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Introduction

Peace and Communication in Post-conflict Africa

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This special issue of *Africa Media Review* assembles essays that highlight factors that inform the theorization of peace communication in post-conflict Africa.

While the history of conflict and violence is not new to Africa, it takes on a new dimension in a context where authors write about its causes and effects on African people. Specifically, the authors use experiences of civil wars in Liberia, Togo, Sudan and Somali, genocide in Rwanda, and post-election violence in Kenya to seek to embed in African communication scholarship and media practice a commitment to address a wide range of issues inherent in conceptualizing peace communication. The authors do so by coalescing diverse theoretical approaches and academic training in multiple disciplines (linguistics, religious studies and philosophy, history, geography and communication) to give post-conflict communication research an interdisciplinary flavour that grounds peace as a vital human phenomenon in post-conflict settings. The interdisciplinary approach contributes to the theory and practice of peace communication education and research in two ways. Firstly, it recognizes the emerging field of knowledge in conflict and peace studies that stands to enrich the understanding of the role of communication scholars, media practitioners, civil society and communities of a complete view of issues that both hinder and promote peace in Africa. Secondly, the approach works to reveal structural factors that perpetuate violence in Africa, and the need to challenge these factors. Each of the articles in this issue identifies factors responsible for violence in the countries studied and delineates strategies to promote peace in post-conflict settings.

Eddah Mutua-Kombo employs ethnographic research to argue for the importance of including Rwandan women as the knowing subjects

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(i.e. subjects that possess knowledge) in research about post-conflict Rwandan society and Africa in general. She uses a feminist critique of knowledge construction to argue for the need to theorize Africa outside of the colonial paradigm that offers a monologic or one-sided analysis of post-conflict Rwanda. She proposes that future research on post-conflict peace communication should seek to account for the importance of Rwandan women's experiences of the genocide as sites of knowledge.

Benson Ojwang provides an analysis of the Kenyan media functions in post-conflict situations. The analysis is rooted in an exploration of ways that the media not only cause and frame actions and reactions about electoral violence but also reflect the desires of the public to engage in post-conflict reconciliation efforts. Ojwang's discussion of the Kenyan media during and after the election violence echoes Esipisu and Khaguli's (2009) assertion that the media need to be 'eyes of democracy' so as to enlighten and sustain an inclusive process of reintegration and reconciliation.

Heidi Frontani, Kristine Silvestri and Amanda Brown introduce us to the quandary of Liberian and Togolese refugees in Ghana and the way it mirrors the failure of the media and United Nations resettlement programmes in supporting the social integration of refugees. They propose that the media use the human rights perspective rather than security terms to frame the plight of refugees by prioritizing their integration in their new 'homes'. This study shows that the media have a responsibility to set an agenda that frames issues of displacement and resettlement in ways that advocate humane policies for refugees.

Hala Guta discusses the politicization and Arabization of the education system in Sudan. Her analysis of selected primary school textbooks and official policies of the Ministry of Education reveals the impediments to peace in Sudan. The failure to recognize cultural, religious and linguistic diversity in schools limits the prospect of using the education system to promote peace. She recommends a radical education policy reform in order to challenge the hegemonic ideology that guides the current divisive curriculum. Her essay shows that Sudan needs a curriculum that promotes the ideals of teaching for peace.

The article by Susan Kilonzo employs a historical-critical approach to show how religious institutions have failed to provide a voice to the voiceless at a time when a proactive response was anticipated in reuniting communities in the aftermath of post-election violence in Kenya. The outcome of this careful analysis is a sharp critique of religious institutions, following the 2007-2008 post-election violence in Kenya. By focusing on the actions of these institutions, she leads the reader to see where religious institutions

stand in speaking out against ethnic hatred and assuming leadership in reconciling communities in post-conflict settings.

Sarah Drake and Mutua-Kombo examine ways that Somali refugees embody post-conflict life in Central Minnesota. Specifically, their article brings to the forefront the challenges facing second and third generations of Somalis in the US. The major concern expressed by the older generation of Somalis points to the 'risk' of losing Somali identity in a new cultural environment. Somalis involved in programmes seeking to keep Somali language and oral traditions alive see their efforts as vital for the future of Somalia.

Finally, I am especially pleased that the articles in this issue attempt to extend academic discourse that seeks to theorize Africa outside of paradigms which stereotypically frame the continent as conflict-ridden and violent. Without doubt, the authors provide us with an optimistic possibility for peace in Africa embedded in the voices emanating from the articles. In each article, we are introduced to voices that enrich how we think about what constitutes peace as expressed by those living the post-conflict experience. Now, it is time to reflect on what they teach us and perhaps to offer responses to questions we cannot wish to ignore. For example, how do we begin to theorize peace efforts in post-conflict societies in Africa? Can our research begin to give voice to the voiceless? How can scholars and media practitioners begin to engage in work that promotes peace in societies torn by conflict? Contributions in this issue indicate that different players in society have the ability to promote peace in their communities. Nonetheless, while a strong case is made to theorize peace from a perspective that privileges African experiences and contexts, a caution is necessary not to romanticize the idea. The goal of African communication scholarship should be to critique and transform what we know or do not know in the context of, and in comparison to, people's lived experiences, something which is often overlooked in hegemonic ideologies guiding divisive policies that threaten prospects for peace. At the same time, Eurocentric representations of Africa as conflict-ridden should be challenged by way of further exploring recommendations made in this issue.

Reference

Esipisu, M. & Khaguli, I., 2009, *Eyes of Democracy: The Role of the Media and Elections*. London: Commonwealth Secretariat, UK.

