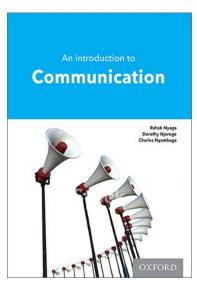Rahab Nyaga, Dorothy Njoroge, and Charles Nyambuga, **An Introduction to Communication**, Nairobi, Kenya: Oxford University Press, 2015, 228 pp., KES 1,276 (paperback).

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An Introduction to Communication is noteworthy because it comes at a time when communication scholars from the global South are increasingly challenging the dominance of Western modernity in communication and media studies. Many scholars have decried the U.S.–UK duopoly of communication and media scholarship as a colonizing ideology (e.g., Asante, 2011; Thussu, 2009); and some journalism programs in Kenya and other sub-Saharan African countries undoubtedly still use texts that are wholly American in content, theory, methods, and examples. At the International Communication Association's (ICA's) October 2016 regional conference in Nairobi, Kenya, numerous speakers encouraged Africans on the continent to produce their own textbooks, with contextually relevant and current examples and highlighting the work of African communication scholars. While many are quick to lament the lack of locally relevant texts, Rahab Nyaga, Dorothy Njoroge, and Charles Nyambuga deserve accolades for taking matters into their own hands and doing the work to produce a Kenyan text for Kenyan and other East African students. The three authors are all Kenyan scholars based at universities in the Nairobi vicinity.

Nyaga, Njoroge, and Nyambuga's text is also timely because sub-Saharan Africa, as elsewhere, is grappling with the revolutionary impact of the Internet and the consequent digital divide, which the authors address. They effectively merge Western concepts and local perspectives in their text. In a brief statement (on the back cover of the book), they underscore the importance of communication as an academic discipline "in an increasingly connected and democratic world." This is "a timely foundational book for students" because "students of communication require focused, practical and contextually appropriate books to ground them in the discipline." The authors also stress the advantages of studying communication by asserting that it is "effective communication that puts individuals and institutions ahead of others" (back cover).

Audience and Format

As noted, *An Introduction to Communication* is a context-driven introductory textbook on communication, predominantly in Kenya, although the text includes some reference to and examples from elsewhere in Africa. According to the authors, the text is intended for undergraduate students and graduate students studying communication for the first time. The book has simplified explanations, local

examples, and illustrations. The book is also practical as students can test their knowledge via exercises found in "to do" boxes and "remember" sections that contain notes and summaries. There are also questions for students in small "quick think" boxes. These pedagogical features are student-friendly. The questions and notes provide relevance to the students' experiences as they engage with the literature to understand communication locally and beyond.

The authors of *An Introduction to Communication* succeed in making the text a one-stop shop for basic information on media and communication in Kenya. The book is arranged into 10 units (i.e., chapters). Each unit begins with a set of objectives intended for the reader (student) to meet at the end of the section. The case studies, summaries, review questions, notes, and *to do* sections are practically intended to make these objectives achievable. Each unit has concepts defined in simple language. The authors begin in unit 1 by providing an overarching definition of communication and by summarizing different ways communication has been defined. They expand on these definitions by exploring six characteristics of communication as part of a process: symbolic, unavoidable, contextual, purposive, two-way, and irreversible. The first unit also includes theories, models, and local case studies. Subsequent units cover human communication (inter/intrapersonal and group communication), nonverbal communication, public speaking, public relations, print media in Kenya, advertising and integrated marketing, the Internet, and emerging trends.

The authors not only culturally contextualize their examples and numerous visual illustrations but also ground their work historically.

The units on advertising, public relations, and print media situate these industries within a local context and narrate their histories in Kenya, hence providing a valuable contribution. The units on advertising and public relations are especially laudable, given the relative paucity of resources otherwise, as well as a relative lack of understanding of both fields in Kenya, due to their persuasive attributes. For instance, the authors reject the notion of public relations as a barrier between the public and the truth. They also point out the common misconception that public relations is propaganda, "spin doctoring," merely media relations or unpaid advertising. For the authors, the field of public relations is "dynamic and encompasses rapidly developing communication management functions" (p. 90).

An Introduction to Communication further covers some of the controversies that have plagued the Kenyan media industry. For instance, the authors break down the jargon in explaining the dispute surrounding digital migration in 2015 that saw broadcasters lock horns with the government over digital transmission licenses. Their summarized version of events is sufficient for a beginning student or anyone seeking an orientation to the broadcast industry in Kenya. The authors also discuss the convergence phenomenon in the media world by highlighting three types of convergence: media, technological, and industry convergence. Industry convergence, which they define as "the consolidation of media companies through mergers and acquisitions to form media conglomerates" (p. 214), is illustrated by both local and American examples. More information about the political economy of the media in Kenya would be resourceful in this chapter. Another point worth noting is the authors' assertion that in Kenya "currently anyone can practice as a media professional" (p. 222). They are quick to add that this has contributed to a lack of professionalism and poor remuneration. They challenge the government to standardize journalism

training to bolster professionalism. However, they might additionally consider the free speech implications of standardization or licensure. Like other scholars, the authors query the boundaries of journalism as more and more Kenyans have access to the Internet.

