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Charles C. Okigbo, Festus Eribo, eds. *Development and Communication in Africa.* Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2004. 249 pp. $39.95 (paper), ISBN 978-0-7425-2746-1; $101.00 (paper), ISBN 978-0-7425-2745-4.

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What to Do with Africa's

This collection of eighteen essays of uneven richness underserved by an overly thin two-page introduction brings together some of the best known names in Development Communication in an attempt to understand African aspirations, experiences, challenges and the place of communication in development. Coming at this stage in a debate that has generated much conventional and critical scholarship, one would have expected the editors to aim at much more than simply providing space for contributors to offer "a fillip and not necessarily a panacea for development" (p. x). The "desirable and useful" (p. x) approaches the book explores would certainly have served their purpose better, within a framework of the need to critically rethink conventional scholarly assumptions about communication and development, especially in relation to Africa.

If Africa's development has stalled due to the poverty of communication capacity among Africans (the contributors to the volume are largely in agreement on this), their institutions and governments have been much more to blame than the lack of resources. To spur the Africans they target with initiatives into required action, development agents would have to invest in proper management of communication capacity and the incorporation of currently marginalized indigenous African values into the equation for the use of communication infrastructure for development. Keen to distance themselves from the Afro-pessimism fashionable in certain circles, the authors stress "the tremendous optimism" in Africans despite the devastating effects of unequal encounters, especially as engineered by Western colonialism. However, development can only materialize through effective communication by dedicated leadership, enlightened followers, and active and balanced involvement of civic and cultural citizenship. To Lucian Pye (chapter 4), how well communication and the media contribute to the crystallization of a shared sense of nationhood, state legitimacy, institutionalized structures of authority, recognized channels of popular participation, and greater integration for greater coherence in the political system and society would determine the extent to which development is feasible in Africa. Compelling though these prescriptions are, the book is not very forthcoming on indicators and operationalization of development and the communication capacity that should enable it. A richer introduction might have fulfilled this function.

Nonetheless, a good number of the contributions competently discuss competing perspectives on development communication (e.g. Pye, Servaes, Jacobson), drawing attention to how practices on and in Africa have tended to impair or enhance the participatory and emancipatory potential of development communication. Some focus closely on communication technologies and their applications (e.g., de Beer, Melkote and Steeves, Eribo), advocating strategies and approaches informed by varying degrees of faith in the capacity of modern information and communication technologies (ICTs) to transform individuals and societies in the name of development. Most of the book makes a strong, even if not always substantiated or negotiated, case for the importance of "indigenous African cultures," if media and communication practices are to adequately serve and service African thirsts for development (Asante, Mazrui and Okigbo, Okigbo, Hachten, Stevenson, Amienyi, Akhahenda, Moemeka, Singhal et al., Okumu, Nganje and Blake). A conscious effort to engage similar debates in anthropology and cultural studies for example, could have yielded further insights.

On the theme of culture, communication and development, many of the chapters highlight the victimhood that Africa has suffered culturally through encounters with others, and suggest ways of redressing the situation in the interest of relevant development. As if to emphasize the centrality of the need for cultural shaping of ICTs, the book starts with Molefi Asante's unproblematized call for "a renewed sense of African centeredness"

as a basis for a more egalitarian and communal Africa, in the face of the allure of the "mindlessness" of Western individualism (p. 1). In seeking to enhance Africans, he argues, communication policies can only succeed by being conscious of the history of debasement that Africa has suffered vis-Ã -vis the West.

Conscious of the need for a more nuanced understanding of Afro-centricity, Mazrui and Okigbo contextualize the call for cultural valorization within Africa's own dynamic history and what Mazrui elsewhere has referred to as Africa's "triple heritage" of civilizations. However, instead of highlighting the creative ways in which Africans are forging or crafting complex new identities through articulation of their triple heritage as building blocks of appropriation and integration, Mazrui and Okigbo basically essentialize African identities by overly emphasizing conflict and the "contest for supremacy" facilitated by partisan or sectarian media. Without stressing the relatedness, interdependence and conviviality (however tenuous) that characterizes the lives of ordinary Africans seeking solutions to the daily predicaments of inequalities and injustices predicated on socially constructed difference, Mazrui and Okigbo simply maintain that the mismanagement of Africa's triple heritage has resulted in serious dislocations. This leaves one wondering what then to make of their recognition that the dislocations can only be resolved through: (a) "looking inwards towards our ancestry, laying due emphasis on our native intelligence, collective wisdom, and the true essence of Africanity"; and (b), "looking outwards to the wider world â?¦ to selectively borrow, adapt, and creatively formulate its strategies for planned development" (p. 28), since Africa has been shaped just as it has shaped the rest of the world. If Africa is indeed a contested territory for the triple heritage, it is also a territory of harmony and conviviality, as Africans daily cover mileage at forging relationships between the multiple cultural influences in their lives. Thus instead of being "a bundle of contradictions and an enigma" as Okigbo suggests (p. 31), Africa is above all a melting pot of multiple influences (even if of unequal power relations), as its citizens and subjects forge new identities from their triple heritage with the assistance of "indigenous" and "modern" communication technologies, the outcome of which is not reducible to any one of the constituent elements, but clearly superior to all. In this way, Africans are actively modernizing their indigeneities and indigenizing their modernities, often in ways not always obvious to scholarly fascination with dichotomies.

Of this book and the themes it tackles, some would say it constitutes dÃ©jÃ vu, little new to write home about, especially as the book has not sufficiently problematized "development" and the implications for the "development process" of competing, complementing, or conflicting articulations of "Africanness" and "indigeneity" by various social actors in and out of the geographical space known as Africa. Questions of conceptualization, identity, and belonging aside, the timing of this volume couldn't have been better. At a conjuncture of competing initiatives–from NEPAD to G-8 through The Blair Commission–to "make poverty history" in Africa as the "scar on the conscience of the world" (to quote Bob Geldof and Tony Blair respectively), a book like this is a useful resource not only for policymakers and those spurred to right past wrongs, but especially for students and researchers keen on understanding the development and communication predicaments of ordinary Africans, and the level of scholarly debate on these issues.

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