However, even the coded words are quite explicit because of the Swahili language, which is a *lingua franca* among the coastal communities.

Table 1. The Common Coded Expressions in Mombasa, Kwale, Kilifi and Taita Taveta Counties

Common Stereotypes	Target Community	Translation	Meanings
Wabaara	Upcountry Communities	Upcountry	The term is used to refer to non-coastals.
Wavivu	Waswahili/Miikenda	Lazy	The Waswahili are considered lazy and they do not like working.
Walevi	Wakamba	Drunkards	The coastal people view the Akamba as people who are always drinking palm wine.
Udigo	Digo	Proud /Witchcraft	The Digo sub-tribe of the Mijikenda are considered proud like the Luo. They are also associated with the practice of witchcraft.
Giriama	Any beautiful girl	Beauty	The Giriama ladies are generally known to be very beautiful. Anyone referred to as "giriama" regardless of her tribe is perceived as beautiful.
Kukuyu/Mwizi	Kikuyu	Thieves	The coastal people consider the Kikuyu community as people with a tendency to steal. Whenever one is referred to as a <i>kikuyu</i> , they mean a thief.
Wanabiashara	Kikuyu	Businessmen	Implies general perception of hard work and business acumen
mwa	Kamba	Brother	The Akamba community are known to use the word "mwa" in most of their conversations.
Wakunanazi	Kamba	Coconut grater	The Akamba community are generally known to grate green coconut in the coast region. It is not considered as a good job at all.
Waleta fuja	Kamba	Distractors	Implies felings of an outsider/foreigner
Badia	Luo/Luhya	Traditionalistic	The Luo and Luhya are referred to as so because of their long standing traditions.
Nyika/Nika	Mijikenda	Bush people	The Arabs in the coastal Kenya refer to the Mijikenda as bush people because they are perceived as traditionalists who live in the wild/forest

3.2. Garissa county - Somali community

Garissa County is located in Northeastern Kenya. It borders Wajir County to the North, Isiolo County to the Northwest, Tana River to the West, Lamu to the South, and the Republic of Somalia to the East and Northeast. Most of the inhabitants are ethnic Somalis.

This study also found out that the usage of some of these coded words and stereotypes have become a norm. Some of the respondents admitted that they do not know the literal meaning of some terms. *Warriah* is the most commonly used coded word, and can also double as a stereotype. The usage of terms such as *Mathomatho*, *Adhoney* and *Malakote* are derogatory terms that may cause ethnic hatred. The target communities in the county felt that the usage of these terms evoked hatred among them and the dominant community which is

Somali. In our view, the continued usage of some of these words may bring about conflict and even cause fighting in fragile situations like electioneering period. For instance, the usage of a phrase like *Al-Shaabab* may not go down well with some target communities.

Example, *Ethihi Dagar* is a referent term used by the Somalis to refer to the Luo community. This can either be a stereotype or a coded word. This phrase literary means a person who throws stones. To the Somalis, the Luos are perceived to use stones as weapons during fights. The users agreed that it is a derogatory word and could cause division among the two communities. *Tugo* is a common stereotype and coded word used by the Somali community to refer to people from the Agikuyu community. The Somalis view them with suspicion and as people with a tendency to steal. When a respondent from the Gikuyu community was asked about the perception he had towards the phrase, he said: 'I would feel very bad if someone referred to me as a thief. I am not a thief and it is bad to generalise such issues.'

This study found out that in general, the Somali community feel segregated from the rest of Kenyans. Their character, culture and even their physical looks put them under suspicion of being an Al-Shabaaab from other Kenyan communities. The commonly used phrases continue to acquire new meanings every day depending on the context. They have the potential to stir ethnic hatred among communities, especially during the elections period.

3.3. Makueni, Kitui and Machakos counties

These are three counties out of the eight counties of the eastern region occupied by the Kamba community.

Table 2. Common Stereotypes used in Makueni, Kitui and Machakos counties

Common Stereotype	Targeted Community	Translation	Meaning
Aoi	Kamba and Kisii	Witches	People who use magic powers to harm or charm others by bewitching
Mundu Mue	Kamba	Sorcerer	A magician who acquires the ability or knowledge using supernatural powers. He/she can use the knowledge to help others get healed or cured from some diseases, get protection or recover their lost property.
Ing'ei	Kikuyu	Thieves	Those who take away other people's items/properties without their consent or knowledge
Asungi/ Aui	Luhyas	Watchmen/ Cooks	House servants who assist mainly in homes and companies. Their duties are mainly guarding and cooking.
Avunyanii	Kamba	Betrayers	People who don't keep secrets or those who don't stick to their promises or agreements

Table 3. Coded Expressions used in Makueni, Kitui and Machakos counties

Coded Expression	Targeted Community	Translation	Meaning
Tunavu	Somali	Tall, Slender and Dirty	The term is used for identification of the Somalis from their tall and slender bodies and the belief that they are dirty.

Murume	Meru	Gentleman	Used by both Merus and other tribes when addressing any man.
Vaite	Meru	Fighter	Used to refer to the violent nature of the Meru community.
Kamau	Kikuyu	Kikuyu name	A common name among Kikuyu used to simply refer to a Kikuyu.
Warrior	Somali	Warrior or a fighter	Used to refer to Somali because of their war-like nature.

The Kamba community use these stereotypes and coded language in various contexts, including identification purposes, positive and negative social portrayal and communication purposes. There are those perceptions which are harmless to both the user and target communities, whether used positively or negatively, while others may amount to hate and conflict against the target communities depending on the context of usage.

