

COMMUNICATION, CULTURE, AND HUMAN RIGHTS IN AFRICA

Communication, Society, and Change Series,
VOLUME 1



EDITED BY BALA A. MUSA AND JERRY KOMIA DOMATOB

FOREWORD BY CEES J. HAMELINK

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Edited by
**Bala A. Musa and
Jerry Komia Domatob**

Foreword by Cees J. Hamelink



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Dedicated To

The loving memories of
Dinatu Waku Tunwari Musa
Ladi Ruwa Nyatse Musa
Mary Talatu Musa Tikon
Halima Shii Musa Lawal
mothers, spouses, daughters, sisters, and friends,
who elevated the humanity of others
by wearing theirs
with dignity and grace.

And

To Dr. Louise J. Bourgault
Author, teacher, mentor, friend, and voice of the voiceless,
who was a part of this work, but passed on before it was completed.

*When a mentor, Like a renowned philanthropist famed for generosity
tumbles into silence
Courtesy, love and fraternity
Demand sincere friends check on her*

*So we greet Professor Bourgault
And enthusiastically welcome her back
Your prodigious contributions
Shine like a sentinel's light, on dark paths*

*Your genuine love for Africa
Manifested through life-long services
Warrants endless appreciation
For you tower as one of its legends*

(Excerpt from the Poem, *Greetings Professor Louise Bourgault: Battle on with
Faith and Conviction*,
By Jerry Komia Domatob, written before her passing).

Communication, Society and Change Series

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This is the first in a series of books which focus on communication and change in the global arena. At a time when things are evolving at a phenomenal pace, all efforts must be made to delve in to the past, in a bid to understand the present for the benefit of the future. This is one of the first strides in that direction, for as the Chinese proverb says, "a journey of one thousand miles begins with one step."

Foreword

Communication, Culture and Human Rights in Africa

Since the Second World War the international community has developed a remarkable set of rules and institutions to guide the members of the human family in their behaviour toward each other. This international human rights regime has turned out to be a tall order for the human race. Most of its rules are permanently violated and its institutions lack the power to enforce the rules.

Even so, and against odds, this unique regime is the only available set of global moral standards which deserves a global supportive constituency. To achieve this, the core ingredients of any strategy are information, education, and exposure. Through information and education, basic knowledge about human rights rules, institutions and procedures should be disseminated. In deed, people should hear about best human rights practices from around the world and should be reminded of a common responsibility to protect others and themselves against the violation of human dignity. Moreover, the violations of human rights and their perpetrators need to be constantly exposed to the world.

All this implies the need for in depth study of relations among means of communication, cultural contexts and human rights. Unfortunately there is not a large library on these relations. Moreover, relevant studies of these vital areas of concern are largely written from a Western perspective. This book is a major contribution to repairing this situation. It presents studies on communication, culture and human rights from an African perspective. It is a “must read” in African educational institutions and deserves more than a casual glance by non-Africans.

The publication of this book gives me special pleasure because of my African bias. If woken up in the middle of the night and asked where I would prefer to be, the answer would unfailingly be the African continent. This is largely due to such African characteristics as the narrative tradition, the continent’s sense of humour, its resilience, the ethos of Ubuntu and the African people’s pre-colonial forms of collective decision making. Interestingly, these features are the essential ingredients of a human rights culture.

Writing a foreword for African colleagues as a Westerner demands an observation about the issue of universality. In my thinking on this I have never considered the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) as a matter of the West imposing its standards upon the Rest of the world. First of

all, at the time of the drafting of the Declaration, there was considerable Western resistance. Mrs Eleanor Roosevelt, the key person in the preparation of the Declaration met fierce opposition from her own country, and up until to-day, many Western governments have great reservations about a strong enforcement of the principles of the Declaration. The implementation of Article 28 of the Declaration that provides to everyone "a social and international order in which the rights and freedoms set forth in this Declaration can be fully realized" has not been achieved anywhere in the world including the west. Moreover, the Declaration contains important elements from many non-Western religious and moral traditions.

