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**CHALLENGES FACING THE COMMUNICATION DISCIPLINE AND
PROFESSION IN AN AGE OF TERROR AND DOMINANT NON-STATE
ACTORS: “AN ALARM FOR A PARADIGM SHIFT IN AFRICA”**

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INTRODUCTION

- Challenges
- ***CURRICULUM CHALLENGES***
- ***ETHICAL CHALLENGES.***

CURRICULUM CHALLENGES: INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION

- **FACTS**
- **THE AFRICAN CONTINENT: *linguistically, ethnically and religiously diverse***
- **Economic refugees or migrants and those fleeing from internecine and inter-state wars**
- **The new “Middle Passage” to Europe**

- **Xenophobia:**
- - **Ghanaian fishermen in Nigeria**
- - **Zimbabweans in South Africa**
- - **Australia and New Zealand against Asian economic refugees due to fear of political repression**

- **Africans are at the mercy of reportage written mainly by Western outlets**
- **Reports are informed by the national interests of the countries (by their cultural, religious and ideological beliefs)**
- **Examples: The wars in Sudan: Muslims versus Christians; Arabs versus Africans**

THE IMPERATIVES

- From the preceding, communication scholars and professionals should be fully exposed to courses in intercultural communication.
- This is to enable them to conduct research, enhance the quality of pedagogy in the discipline, and re-center their focus from reliance on external analysis and assessments which are simply regurgitated in newspapers and television stations in Africa.

- ***Africa* should be *the* center of departure, when it comes to communication research, pedagogy, and dissemination of information on all activities in the continent.**
- **Intercultural communication provides the fulcrum, because the course cannot be taught, or research conducted on the subject, without a sound grounding in African history, political economy, political science, comparative religion and sociology.**

FOUNDATIONAL BASIS APPROACH A PROPOSAL

- **NECESSITY:** To augment the quality of research and instruction in intercultural communication, and address the challenges of the twenty-first century
- **Fixed position for intercultural communication, and a *core requirement* in curricula of Departments of Mass Communication or nomenclature associated with communication studies.**

FOUNDATIONAL BASIS APPROACH

- **Predicated on the belief that a soundly conceived and developed course in intercultural communication would reflect, in addition to communication theories, associated topics/themes that are grounded in related disciplines, namely history, political science, sociology, political economy and religious studies, a wider scope and understanding of intercultural relations and a wide range of issues involving cultural understanding and mis-understanding.**

THE PARAMETERS FOR INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION

- Focus on the deeper and more foundational basis that inform and influence interactions between and among cultures.
- *Stressing Pragmatic* and training approach solely is not tenable in the present era of terror and dominant non-state actors.

- **There is a clear need for a broader frame of reference in attempting to understand culture and communication that would require scholars and researchers of the subject to approach it more *holistically*, accounting for its inherent multi-dimensional and interdisciplinary characteristic features, hence, the foundational approach.**

INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION

- **Asante, Newmark and Blake (1979) in their introduction to the field of communication state: “we begin where all science must begin, with a problem: we seek to explicate the dissimilarities and similarities which impede or enhance communication across cultures” (1979, p.11). They went on to argue further that: “Intercultural communication attempts to shed the trappings of ethnocentrism and explain the communicative act in its own terms” (p.12).**

- **Chen and Starosta (1998) cogently observed that, “Disorder characterizes the initial development of the field. Intercultural communication scholars pursued their own directions and definitions, with few attempts at integration”.**

- Among some of the ramifications grounded in *“history”* as a component in the foundational base is an enhancement of the understanding, analysis and assessment of the blatant display of ethnic, linguistic, religious and cultural hegemony by the more dominant culture in multiethnic, multi-linguistic and multi-religious countries..