3.4. Embu county

Embu County is located in Eastern Kenya, bordering Tharaka Nithi to the North, Kitui to the East, Machakos to the South, Muranga to the Southwest, Kirinyaga to the West, and Meru to North West.

Table 4. Common Stereotypes used in Embu County

Common Stereotype	Target Community	Translation	Meaning
Wi wa mana ta Ikamba	Use to refer Embus who cannot work	. You are useless like a Kamba	Used earlier to show Kambas had nothing/ they were seen as poor, therefore unable to help others.
Niukua na mbia ta mumiru?	Refer to Embus who are mean with their money	Are you going to die with money like a Meru	Used to refer to Merus commonly from Maua who do not share their money even after the sale of <i>miraa</i> .
'Niukua na mbia ta mugikuyu?'	Kikuyu	Will you die with money like a Kikuyu	To refer to Kikuyus love for money.
Andu a kuria thamaki na ngima	Luos	People who eat fish and Ugali	Luos
Andu a mathiga	Luos	People who throw stones	

Table 5. Common Coded Expressions used in Embu County

Coded Expression	Target Community	Translation	Meaning
Murume/Baite/ Bai	Meru	Refer to Meru Men	
Nduriri		Any other tribe apart from GEMA	Borrowed from Israelites who referred to other tribes as Nduriri

Mbari ya Mbeere, Ruruka rwa mbere	Mbeere	Tribe/ Mbeere generation	Refers to Mbeere community
Arogi a Mbeere	Mbeere	Witches from Mbeere	Refers to a certain people from Mbeere who are believed to be witches/ own black magic.
Irimu	Mbeere	Fools	Embus see people from Mbeere as very foolish.

Terms like *Niukua na mbia ta mugikuyu*, *mundu wa nyumba*, *Jalugo*, *Ivici* and *Kai watonya atia ta mumaita* are some of the most used coded expressions and stereotypical phrases in this county, and to a larger extent, relates to target communities which are bordering the Embus, like the Mbeere, Kambas, Kikuyus, except Luos community, who are identified as *Jaluo*, or in more derogatory terms like *ivici*, or *Andu a nthamaki*. However, it was noted that, negative stereotypes feature commonly during elections, when inter-ethnic sentiments are brought to the limelight.

3.5. Meru and Tharaka Nithi counties

Meru and Tharaka Nithi counties are situated in the central part of the Eastern region.

Table 6. Common Stereotypes in Meru and Tharaka Nithi counties

Common Stereotypes	Target Community	Traslation	Meaning
Mwiji, Jathi, Kabisi	Luo	Uncircumcised	It means uncircumcised.
Woria	Cushites.	All light cushites.	All light haired cushites
Antu ba Kamuti	Kamba	People of portions/sticks	Witches/ people of portions
Nyamu cia Rwanda	Communities form semi-arid areas	Animals of the desert	Associated with Somali, Maasai, Turkana, Samburu and Tharaka.
Nturubu	Ndorobo	People of funny language	Sometimes means a primitive person.

Table 7. Coded Expressions used in Tharaka Nithi and Meru counties

Coded Expression	Target Community	Translation	Meaning
Kwenda mukwaji ja mutharaka	Tharaka	Loving cassava like a Tharaka	Tharaka are associated with hunger because they come from semi-arid part of Meru region. Many times cassava was only their stable food
Uriti ja mutigania wa wa kunati	Tigania	Foolish like Tigania from Kunati	Kunati is a place. Tigania people from this place are perceived to very foolish and primitive.
Tigania iria yarire cimiti	Tigania	The Tigania who ate cement	Tigania people considered to be foolish. To the extent of eating the cement thinking its maize meal.

Tigania iria yarire chokaa	Tigania	The Tigania that ate chalk	Means that they are foolish to the extent of eating the chalk.
Uju ni muruguru	Those living near the mountain	This one is from of up the hill	Commonly used to refer to wealthy people living on rich fertile grounds at the foot of Mt Kenya.

Some proverbs that significantly features in day to day interactions describing these two communities are; *kwenda mukwaji ja mutharaka* and *Uriti ja mutigania wa kunati*. The main perceptions elicited by stereotypes and coded language about the target communities by the users in this county generally expresses the strained relationships between various sub-tribes. Generally, the main intentions of the user communities are to ridicule or despise someone from the other community. On the other hand, the target communities take these stereotypes as outright insult. Many respondents who came from target communities said that they strongly felt despised and dehumanised when such terms are used against them.

3.6. Isiolo county

Isiolo County is recognised as an administrative unit in eastern region of Kenya.

Table 8. Commonly used Stereotypes used in Isiolo County

Common Stereotype	Target Community	Translation	Meaning
Emoit	All non-Turkana	An enemy	An enemy/stranger who is not a Turkana
Lmang'ati	Anyone who is not from Samburu Community	An enemy	An enemy/stranger who is not a Samburu
Milandufte	Somali	Somebody who trekked.	Somali community who trekked on foot (Historically the Somali came on foot to Isiolo from the upper North-Eastern part
Nangai	Turkana community and other tribes except Somalis	Beggar	People who like begging
Guraale	All non-Somali and Borana tribes Kincky-haired	Kinky-haired	Refers to someone with rough /kincky hair
Lukume	Turkana	Nose	Used by Samburu to refer to Turkana as useless people.
Sare Guraale	Turkana	Dog-Like	An abusive term which is used to refer to Turkana as dogs
Sakhatan	Turkana	Dirty	Used by Boranas to refer to Turkana as dirty.
Ajayee	Turkana	Smelly	Used by the Boranas to refer to the Turkana as Smelly.
Lkokoyo	Kikuyu		Used to identify a person from Kikuyu community.
longuulkitkit	Kamba	Smelly armpits	Means those with smelly armpits

Longuu	Turakana	Smelly/Unclean	Used by the Samburu to refer to Turkana as smelly and unclean people.
Lememurata	Turkana	Uncircumcised	Used by the Samburu to refer to Turkana since they are uncircumcised.
Ltoroboni	Rendiles & Oromo	Outsiders	People who occupy other people's territory.
Lomera	Meru	Light-skinned	Used by Samburu to refer to Merus as light-skinned and as Miraa growers.