The emerging human rights regime came as a major challenge to all participants in the international system because of its demand for inclusiveness. The leading notion of the Declaration that "all people matter" implies that conventional and convenient forms of tribalism have to be overcome. Tribalism is a powerful force that has shown its devastating potential in recent times in former Yugoslavia, the Russian Federation and Rwanda. The 'tribal instinct' represents the strong belief that the members of an individual's clan (which could be one's family, one's ethnic group, or one's national state) deserves the protection of basic rights and freedoms but that these entitlements cannot be equally extended to include the "outsiders".

Whether we are "I" or "We" cultures, we are all asked to build new "I-Other" and "We-Other" relations. The key assignment of the human rights regime is to develop dignified relations with the "Other" and it asks us to respect the alterity of Others. It is here that we may find the real significance of the universality of human rights.

It is obvious that members of the human race have different and possibly conflicting notions about values and norms. The international human rights regime is not about ignoring this or forcing everyone into one moral straightjacket. It is precisely about human heterogeneity. The universality of human rights should be found in the proposal for meaningful communication about otherness. Human rights suggest that we can and should dialogue about our Otherness with respect, openness and reflexivity. They inspire us to an exploration of a communicative process to deal with heterogeneity. This is a difficult and enormously challenging mandate. The present book makes an invaluable contribution to this common exploration.

Cees J. Hamelink

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Preface

Communication, culture and human rights issues dominate political, economic and social agendas, not only in the advanced nations of Europe and Americas but also the emerging states of Africa, Asia and Latin America. Indeed, these issues permeate every level and strata of society. Scholars across different disciplines, artists, journalists, activists, and concerned citizens constantly address these questions. This book tackles the crucial question: What is the relationship between communication, culture and human rights? What philosophical axioms underpin the human rights quests in the African continent? How does communication in the context of African culture foster or hinder human rights? What policies can enhance the quest for human rights in a world reduced to today's global village where states and nations are increasingly intertwined through travel, education, immigration, religion, politics, health, business transactions, etc. The responses to these questions lead to a number of hypothesis, challenges, theoretical perspectives and policy options. For all intents, and purposes, therefore, this book is just a tip of the iceberg in a new and evolving area, which needs further research using diverse methodological, theoretical, and interdisciplinary approaches. It sets the tone for advancing such endeavor.

Complex Tapestry

Africa's human rights image, practice, and history present a complex, complicated and intriguing picture. A vast, intricate and ever changing continent of great diversity, the 54 states, which comprise the heterogeneous continent of Africa, blend facets of capitalist, communitarian and socialist societies. Africa's complex nature is exacerbated by traditional mores, colonial, neocolonial and imperial ethos along with crusading religious zealots be they Islamic or Christian which sometimes provide a vicious veil for the expressions of protest, frustrations and above all, socio-economic oppression as evident in Sudan and now Nigeria.

Despite the invasiveness of capitalism, many Africans value the ethos of *Ubuntu* or *I-Thouness* just as a few and arguably a growing number now embrace the capitalist culture of egotistical greed. Though the individual has a prestigious place in most African societies, in most instances, the *Ubuntu* philosophy demands that the individual's interest take a secondary role to that of the community's overall demands.

Depending on the African state or nation, most individuals can lay claims to their intrinsic rights irrespective of achievement, status, and background. Notwithstanding, many Africans share the worldview which posits that one's hu-

manity and worth arises from the survival and success of the group. That accounts for the strong attachment to ethnic roots sometimes, which in certain situations, like the 1994 Rwandan genocide, degenerated into brutal massacre and mayhem.

Ubuntu and other collective philosophical norms such as *Nchuyin* (Unity) among the Chambas of Cameroon, Nigeria, Niger and Chad, call on societies to value and respect every member. This implies as the saying goes that: "I am because you are."

Unlike the Cartesian protonorm of *Cogito ergo sum*, "I think therefore, I am," and the Enlightenment revolution that shaped Greco-Roman-Anglo civilization, most African's, who are not tarnished by reckless savage capitalism, espouse the collectivist cultural ethos, even if it is merely rhetorical and empty. These two mid-sets distinguish individualistic from communal cultures.