Discussion

An Introduction to Communication has an accessible pedagogical style characterized by clear writing that is conversational and relational. This makes the book engaging and easy to follow for the beginner. Other pedagogical strengths are the end-of-chapter summaries and review questions. Perhaps the biggest advantage for students is its contextual focus. Unlike communication texts that have what Downing (2009) calls "cookbook" styles (e.g., how to communicate effectively) or books that are heavily tilted toward the Western experience, *An Introduction to Communication* stands apart in embedding itself within the African experience. More important, the authors embrace many Western concepts and references, but do not stop there. They proceed to situate them only to the extent they are relevant to an understanding of communication in Kenya.

While *An Introduction to Communication* provides a strong introduction in many ways, it is not as comprehensive as it could be. The book could benefit from additional conceptual and empirical scholarship. More content on broadcasting—especially radio—is needed, as radio remains the most powerful medium in sub-Saharan Africa. More content on social media trends, popular culture, and media and politics in Kenya are needed if we are to understand the communication dynamics of the region. A history of communication in Kenya can explore the rich, but often neglected roles of traditional communication methods like oral storytelling, proverbs, and old sayings that continue to have relevance in Africa. In addition, more discussion of inequities by gender, ethnicity, religion, nation, economic class, age, and other relevant intersections would be valuable. In comparison, most introductory works on communication studies in the West focus more on new information technologies and seek to redefine journalism and media studies in the digital era. Kenya is less advanced technologically, so this difference is understandable. Nonetheless, further discussion of digital technologies, trends toward convergence, ICT4D policies, and future trends would be desirable. Books about communication in Kenya and elsewhere in sub-Saharan Africa are rare; therefore, comprehensive attention to the missing gaps in African media and communication will attract attention and fuel the much-needed growth of scholarship in this area. In format, it would be beneficial in a future edition to add a preface before the introduction, in addition to the brief information that appears on the back cover. A preface with expanded information would give readers a preliminary glimpse of the writers' backgrounds, affiliations, and aspirations in writing this book.

As noted at the outset, *An Introduction to Communication* employs Western concepts while laudably highlighting local perspectives. Yet, we think the authors could perhaps go further to de-Westernize their work. At the regional ICA conference in Nairobi, there was considerable discussion of de-Westernization/decolonization to curb Western and English language dominance of communication scholarship. Some called for uniquely African theories to define African communication studies. Others advised caution to avoid cultural essentialism that de-Westernization is supposed to erase. Keynote speakers Herman Wasserman and Audrey Gadzekpo maintained that de-Westernization did not mean cleansing of Western thought, but rather a critical interrogation for relevancy in various African contexts.

The de-Westernization debate clearly revealed fault lines that require open engagement moving forward as Africans pursue local knowledge production opportunities.

In fact, the de-Westernization scholarship reveals little consensus on how to go about de-Westernization (Wang, 2011). Some would undoubtedly criticize the authors of *An Introduction to Communication* for foregrounding Western concepts, even though examples are localized. As Asante (2011) notes, "The real danger for Africans is to make the distortions of the West as reality about their own cultures" (p. 23). According to Wang (2011), scholars such as Molefi Asante and Yoshitaka Miike call for culture-centric directions in communication studies "to address longstanding discontent with Western-centrism" (p. 2). However, the push for culture-centric approaches to communication studies is contradictory in that it reproduces what we seek to eliminate, that is, the marginalization of Western thought (Chakrabarty, 2000; Wang, 2011). Therefore, even as the push for de-Westernization gains momentum, a sole focus on nation- and region-centric forms of knowledge may create geocultural limitations of knowledge (Waisbord & Mellado, 2014). Drawing such boundaries of knowledge is counterproductive and defies the whole basis of de-Westernization. Furthermore, as Chakrabarty (2000) notes, the universality of concepts such as theory and the hegemonic hold of the English language should lead scholars from the global South to consider multiple ways of knowing that intersect, speaking to each other, and having mutual connections. Put simply, we need to value multiple ways of knowing. The authors of *An Introduction to Communication* show their support for this perspective, particularly in their presentation of the history of public relations in Africa and Kenya, tracing its growth from ancient Egyptian times, before the discipline was born in the West. Besides contextualizing public relations in Africa, this approach underscores the role of religion within African contexts. The authors also discuss public relations in pre-colonial times and how early missionaries and colonial governments mastered the art of effective strategic communication. Against this background is a paragraph detailing the traditional methods of communication used by African societies "to keep communication flowing and relationships alive" (p. 99).

Finally, and aside from its vulnerability to criticism around an emphasis on Western concepts, we believe that many more African sources could be highlighted, including prior works by the three authors of the text. The bibliographies are presented at the end of each unit. The bibliography for unit 1, which establishes the conceptual context for the book, entirely comprises Western authors. The other units feature disappointingly few African authors, although numerous Kenyan and other African scholars have produced conceptual and empirical work about communication and media studies in Africa. We urge the authors to cite more African scholars in a future edition.

In conclusion, *An Introduction to Communication* is a laudable effort to break down complex communication content and co-opt Western concepts with African experiences. The book comes as communication and media studies are confronted with complex and dynamic realities of globalization. The authors realize their goal of providing a basic, but important overview of the process of communication and mass media in Kenya for beginning undergraduate and graduate students. We encourage them to expand their work to a more comprehensive handbook on communication in Kenya and beyond in sub-Saharan Africa.

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