Table 9. Commonly Used Coded Expressions used in Isiolo County

Common Stereotype	Target Community	Translation	Meaning
Emoit	All non-Turkana	An enemy	An enemy/stranger who is not a Turkana
Lmang'ati	Anyone who is not from Samburu Community	An enemy	An enemy/stranger who is not a Samburu
Milandufte	Somali	Somebody who trekked.	Somali community who trekked on foot (Historically, the Somali came on foot to Isiolo from the upper North-Eastern part)
Nangai	Turkana community and other tribes except Somalis	Beggar	People who like begging
Guraale	All non-Somali and Borana Tribes	Kincky-haired	Refers to someone with rough /kincky hair
Lukume	Turkana	Nose	Used by Samburu to refer to Turkana as useless people.
Sare Guraale	Turkana	Dog-like	An abusive term which is used to refer to Turkana as dogs.
Sakhatan	Turkana	Dirty	Used by Boranas to refer to Turkana as dirty.
Ajayee	Turkana	Smelly	Used by the Boranas to refer to Turkana as smelly.
Lkokoyo	Kikuyu		Used to identify a person from the Kikuyu community.
longuulkitkit	Kamba	Smelly armpits	Means those with smelly armpits
Longuu	Turakana	Smelly/Unclean	Used by the Samburu to refer to Turkana as smelly and unclean people.
Lememurata	Turkana	Uncircumcised	Used by the Ssamburu to refer to Turkana since they are uncircumcised.
Ltoroboni	Rendiles & Oromo	Outsiders	People who occupy other people's territory.
Lomera	Meru	Light-skinned	Used by Samburu to refer to Merus as light-skinned and as Miraa growers.
Lmeeg	Kikuyu	Opportunist	Used by the Samburu to refer to Kikuyu as opportunists.

The main perceptions by the target communities about these stereotypes and coded language may be classed into two groups. On one hand, there are those who strongly feel despised and dehumanised when such terms are used against them. On the other hand, there are those who feel these terms have been used so much that they have become part and parcel of an everyday language of conversation to an extent that they no longer provoke any negative feelings or reactions from the target communities.

3.7. Kiambu, Murang'a, Nyeri counties

The above three counties were grouped together in this study. This was because the speakers in the counties speak the same language. Most of the words and phrases fundamentally show that the user community is different from the target community, and expresses intensions of keeping distance, for example, *Nduriri* is a reference name for other tribes who are not from the GEMA community (Gikuyu, Embu, Meru and Akamba). A close scrutiny reveals that most of these words show that people from the Kikuyu community consider themselves as superior in character, and culture. It was also noted from the study that most of these words had become part of everyday usage such that most of the respondents did not even care what these words and phrases may imply in the wider context of interaction, for example terms such as *kihii*, *aicii*, *andu a ruguru*, *mera*, *gethii*, among others. This was the main perception of the user community deduced from the counties. However, it was also noted that the users of these words and phrases would likely form negative perceptions if they were referred to using such stereotypes. Generally, most of the respondents, however, felt that these coded words and phrases are likely to fuel ethnic hatred and tensions.

3.8. Bomet, Kericho and Nandi counties

These Counties are found within the former Rift Valley province of Kenya, which borders the former Western and Nyanza provinces to the west and speak Kalenjin language. The most common stereotypes that are used by the Kalenjin community target the communities that share a common geographical boundary with them and those that interact with them at social and economic levels. In fact, the stereotypes and coded language that have been documented here indicates both negative and positive perceptions. The positive stereotypes included such expressions as *Kap Maama*, *Chitab Kipsongik*, *Chitab Ndisiot*, *Pik ap Ngokyot*, *Chitab Ainet* and *Kap Chelit*. While those which denote negative perceptions include *Bunyot*, *Ngetik*, *Bonik*, *Chorik*, *Kimur Kelda*, *Kipkerugu* and *Chemasut*.

These coded languages and stereotypes are mainly targeting people from Luo, Abagusii, Luhya and the Agikuyu communities. However, as it emerged there are instances where coded language expressions could be used to target individuals from the same community to conceal meaning on some particular aspects of issues. Generally, the kind of perceptions evoked by the use of stereotypes and coded language about the target communities by members of the Kalenjin community in Nandi, Kericho and Bomet counties indicate that the user community are different from the target communities.

However, various coded languages and stereotypes documented in this study indicate that, the interpretations given to them by the target communities vary across the target communities. While others may view them as for identity purposes, others also view them as largely meant to perpetuate ill feelings among the interactants. Furthermore, making a clear cut distinction between coded expressions and stereotypes depends on the context in which they are used, and such terms as *Kimur kelda* that are used for identity may amount to hate speech according to how the target community perceives it.

3.9. Uasin Gishu county

Uasin Gishu County is located in the former Rift Valley Province, with Eldoret town as its headquarters.