The former holds the view that all people are born equal; the latter asserts that all humans are also born mutual. Several Africans subscribe to this worldview because they perceive their humanity as bound up with their neighbors and vice-versa.

Consequently, when one individual is devalued, deprecated, or dehumanized, all are diminished. Deeply rooted in this respect and value for the other is the African conceptualization of human rights even if it is not articulated in fancy documents as the Bill of Rights.

While the western worldview, often encourages people to strive toward attaining their full potential by liberating the self from any form of tyranny; a dominant African cultural perspective agrees but insists that people reach their potential by upholding their responsibility to honor the humanity of others.

This is at the crux of the human rights discourse. Yes, human rights has for long been defined in accordance with the western worldview which emphasizes individual freedom and liberty. This has led many to dismiss the call for human rights in the developing world as a Western and Eurocentric extension of cultural imperialism.

Hamelink (2004) argues that this conception of human rights is not only outdated, but it is also inadequate for explaining contemporary reality. Defining human rights only in terms of state power fails to recognize the role of many non-state, yet powerful, bodies like corporations, war lords, cultural organizations as gangs, mafias and even well-meaning social clubs etc, that are capable of fostering human rights.

Diamond and oil mining as well as other multinational corporations have been accused of gross human rights abuses in South Africa, Liberia, Sierra Leone, and elsewhere. Oil companies in Nigeria have been fingered for complicity in environmental and human rights abuses. In Uganda, *The Lord's Resistance Army* has carried out untold brutality against unarmed civilians. They have recruited child-soldiers, raped, mutilated, and tortured minors. Former Liberian war lord, Charles Taylor is standing trial before the International Human Rights

Tribunal in The Hague for the atrocities committed under his watch as a war lord and Head of State in Liberia.

Abuse of the rights of women through domestic violence, denial of women's rights to own property, rejection of the girl-child's right to education, female circumcision, unlawful seizure of personal property, etc., highlight the gross human rights imperatives several Africans, states and the international community must address in order to alleviate this growing tragedy.

Eleanor Roosevelt (1958) observed that universal human rights begin in the small places, "close to home" (cited in Williams, 1981, p. xxiii). However, most human rights discourse has concentrated on formal political structures to the neglect of civil society and institutions. The state is often pitted against the individual. Political leaders are mostly portrayed as villains. This approach fails to recognize that in cases of gender-based human rights, e.g., abuses or inter-ethnic, communal or religious genocide, the state may sometimes be the protector and defender of human rights. In other instances, as it is currently the case in Sudan, the state might actually be the culprit and villain of the piece.

As Hamelink (2004) observes, the dominant approach to human rights looks at communication as linear transmission rather than the interactive "process of personal and public dialogue" (p. 205). This book therefore focuses on communication, culture and human rights from an interdisciplinary perspective.

Part I provides some theoretical outline for examining the discourse on human rights in the complex African continent. In Chapter 1, Bala Musa establishes the causal relationship between dialogic communication theory and human rights. He argues that the international conceptualization of human right is consistent with, the traditional African worldview and values on the subject. He calls for a broader definition of human rights, which can help readers comprehend dialogic communication, the ontological idea of what it means to be human, and the axiological standards of humane relationships. Musa argues that a dialogic communication approach helps people understand human rights as a major constitutional, public policy, interpersonal, intergroup and civic issue.

Using Perloff's (2005) fundamentals of political communication, Matt Mogeke's analysis, in Chapter 2, of human rights in the context of political campaigns and electioneering, highlights how elections can mobilize or alienate publics. He critically analyzes communication strategies used by Nigerians politicians seeking national and state electoral offices and their effects on the public's right to informed participation in the political process.

Many chapters in this book examine the mass media's role in Africa as one of the indexes and vanguards of human rights. The four chapters in Part II discuss the effect of the media on human rights in Africa and vice-versa. The media play key roles in creating awareness about human rights abuses. From Bosnia, to Rwanda, and from Columbia to Sudan, the media help inform the world about human rights abuses.

There are several instances when the media fail in their responsibility to report on and educate the public on human rights. Indeed, at times, "media do not only fail in educating and reporting about human rights, but are themselves among the perpetrators of human rights violations" (Hamelink, 2001, p. 5).

