BOOK REVIEW

Jacinta Maweu and Admire Mare, eds. ***Media, Conflict and Peacebuilding In Africa: Conceptual and Empirical Considerations***. New York, Routledge. 2021. Illustrations. Index. 280 pp. $42.36. Paper. ISBN: 9780367726508.

Media, Conflict and Peacebuilding In Africa: Conceptual and Empirical Considerations, edited by Jacinta Maweu and Admire Mare, is an eighteen-chapter volume which examines the way media reporting on African conflicts is caught up in a dogmatic dichotomy of warfare and peacebuilding. It clearly identifies the gap it seeks to fill as playing "the in-between role" left by scholars who take either side of the dichotomy (1). The volume consists of three parts: "Different Conceptual and Methodological Considerations"; "The Good and Bad of Traditional Media in Conflict"; and "Digital Media, Conflict and Peacebuilding." The compilation was inspired by the changing communication ecology across the globe, neo-liberal globalization, and the increasing calls for decolonization and deWesternization of journalism practice in the global South (1).

The introductory chapter provides an overview of the volume's fresh insights and critical analysis, which captures the readers' imagination. It effectively serves as a prelude for the rest of the chapters, which consist of conceptual and empirical case studies. The chapter successfully sets the tone for the edited volume, easily inviting both academic and non-academic readers into the contributing authors' skilful and stylistic navigation through diverse debates. This is achieved through an accessible writing style which allows the readers to easily grasp the gist of the arguments in the volume—the potential and actual power of media to escalate or deflate conflicts in Africa.

In the first part, the volume contextually explores how the predominant application of Western values to news coverage in African media alienates the audience, leading to a misinterpretation of conflicts and peacebuilding efforts. Colin Chasi and Ylva Rodny-Gumede, in Chapter Two, attempt to conceptualize Afrocentric news values in what they call "Ubuntu Journalism" (20); while Fred Ogega in Chapter Three historically contextualizes the conflicts in Eastern Africa. Perhaps among the most powerful elements in this section is the juxtaposition of the CNN TV interview between Christiane Amanpour and former Nigerian President Goodluck Jonathan in Switzerland (Chapter Five) with selected sub-ethnic *Maragoli* folklore in rural Western Kenya (Chapter Six). This juxtaposition analogically demonstrates how African researchers simultaneously seek both Western and indigenous African approaches to study media and conflict in Africa.

The second part of the volume questions the media's structural subordination to the interests of the political and economic elites. Dumisani Moyo, in Chapter Seven, draws from a book titled *The Media of Conflict* (Jean Seaton, Zed

1999) to anchor the argument that the media are "not mere stenographers of conflict, but can also be active drivers of conflict," due to their vested interests (87). Benjamin Muindi in Chapter Eight uses the case of Kenya to explore how embedded political and commercial interests deter effective journalism; Doreen Muyonga in Chapter Ten persuasively offers a global perspective of the same as "international diplomatic manoeuvrings" (126). By blending specific cases with global perspectives, this section, and the volume at large, contextualize these debates within their global perspectives.

The third part contrasts the potential of traditional and digital media to escalate conflicts or promote peace. This section interrogates the efficacy of traditional media when it adopts artificial intelligence, algorithms, and analytics-driven journalism. Richard Stupart in Chapter Fifteen argues that the adoption of these modalities forces traditional media to chase after clicks, views, engagement rates, and time-spend and browsing speed, at the expense of public interest journalism. He questions how the "newsroom culture on journalists' practices" can reasonably exist in such a social-mediatized environment (197). In contrast, Mphathisi Ndlovu in Chapter Sixteen examines the role of digital media in promoting reconciliation, reconstruction, and rehabilitation and helping to rebuild lives in the aftermath of *Gukurahundi* in Zimbabwe (210). Arguably, among the most notable contrasts is Allen Munoriyarwa's Chapter Seventeen, titled "We have Degrees in Violence," which demonstrates how social media provided "alternative voices" when former Zimbabwean president Robert Mugabe imposed countrywide terror to intimidate the opposition after sensing election defeat during the June 2008 presidential elections (224). These contrasts, parallels, and sometimes contradictions between the chapters and themes allow for a realistic and contextualized interweaving of African narratives.

Whereas the volume editors acknowledge the volume's strength as the first book-length research on conflict and peacebuilding from both destructive and constructive perspectives (and hence its diversity) (2), there is also a potential weakness in the fact that the chapter contributors are predominantly scholars (vii-xi). Arguably, the inclusion of more practitioners and policymakers, among others, could have brought in even more diversity. Also, although not to a magnitude that raises ethical concerns, one section of the volume includes images of dead bodies and severe injuries (229, 232, 238). Readers from varying cultural backgrounds may question the appropriateness of such images, although their appearance in black and white serves somewhat to minimize the readers' discomfort. That notwithstanding, this edited volume remains a must-read for students, researchers, policymakers, and industry professionals interested in a contextual understanding of the media and conflict in Africa.

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