Table 10. Common Stereotypes in Uasin Gishu County

Tribes	Common Stereotypes	Target Community	Translation	Meaning
Kalenjin	Kamau	Kikuyu	Name from a particular tribe	Used to refer to any person from Kikuyu tribe and perceived as thieves.
	Turu	Turkana	Tribe	Refers to any person from Turkana community
Kikuyu	Kabila Choma	Kalenjin	People of the tribe that burn others	The tribe that torches other people's houses
	Nduriri	Non-Kikuyu	Strangers	Refers to all people from non-Kikuyu community.
Maasai	Okuyu / sapere	Kikuyu	Kikuyu	People from the Kikuyu tribe
	Jalang'o	Kalenjin	Person from the hills	Refers to a person from Kalenjin community
Luhya	Kabaris	Luhya	Tribe of the Luhya community	Person from the Kabaris tribe
	Mseve	Kikuyu	He who behaves like Pumpkin	People who can manoeuvre their way out and stay anywhere

Table 11. Common Coded Expressions used in Uasin Gishu County

Tribes	Coded Expression	Target Community	Translation	Meaning
Kalenjin	Kimurkeldet	Kikuyu	Brown teeth	A person with brown teeth.
	Kimoriot	Kikuyu	Ambush from the forest	A person who cannot attack his enemy in open but hides and ambushes from the forest.
Kikuyu	Kabila Choma	Kalenjin	People who torch other people's houses	The tribe that is known to torch other people's houses
Maasai	Nduriri	Non-Kikuyu	Enemy	Refers to all people from non-Kikuyu community who are considered to be enemies
	Maziwa lala / Mursik	Kalenjin	Sour Milk	People who drink sour milk
Luhya	Ilmagat	Non-Masaai	Enemy	Refers to any enemy
	Mseve	Kikuyu	Pumkin	People who can manoeuvre their way and stay anywhere

Uasin Gishu County is a cosmopolitan county with a diverse cultural background in terms of ethnic composition. All tribes have different coded languages and stereotypes used to refer to other tribes. Some people from the Kalenjin community have a perceived notion that the entire Rift Valley province is their ancestral land, and any non-Kalenjin community inhabiting it are considered strangers or enemies. This notion

is conveyed through such terminologies as ‘*Bunyot*’ and ‘*ilmagat*’, which are used by Kalenjin and Maasai communities respectively to mean an enemy. However, most target communities felt that these terms are negative since they created and reinforced feelings of mistrust, suspicion and hate.

3.10. Elgeyo-Marakwet and Baringo counties

Elgeyo Marakwet and Baringo Counties border each other and are inhabited by the Marakwet, Keiyo and Tugen communities of Kenya. The three communities speak the native Kalenjin language but with different vernaculars among them. Due to such shared identity, they have a number of stereotypes and coded language, which are common among them.

The coded expressions and stereotypes are mainly used on the neighbouring communities which are the Pokot, Nandi, Turkana and the Kikuyu. Besides, a majority of the coded terms would be used within the community to hide meaning on particular issues. One example of a coded expression, which indicates identity is *chebo araraita*, which means the person or woman from the lake. This coded expression is used to identify the Luo women who are largely perceived to come from the lakeside.

The kind of perceptions evoked by the use of stereotypes and coded language about the target communities by members of this County show that they were mainly meant to be used to identify the target community and hide meaning of things they considered to be meant for the user’s group alone. Moreover, the kind of perceptions elicited by the use of the coded language and stereotypes differ in context and clearly attaching meaning to them would be very difficult.

Table 12. Common Stereotypes used in Baringo & Elgeyo Marakwet Counties

Common Stereotype	Targeted Community	Translation	Meaning
Punyoot	Any community	Enemy	An enemy who is not allowed to share the Elgeyo-Marakwet views
Chepngal	Nandi	Person of many words	Very proud and talkative
Ngetiik	Luo	Boys	The uncircumcised
Ngoroko	Pokot	Cattle rustlers	people who steal livestock
Cheptukenyot	Tugen	Tugen lady	The very mean lady
Kimurkelda	Kikuyu	Brown teeth	Community of people with brown teeth
Chepturkanyat	Turkana	Turkana lady	Dirty lady who never observes hygiene

Table 13. Coded Expression used in Baringo & Elgeyo Marakwet Counties

Coded Expression	Target Community	Translation	Meaning
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Lemeek	Luhya/Luo tribe	Luhya/Luo people	Anybody from the Luhya/Luo community
Ngoroko	The Pokot	Cattle rustlers	People who steal livestock
Cheptukenyot	Tugen	A Tugen lady	To identify a Tugen lady
Kokoiyot	Kikuyu	A Kikuyu	Anybody from Kikuyu community
Mamaalat kot	Any non-homogenous group	The house isn't well smeared	The context isn't safe for confidential discussion
Punyon	Kikuyu	Enemy	People who were considered to be the enemy
Chep'ngal	Nandi	Talkative	Somebody proud and talks a lot
Kamama	Kikuyu	Of a relation, or our uncles	Treat with much care and give them respect
Kameriech	Kikuyu	Not encouraged	Not partakers of Tugen rituals
Kimurkelda	Kikuyu	People with brown teeth	Dirty teeth
Ng'etik	Luo	Boys	Uncircumcised
Kosobeek	Kisii	Dealers in witchcraft	People who bewitch
Chebo araraita	Luo	Of the lake side	People or woman from the lake
Punyon nepirir kuyang	Kikuyu	Red enemy	Very dangerous enemy ready to shade blood

3.11. Nakuru county

Nakuru County is in the former Rift Valley Province of Kenya. Nakuru County is a cosmopolitan County with people from diverse backgrounds of race and ethnicity. Therefore, to avoid unnecessary duplication of data, some terms which have been documented in other cosmopolitan counties mentioned above have been omitted deliberately.