In Chapter 3, Jerry Domatob critically examines the media's role in promoting or inhibiting human rights against the backdrop of socio-economic factors. He argues that, the local and international media help to advance human rights in Sub-Saharan Africa. However, they sometimes aid and abet human rights abuses. Domatob contends that the culture of silence, corruption, violence, diffidence, dependence, poverty etc, jeopardize the media's positive roles in human rights quests. He proposes socio-cultural progress, media development, training, research, international assistance and commitment to human rights as policies that might enhance the media's role in this cause.

Jo Ellen Fair and Audrey Gadzekpo critique Ghanaian journalists' coverage of the country's attempt to redress past human rights abuses through the National Reconciliation Commission in Chapter 4. The analysis vividly illustrates some of the impediments discussed in chapter 3 such as, the culture of silence, dependence, deception, and fear. Fair and Gadzekpo describe the delicate walk journalists must undertake as they navigate a cultural landscape that is rife with political landmines and professional sink holes. The authors discuss Ghanaian society's expectations of the media, as well as the individual and collective challenges of media professionalism.

Chapter 5 revisits the theme of media ethics and professional training with specific emphasis on post-conflict Africa. Bala Musa discusses various philosophies of media ethics and their implications for human rights education for journalists and the public at large. He recommends professional development and public policy strategies which can better equip the media for the task of advancing human rights awareness, education, and culture in Africa.

Victor Massaquoi uses a comparative case study, to examine trends in press freedom in Sierra Leone and Zambia. He examines the constitutional provisions for press freedom and freedom of expression in both countries and exposes the gap between constitutional guarantees of freedom and their frequent violations. The chapter demands a new political will and culture as a *sine qua non* for the protection of press freedom, human rights in African states.

Part III looks takes up the impact various power groups, institutions and agencies have on human rights. The interest groups discussed in this section include: the military, political elite, corporations, and the professional class. This is relevant in the light of the political history of Africa, since the end of colonialism.

Images of Africa's past and present military as well as civilian iron-fisted rulers like the late Uganda's Idi Amin, the deposed Democratic Republic of the Congo, president, Mobutu Sese Seko, deceased Gnassingbe Eyadema of Togo, the late Gabonese leader, Omar Bongo, the current Egyptian tyrant, Hosni Mu-

barak, the ruthless dictator of Nigeria, late Sani Abacha, Cameroon's dictator, Paul Biya, deposed emperor Haile Salasie, and slaughtered Liberian murderer, Samuel Doe, etc, loom large.

In Africa, state power may be acquired equally through the barrel of the gun as well as the ballot box. The former is becoming less and less tolerated by Africans and the global community. Africa's military and civilian rulers all face crises of legitimacy for reasons that are beyond the focus of this volume. However military regimes always have a greater task selling their legitimacy to the public. They often resort to force and brutality as a means of consolidating power.

Amiso George examines human rights abuses and the effort at image restoration during Nigeria's transition era from military to civilian administration. In Chapter 7, she traces the human rights abuses of the military, particularly during the Abacha regime as well as the sanctions and disrepute it brought to the nation. Using Benoit's (1995) theory of image restoration, she graphically shows how the Abacha, Abubakar, and Obasanjo regimes attempted to use denial, evasion, trivialization, correction, mortification and other strategies to manage the country's human rights image.

Chris Ogbondah harps on the same theme in Chapter 8, arguing that Nigeria's 1997 shift from military to civilian rule did not bring about the expected change toward a more democratic era. He contends that eight years of the Obasanjo administration were characterized by intolerance for criticism and opposition; impunity toward constitutional processes as well as the rule of law; intimidation and brutality toward activist groups, press censorship.