- **Historically, mechanisms used to achieve cultural hegemony included slavery, the crusades, jihads, and colonialism, which in some instances, resulted in the extermination of indigenous people.**
- **Presently cultural hegemony is manifested through the imposition of visions of desirable societies by the dominant powers in the international system, manifested by an aggressive prosyletization of ideology, alien values, and political economy.**

- **To add to the above, conflicts among co-cultural groups arising from religious intolerance have their roots in a lack of appreciation or understanding of the importance of an informed exposure to comparative religions as a foundational base in societies that reflect different religious traditions**

- **Intercultural communication, approached from foundational basis prepares us to study effectively, the prevailing circumstances in a given era; to write and report accurately, cogently and perceptively via news papers, broadcast and social media about conflicts that are dominating the world system presently, specifically in the Islamic communities in Africa.**

- **To emphasize, intercultural communication interactions cannot be studied or taught without a firm grasp of the historical, political and religious foundations of co-cultural groups, and how the foundations influence and shape intercultural communicative interactions.**

- **The approach helps to explain intercultural communication dynamics that tend to heighten conflict or promote harmony among co-cultural groups regardless of geographical location.**

- **We cannot understand in depth, the continuing crisis in the Federal Republic of Nigeria without knowledge of history, particularly on ethnic relations, and religion in the country.**
- **We cannot understand the carnage that occurred in Rwanda during the era of the genocide without understanding the history of colonial Africa.**

- **Clearly the foundational basis approach is interdisciplinary and requires a curriculum that incorporates intercultural communication as a core course.**

- In the absence of faculty in departments of communication that could handle competently, the content of the nature of intercultural communication theoretically and methodologically, students enrolled in such departments should be *required* to take the classes in the departments of history, sociology, political science or economics, depending on which of the two offers courses in political economy, and religion.

- **What makes it mandatory for Departments of Mass Communication/Communication Studies to have intercultural communication as a core course is apparent.**
- **The imperative of the current era demands it. Insurgencies that are causing mayhem in Nigeria for example, cannot be handled in Mass Communication/Communication Studies Departments and felicitously reported by media personnel without course(s) in intercultural communication.**

- **Fundamentally, intercultural communication as part of the core courses *arms* the researcher, the instructor and the professional with a vision that prepares him or her to investigate in a *comprehensive* manner, various basis upon which the complex *processes* of communication occur and how such basis influence intercultural conflicts.**

RHETORICAL THEORY AND ANALYSIS

- **Rhetorical theory privileges suasive communication but yet cognizant of the role of non-discursive means of attempting to solve wars and other forms of conflict. Suasive characteristic features of rhetorical theory would make it incumbent upon us when dealing with conflicts at various levels and degrees of complexity, to delve further into the depths of the warrants groups in conflict invoke as they prosecute wars, or engage in other forms of non-discursive forms of dealing with conflict**

- **I have argued elsewhere that “Suasory characteristic features refer to those features that commit communication to persuasive strategies in efforts to resolve conflicts” (p. 310, 1998).**

RHETORICAL IRRITANTS

- **These are actions undertaken usually by more powerful countries or governments that desecrate or denigrate religious beliefs and customs of the “other” that are not understood by powerful bodies.**
- **Rhetorical irritants are avoidable. At times rhetorical irritants arise as a result of lack of understanding of the history between/among warring factions that could easily trigger them, resulting in wars. There has been, and continues to be bloodshed, for example, among Christians and Muslims in Nigeria over locations for building churches in front of mosques.**

- **An argument could be made that citizens in a mixed locale have the right to construct edifices when granted permission to do so. However, as discussed under the rubric of intercultural communication, very good knowledge of history could influence judgment on choices of locale in order to avoid conflict.**

Secular contexts that breed rhetorical irritants:

- The rapid invasion of external cultural norms and value systems that are antithetical to foundational normative systems in African societies and elsewhere**
- The domineering position of the neo-liberal project in many African countries that have led to aggressive dislocation of local communities, environmental degradation, and anomie among youths in such affected areas.**

- **One can catalogue locales in which the neo-liberal projects have caused severe damages to local communities in many parts of the world. Our concern presently is Africa.**

- *Normative foundational systems*
- **My argument is not that normative foundational systems are sacrosanct in their entirety, but that that there are certain core values in all normative foundations systems globally that remain constant, and resistant to external threats to modify or obliterate them.**

BOTTOM LINE

- **Rhetoric is the architectonic art of all discourses that center suasive means of persuasion. We cannot teach or practice social communication for peace, for example without a sound grounding in rhetorical theory and analysis.**

CULTURAL WARRANTS IN RHETORICAL THEORY/ANALYSIS

- **We cannot engage in diagnosis of societal problems without getting into the depths of how cultural warrants serve as facilitators or stumbling blocs for successful communication interventions when they are used to justify actions.**

- **Cultural warrants are an integral part of how arguments are structured. Of course argumentation could be studied outside of the realm of rhetorical theory but the realm of rhetoric provides a basis for fashioning messages and suasive strategies that aim to inform, educate, convince and persuade.**