Table 14. Common Stereotypes used in Nakuru County

Users	Common Stereotypes	Target Community	Translation	Meaning
Kikuyu	Arogi	Akamba	Witch	Those who practice witchcraft.
	Kehee /Ihee	Luo	Uncircumcised	This means that community whose men are uncircumcised.
	Rubwa	Kipsigis	Highlands	People who live in the highlands
Kalenjin	Kimurgelda	Kikuyu	Brown teeth	They are called so because it is believed they have brown teeth.

	Punyot	Kikuyu	Enemy	The Kalenjin view the Kikuyu as enemies, hence shouldn't be trusted.
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Table 15. Common Coded Expression used in Nakuru County

Users	Coded Language	Target Community	Translation	Meaning
Kikuyu	Nduriri	Kikuyu	Non-Kikuyu	Referring to all other communities who are not kikuyu.
	Ngiti	Individual/group	Dog	One who has numerous sexual partners. This practice is equated to a dog.
	Athoni-Aito	Gema/Akamba, Embu, Meru, Masaai	In laws	Those communities that married from Kikuyu.
Kalenjin	Punyot	Kikuyu	Enemy	The Kalenjin view the Kikuyu as enemies, hence shouldn't be trusted.

Some of these terms are used for identification while others are used when discussing confidential information, which other communities are not permitted to be part of. These terms have positive, negative or dual implication to the target communities.

3.12. Samburu county

Samburu County is located in the former Rift Valley province. Its borders Baringo County to the West, Laikipia County to the South, Isiolo County to the East, Turkana County to the Northwest and Marsabit County to the North.

The study found out that the common stereotypes and coded language used by the Samburu community are restricted to the communities that neighbour them or live in the major towns within the County. For example, *Soqui* refers to people who live in the bush. Samburus use this term to refer to the Pokots. This is because they are perceived as dark skinned and prefer to dress in dark hides and skin. Pokots are feared by the Samburus, and are mostly considered as inhuman since they are known to mercilessly kill everyone in the *manyatta* when they raid the Samburus. Even children and women are not spared during such raids. Other common stereotypes include *Ngajiesiel*, *Lmeeg*, *Longu Mala*, *Loongu*, *Loongu ikikit*, *Soqui*, *lmero*, whereas some of these may still be considered as coded. However, the coded group include *Ikokoyo*, *Meroni*, *Lkiyanyita*, *Lentora*, *Lootuudengutuk*, *Nkoor* and *Sogis*.

Generally, it emerged that users and target communities perceive these stereotypes and coded language differently. However, it was noted that mostly, they invoke feelings of scorn, identity, express contempt or discredit the communities to which they are targeted. It is important to note that the data from Samburu indicates that the people from Samburu community have no stereotype or coded language that would refer to communities that they have never interacted with.

3.13. Turkana county

Turkana County that forms part of the arid and semi-arid lands of the former Rift Valley province of Kenya. It is located in the north-western Kenya to the west of Lake Turkana. It borders Ethiopia to the north-east, Sudan to the north-west and Uganda to the west, and the Kenyan counties of West Pokot and Baringo to the south, and Marsabit and Samburu to the east.

Table 16. Common stereotypes in Turkana County

Common Stereotype	Targeted Community	Translation	Meaning
Lochomil-angakonyen	Pokot	Small-Eyes	Can See the cattle even when far away and raids
Tiritirio-kope	Pokot	Perched on the hill-tops	Fierce enemy residing on the Hills
Ekile lolenger	Pokot	Circumcised Man	Circumcised enemy
Emoit loa akwara	Pokot	Enemy with a spear	Potential Enemy

Table 17. Common coded expression used in Turkana County

Coded Expressions	Targeted Community	Translation	Meaning
Eupekit	Pokot	Noun	A Turkana word for anyone from the Pokot Community
Emoit	Pokot	Enemy	A thief of the cattle
Emoit	Other communities	Non-Turkana	People from other communities
Ebukut	Other communities	Non-Turkana	People from other communities
Punyon	Turkana	Enemy	A word used by the Pokots to refer to the Turkana and other Communities

The Pokots have been the aggressors by being in constant conflict with almost all their neighboring communities such as Marakwets, Samburu, Turkana and Karamojong of Uganda. Most of the stereotypes and coded language identified signaled negative portrayal mainly by the user communities to the target communities, drawing hatred, fear, provocation and anger between those communities as found out in the survey. The more angry one gets at these biases, stereotypes and use of coded language against another, the

more it is indicative of the strength of his/her own inner convictions and perceptions, biases and the stereotypes. Generally, it is too hard for one to typically tolerate any one who is thinking different from what they are and, especially with the negative perspective, most likely leading to hatred and conflict.

3.14. West Pokot county

West Pokot County is one of the counties in the Rift Valley. It borders Turkana to the North, Baringo to the East, Elgeyo Marakwet and Trans Nzoia to the South, and the Republic of Uganda to the West. The most commonly used stereotypes are those which feature prominently in every day's interaction and those which seem to express strong hate towards persons from other communities. When these stereotypes and coded language are used, they draw different perceptions from both the users and the target community. These perceptions range from identification, recognition, hatred, contempt, scorn, provocation, appreciation and friendship.

From this study, however, it emerged that majority of the stereotypes and use of coded language by the Pokots against other communities drew negative perceptions in almost all the cases. This means that they hardly view other communities in a positive way, especially the neighbouring ones. One of the respondents said that most of the conflicts between the Pokot and the neighbouring communities arose out of suspicion of theft of their cattle and the coded language they would use to refer to the other communities.