In Part IV, Brian Ekdale and Melisa Tully evaluate the role of social media, new media, and popular media in promoting awareness, mobilizing support, and empowering the grassroots in defense of human rights. Ekdale (Chapter 9) submits that small media, such as digital technologies, and alternative popular media, are powerful forces that can "conscientize" the world about the plight of people, such as the Invisible Children of Uganda. The chapter demonstrates that, one person, with a story to tell and a conviction to make the truth known, can start a revolution. The Invisible Children documentary and public communication campaign tell us that new communication technology make it even easier to create a movement behind any cause today. In the case of Invisible Children, the cause is showing the world the plight of the children caught up in the war in Uganda. Melisa Tully (Chapter 10) discusses the role of the World Wide Web and social media in post-election crisis management. The chapter illustrates how youth and political opponents, who are shut out of the mainstream media, used social and alternative media to expose human rights abuses in Kenya after the controversial 2007 presidential elections.

Part V takes up the important subject of gender and human rights. It spotlights the human rights status of African women, which in reality is the story of women in many other parts of world. Chapter 11 by Ibrahim M. Ahmadu and

Bala A. Musa examines cultural violence against African women and proposes strategies for tackling the malaise. The authors narrate the physical and psychological ordeal newly widowed women underwent in traditional Kuteb society. The chapter notes that similar, sometimes more inhumane, practices existed in other African cultures. It decries these practices and calls for cultural, social, and political emancipation for women.

Chapter 13, by James Kantiok deploys ethnographic research and performance ritual theory to exemplify how African traditional cultural rituals at times dehumanize women, while at other times they empowered and elevated them. Kantiok demonstrates that the status-quo where women are marginalized from public and political leadership has not always been the norm in parts of Africa. Citing the leadership role of women in the Bori culture, the most powerful social, spiritual, and political cult in pre-Islamic Hausa society in Northern Nigeria, the chapter demonstrates that in many African societies, the subordination of women has been the result of foreign religious, political, economic, and social trends.

Contrary to the general perception that African women lack respect, Kantiok argues that in pre-Islamic Hausa land, like in other African cultures, women occupied influential leadership roles such as queens, queen-mothers, priestesses, king-makers, councilors, and warriors.

The Magajiya in Hausa land is an influential political office that is exclusively occupied by a female. Among Ghana's Akans, for example, the queen mother is practically the most powerful member of the society. Women likewise, play significant influence roles in civil society.

Because on average women have longer life-span than men, elderly women serve as family matriarchs and wield great power in the African extended family system. This chapter contends that contrary to popular perception, modernity and the entrance of foreign cultures and religions to traditional African society have sometimes undermined the rights of women in parts of Africa. Likewise some traditional African practices dehumanize women while others empower and elevate their status in society. Chapter 13 discusses ways, women's rights are still undermined today, namely the African girl-child's lack of access to education. In this chapter, Kantiok identifies the cultural factors that negate access to full education for the girl-child in Africa. He also suggests the execution of public policy and the use of communication strategies for dealing with this dilemma.

The last section, Part VI, shifts attention to health communication as an African human rights issue. It stretches the preceding discourse by looking at women's rights to healthcare. In Chapter 14, Marie Fongwa provides a theoretical overview of the relationship between healthcare, communication, and human rights. Using a human needs analysis, the chapter makes the case for why healthcare needs to be regarded and treated as a fundamental human right. It

discusses the roles effective interpersonal, intercultural, and mass communication can play in promoting and protecting citizen's rights to basic healthcare.

Franklin Yartey argues in chapter 15, that access to basic healthcare is a fundamental human right. He particularly looks at the stigmatization and dehumanization of Africa's HIV/AIDS victims. The chapter identifies the cultural influences that further the spread of HIV/AIDS. It discusses the role of gender-based human rights abuse in the spread of HIV/AIDS. It provides a theoretical framework for understanding the cultural context and breaking the vicious cycle that perpetuates the problem. It identifies communication strategies that have been successful in countries like Senegal and Uganda.

Benson Ojwang, Chapter 16, uses linguistic ethnographic study of nurse-patient communication in selected public hospitals in Kenya to highlight what works and needs fixing. His study shows that in some cases both nurses and patients seem aware of their rights and also attempt to respect the rights of others. Nurses as well as patients, put self-interest ahead of respecting the other's human rights. The chapter calls for communication and linguistic competence for healthcare providers as well as recipients in order to safeguard the human rights of all groups involved in the health care system.

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