From the study, very little is evident on the positive portrayal of other communities by the Pokots, meaning that they hardly accept or accommodate anybody from a community different from theirs. The use of derogatory words like *punyon, sik, kawau, chang-kellat and Kapchepan* to refer to other communities is proof that there is need to intervene and identify ways and means of co-existence between the Pokot community and other communities. It is therefore important to educate the Pokot community and other communities on issues related to stereotypes and coded language because it is evident that it can cause violent reactions between one community and another.

Perception is a key perspective in our day-in day-out activities, therefore individuals in a society interpret and attach meaning to issues based on their social, economic, cultural and political background. These arise from the beliefs and values from which they attach to themselves and others. There is need to incorporate both the internal and external perceptions within a community.

3.15. Trans Nzoia county

Trans Nzoia County is located in the former Rift Valley province. It borders the Republic of Uganda to the Northwest, West Pokot to the North, Elgeyo Marakwet to the East, Uasin Gishu and Kakamega to the South, and Bungoma to the West and Southwest.

Table 18. Common stereotypes used against other communities in Trans Nzoia County

User Community	Common Stereotype	Target Community	Translation	Meaning
Luhya	Omunyolo / /Omusinde	Luos	Uncircumcised	Refers to people who have not undergone circumcision

Luo	Sapere	Kikuyu	Kikuyu	Used to refer to a person from Kikuyu community
Kikuyu	Gashurie	Kalenjins	Hanging ears	This refers to people who have long pierced and hanging ears
	Ndia Nguya	Luhyas	Termites	Used to refer to people who eat termites
Kalenjins	Kimorio	Kikuyu	Ambush	This means people from the bush. The name was used because of the guerilla tactics used by Mau Mau

Table 19. Coded Expressions used by the Communities to refer to other Communities

User community	Coded Expression	Translation	Target Community	Meaning
Luhyas	Wosia Nju	House burners	Sabaot	Refers to people who burn houses
Luos	Odiero	White	White man	Used to refer to a white man
Kikuyu	Rugune	Demean	Turkana	It is used to belittle somebody
	Gumee	Magnet	Kalenjin	Used to mean petty thieves.
Kisii	Ekenyambi	Grass	Kikuyu	This means some type of grass which does not dry up from the farms and spreads very fast. They are called so because they are in every part of the country and even when evicted they still get back and cannot be eliminated.

Since Trans Nzoia County is vast and is inhabited by a number of communities, each community within the county has designed a name that it would use to refer to the other community that may be said to be the 'outsider'. The common stereotypes and coded language are *Gashurie*, *Gumee*, *Mongen*, *Rubwa*, *Kamathia*, *Rugune*, *Ndia Nguya*, *Funyo*, *Kimurgelda*, *Kapmama*, *Kimorio*, *Jarabuon*, *Jakuo-gni*, and *Egenyambi*. From the study, we would also say that there was a big challenge in trying to separate stereotypes from the coded language because some communities have words or phrases that are both stereotypes and also coded language.

3.16. Bungoma county

Bungoma County is in the Western region of Kenya. Bungoma neighbors Uganda on the Eastern side, at the Lwakhakha border. It also neighbors Kakamega, Trans-Nzoia, and Busia Counties. Bungoma County is a cosmopolitan society. Hence, there exist several ways in which communities think about one another.

Table 20. Common stereotypes in Bungoma County

Common Stereotype	Target Community	Translation	Meaning
Basuta Muka	Kalenjins	The ones that carry the milk guard	They love carrying milk wherever they go because they are a pastrolist community

Baruka Njoya	Other Luhya communities that neighbor the Bukusu	The ones that crossed River Nzoia	The other Luhya communities that reside across River Nzoia (Njoya)
Bakoye	Kambas	Ropes/sweet potato vines	This is literal translation of the Swahili word for ropes which means 'kamba' In Bukusu culture, the two foodstuffs that are readily available during drought are sweet potatoes and cassava
Bamasaba	Abagishu of Uganda and Kenya	The people from the slopes of Mt. Elgon	Masaba is a local name used by the Gishu people to mean Mt. Elgon. Because the Gishu community resides at the foot of Mt. Elgon, they are referred to as Bamasaba meaning that they are people from Mt. Elgon
Bakitosi	Bukusus	Fools	This is word commonly used by the other Luhya communities, especially the Baruka Njoya to refer to the Bukusu. This is intended to mean that Bukusus are foolish.
Sianja Barende	Bukusus	Hospitable	It is a word used by the Bukusu community to refer to themselves as being a community that is very hospitable to 'foreigners'
Bekhunyanja	Luos	From the lakeside	It is a term used to refer to the Luo people because of their geographical location that is along Lake Victoria

The stereotypes are an equal mix of good and bad, but there has never been a reported incident of conflict because of these stereotypes. The worst that happens about the hateful stereotypes is a hit-back in name branding from the target community. Most of the names of communities were rooted in stereotypes. Some names such as *Basuta Muka*, *Barwa* and *Baruka njoya* have direct meanings yet others such as *Basebe*, *Banyolo*, *Bayobo* and *Bamia* have no direct meanings but can still be attributed to certain connotations.

Communities are evaluated on the basis of the culture in question. Those whose practices are against the other's culture are seen as bad while those that complement a community's culture are perceived as good. For instance, the Bukusu perceive communities that do not culturally circumcise their men such as the Luo and the Teso as children and dirty.

Table 21. Coded Expressions used in Bungoma County

Coded Expressions	Target Community	Translation	Meaning
Basebe	Kikuyu	No literal translation provided	Thieves, love money, enterprising
Bayobo	Sabaot	Unclear speech system	The words in their native language are not audible and organized.
Bosyanju	Sabaot	People who burn houses	They have been burning houses of the Bukusus
Banyolo	Luo	No literal translation provided	Uncircumcised, from the lakeside, love eating fish
Bamia	Teso	No literal translation	Uncircumcised, dark complexion
Basuta Muka	Kalenjin	Guard carriers	They love milk

Basomeki	Nandi	Nomads	Communities that move from one place to another in search for pasture for their livestock
Barwa	Nandi	People with sagging earlobes	They have pierced and enlarged earlobes that have been elongated by heavy sticks
Batechela moni	Teso	Using eyes as a shield	They use eyes as a shield during wars
Bana bekhanganga	Tachoni	Children of the guinea fowl	They are a very proud community like the guinea fowl. They vanish in times of war or danger at a supersonic speed.
Enda ya mulembe	Bukusu	The stomach of peace	A peace loving community
Bandu be kamafunga	Luo	People who have foreskin	Communities that do not culturally circumcise their young men

Coded expression is mostly exhibited as an expression of stereotypes as they are anchored on beliefs of a particular community in comparison to another. Despite the existence of stereotypes in Bungoma County, communities therein live peacefully. In fact, most target communities expressed the view that they did not like some of the negative stereotypes and coded words and phrases used about them, but did not mention this as a key cause of conflict. Besides the land clashes and the apparent cattle stealing that occasionally cause conflict between the Bukusu and the Sabaot, there are no major conflicts among the tribal communities of the County.

3.17. Kakamega, Busia and Vihiga counties

Kakamega, Busia and Vihiga Counties are within the former Western Province of Kenya and are predominantly occupied by the Luhya ethnic community. The three counties were clustered in this discussion because they share a common background as the vocabulary used in the languages in these counties is similar.

Table 22. Commonly held stereotypes in Kakamega, Vihiga and Busia Counties

Common Stereotype	Target Community	Translation	Meaning
Avalosi	Kamba	Witches/wizards (people who practice witchcraft)	They practise a lot of witchcraft, which is so lethal/potent.
Avaseeve	People who are not likeable.	Anybody who is a member of the Kikuyu, Meru, Embu ethnic communities	Kikuyu/Embu/Meru (Avaseeve) - These are people who must be feared at all times.
Aveefi/Kamau	Kikuyu/Embu/Meru	Thieves, swindlers, conmen	Kikuyu, who are believed to be great thieves, especially in robbing of commercial banks.
Ava omukhoonoom urambi	Kikuyu/Embu/Meru (Avaseeve).	Those with the 'long hand/arm'.	They are believed to be 'professional' thieves

Table 23. Coded Language in Kakamega, Busia, and Vihiga County

Coded Expression	Target Community	Meaning	Implied Meaning
Ava amapwoni	Kikuyu	people of Irish/English potatoes	They do not only cultivate potatoes but they also eat them in large quantities too.
Valamwa	Luo	In-laws	The Luo are related to the Luhya due to intermarriages.
Avokhumatsi	Luo	Those from the Lake.	Luo people from Nyanza live on the shores of Lake Victoria.
Veeneeshialo	Kikuyu/Embu/Meru (Avaseeve)	Those who own the world, the rulers.	Those who have always ruled.
Avamarwi	Kalenjin, Maasai, Turkana and Samburu	People who have very large long ears.	These people are known to have very large long ears due to the piercings in them.

The participants acknowledge though that stereotypes, in particular, entrench the wrong perceptions about the targets by the user communities. They feel that if there was a way out, these perceptions would have been eliminated. However, they also acknowledge that perceptions are in the mind and cannot be changed.

3.18. Migori/ Homabay/ Kisumu/ Siaya counties

The counties under study fall within former Nyanza Province. The Province is located Southwest of Kenya, around Lake Victoria. The Luo are the predominant group that inhabits the region. There are also Bantu-speaking tribes such as the Abagusii, Kuria and a few traces of the Luhya living in the Province who have found themselves in the area because of the intermarriages with the Luo community.

They tend to be a type of qualities assigned to groups of people which are normally related to what they are known for. This is in terms of what they eat, where they come from or what they are known for. With a keen look, they lead to discrimination and ignore the diversity within groups. Stereotypes that are negative, positive and those that are used for identity exist. That's because all stereotypes are limiting and leave little or no room for individuality. A person might have been around when something got lost, and because he/she comes from this community which is branded as thieves he/she will be the first suspect.

Some of the mostly used stereotypes in the counties include; *Onjelo*, *Jarabuon*, *Jo tok koder*, *Jorabolo*, *Andhoga*, *Bim*, *Jolang'o* and *Ogwang*. The words are used interchangeably when it comes to coded language. The main communities referred to in this place are Kikuyus, Akambas, Luhyas and the Kalenjins. Members of these communities in the named counties tend to have more negative stereotypes and coded language in reference to members of communities they don't want unlike the ones which are believed to be positive or dual.

The kind of the perceptions evoke the feeling of mistrust among the mentioned groups which is negative, for example, the use of a coded language like *Bim* which means a baboon and it refers to the art of being greedy.

When all the wordings are given, they are more of negative because they promote tribalism. This can be felt when people are always seen in their tribal groups talking about others.

3.19. Kisii and Nyamira counties

Kisii and Nyamira Counties are found in the former Nyanza province. The majority inhabitants are the Abagusii community whose main economic activity is farming. The Nyanza province as a whole borders, Rift Valley and Western Provinces.

Table 24. Common Stereotypes, in Kisii and Nyamira Counties

Common Stereotype	Target Community	Translation	Meaning
Abaibi	Kikuyu	Thieves	The Abagusii perceive Kikuyus to be thieves. And for this matter they cannot be trusted with anything, not even leadership.
Abenkoro ekoiruruka	Meru	Those whose heart goes fast/temperamental	The Abagusii perceive the Meru community to be very temperamental. That they do not know how to control their anger.
Abachabu/abaisia/abagima	Luo	Dirty/uncircumcised boys/those who are full	The Abagusii perceive Luos to be dirty or unclean and at the same time uncircumcised.
Abanyamato	Kipsigis	Those with ears	This term refers to the Kipsigis because they used to pierce their ears and they would hang ornaments on their ears for either gender.
Ababisa	Maasai	Enemies	This term is used to refer to the Maasai because of cattle rustling they undertake at the borders.

Table 25. Coded Language in Kisii and Nyamira Counties

Coded Expressions	Target Community	Translation	Meaning
Omonyamato/Abanyamato	Kalenjin	Those with long ears	Amato" is a Kisii word that refers to ears therefore Abanyamato refers to those with long elongated ears. They used to pierce their ears such that they would hang ornaments on the ears for both gender.
Abamanyi/ababisa	Maasai	Enemy	They are enemies because of the cattle rustling, especially at the borders.
Kenyambi	Kikuyu	Couch grass	They are people who go somewhere and want to stick there forever just like couch grass, which is hard to get rid of and they multiply too
Amangurunguru/abegonko	Luhya	Those with poor eating habits/those of the hen	They are people who love to eat anyhow or gluttonously/ they love chicken

Omonyangori/Aba nyangori	Akamba	Those of the rope	This is associated with the fact that they make kiondos from the ropes. Engori is a Kisii word which refers to a rope
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The most common stereotypes used by the Abagusii include; *Abachabu/Abaisia*, *Abaibi*, *Ababisa/abamanyi*, *Abenkoro ekoiruruka (temperamental)* and *Abanyamato*. On the other hand, most of significant forms of coded language used by the Abagusii to refer to members of other communities include the following: *Abaruroche* referring to the Luo community, *Abamanyi/Ababisa-* to refer to the Maasai, *Kenyambi-* to refer to the Kikuyu, and *Amangururu* to refer to Luhya. These terms are used in various contexts to elicit negative or positive perceptions. It is fundamental to also mention that some of these words can be used interchangeably as a stereotype as well as coded language depending on the users.

3.20. Nairobi county

Nairobi County is located in the former Nairobi province. Nairobi is a cosmopolitan and multi-cultural city and is the capital city of Kenya. Although stereotypes and coded words were collected from this County, it was noted that their usage was minimal as compared to other counties. This was because the County is very cosmopolitan and the language of use is mostly English and Swahili, rather than mother tongue.

It was also deduced that most of the persons interviewed did not originally belong to the County but moved to Nairobi to work. Most of those interviewed were professionals in different fields. Their usage of mother tongue was minimal compared to those in their home Counties. They were, therefore, not so much in touch with the current meaning of stereotypes and coded words.

One other unique feature is that this County had individuals from different ethnic communities. Due to their constant interaction, the coded words and stereotypes were unlikely to cause ethnic tension. Another characteristic that was noted from this County is that some ethnic groups have occupied certain areas of the city but this did not mean the usage of mother tongue was rampant like is the case in their mother Counties. Although the respondents listed these coded words and stereotypes, the researcher appreciates they are not exhaustive.

A brief example, Ing'ei is a very commonly used stereotype among the Akamba community to refer to the Agikuyus. They perceive them as people who are hard to be trusted. *Ngetik*, a Kalenjin word that means an 'uncircumcised person', to refer to the Luo. *Chorik*, which is a Kalenjin word for a thief. They see the Kikuyus as people who are always ready to steal. A comprehensive list of coded words and stereotypes can be found in the "mother" counties.

4. Conclusion

To begin with, the study revealed that every linguistic community in Kenya has stereotypes / use coded expressions about other Kenyan Communities. Some of these are specific to particular communities while others are general – referring to all "other" Kenyan communities generally. Similarly, practically all ethnic

communities studied have stereotypes and/or coded expressions used to refer to them by other communities in Kenya. Indeed, the use of stereotypes and coded expressions is not only in reference to other ethnic communities but also within the same ethnic communities. Indeed there exist what could be called *intra – community, intra-clan, intra-region* and even *intra-village* stereotypes and coded expressions.

The data indicates that almost every Kenyan ethnic community has both positive and negative stereotypes about them (by other communities) and about other Kenyan communities. The positive stereotypes reflect such beliefs as courage, generosity, business acumen, loyalty to deals, support of friendly communities success in education and recognition of some unique characteristics about the target communities. The negative stereotypes, on the other hand show contempt, insult and sometimes outright hate about the target communities. It is important to note that in a number of cases, the same ethnic community attracts both positive and negative stereotypes from the same community or from other communities in general.

5. Recommendations

It is a wakeup call for the NCIC and any relevant organs charged with the responsibility of facilitating harmony and integration in Kenya, to enlighten Kenyans about the diversity expressed in the stereotypes and their perceptions and emphasise the need to acknowledge the inevitable existence of various socio-cultural-economic orientations among Kenyan communities; none of which is superior whatsoever to any other. Ultimately it is imperative to use the data base provided by this study to understand, monitor and correct the contexts in which stereotypes and coded expressions may be manipulated for negative opportunistic intentions.

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