ETHICS: A New Perspective

- **Centers primarily on the preparation of journalists for the conduct of their practice/profession in Africa against the backdrop of the topic under discussion – the era of terror and dominant non-state actors.**
- **Serious work has been done by Africans including but not limited to Francis Kasoma, Andrew Moemeka, Cornelius Pratt, and Francis Nyamjoh just to name a few.**

- **My motivation for coming up with a new perspective is based mainly on what I consider to be the overall malaise that is easily discernible in the practice of the profession in the continent: a profession, as Kasoma argued, “inherited from the North Atlantic countries.”**

- **The “inheritance” construct is quite logical because of the realities of colonial history, and the baggage that history heaped on Africans, a baggage which many Africans still carry: accepting Western dictates as correct and right for decolonized Africa, even after gruesome experiences of colonialism and racism in the entire continent, but with particular devastating ugliness in Southern and Eastern Africa, two regions that had white/Western settlers.**

- **We must not lose sight of the anomalies and hypocrisy loaded in the “inheritance”, and how that has marred and obfuscated the kind of preparedness we see among our colleagues in the academy and the communication professions.**
- **During the colonial days, what the West is presently pushing down the throats of Africans did not obtain.**

- **There was no freedom of speech for the subjugated Africans. There was no right to revolt against the injustices levied on Africans by the colonial powers in defense of their freedom. Attempts of free speech received harsh reproaches in the form of incarceration.**

- **Resistance in defense of freedom met with violent put downs of the resistance movements by the colonial powers. The Mau Mau comes to my mind. We are all familiar with the struggles in Southern Africa and the Portuguese colonies as a whole.**

- **One cannot but question the moral authority of the West to talk about and proselytize “Freedom” against the backdrop of a badly stained history of slavery, racism, a near extermination of a race in North America, and colonialism.**

- **Chinua Achebe said in an interview that “colonialism was absolute totalitarianism”.**
- **After all, at the heart of the debate on the issue of ethics and morality is the right of the individual and his/her freedom, and his or her obligations for the defense of the community. But what we have as a historical fact is that slavery, colonialism and apartheid deprived Africans of their rights and freedom.**

- **Yet we are now being led by the West to utilize what they posit as their ethics grounded in the neo-liberal project, the aim of which is to keep Africans in particular glued to the prescriptions of the West.**

- **Africans continue to abdicate from the basic, and core African ethical values that are antithetical to the following: Rugged individualism, greed, and other manifestations such as the reportage on conflicts particularly in the Arab and Muslim communities in various parts of the world**
- **Reactions against Western values stated above have contributed to an era of terror, and given rise to major non-state actors with lethal arsenals and brutal tactics. We rely on the lenses of the West to report on activities in this era of terror, and the activities of dominant non-state actors.**

- **Not to be misunderstood at this juncture, I am not endorsing the strategies and tactics utilized in this era of terror by state and non-state actors, but stating simply that the professional ethics that we teach in our respective curricula mimic the norms and values propagated by the West since decolonization.**
- **The point is captured in some way by Nyamjoh in a paper he delivered titled: “Africa’s Media: Between Professional Ethics and Cultural belonging” (2010).**

- **According to Nyamjoh, what obtains is a journalism whose tendency is to “debase and caricature African humanity, creativity and realities.” Africa’s journalism has become for him, a journalism of “bandwagonism, where mimicry is the order of the day, as emphasis is less on thinking than on doing, less on leading than on being led, less on defining than on being defined”.**

- **“African journalism lacks both the power of self-definition and the power to shape universals that are deaf-and-dumb to the particularities in and on Africa” (p.14).**
- **Nyamjoh’s take epitomizes the lack of preparedness of the discipline and profession during this era of terror and the dominance of non-state actors.**

- **Nyamjoh deals the ultimate blow by saying: “Because journalism has tended to be treated as an attribute of the so-called ‘modern’ societies or ‘superior’ others, it is only proper, so the reasoning goes, that African journalism and the societies it serves, are taught the principles and professional practices by those who ‘know’ what it means to be civilized and to be relevant to civilization in a global hierarchy of humanity and cultures” (p.14).**

- **The preceding is very much in line with what I have termed elsewhere as the “rhetorical construction of the African” by Europeans and Americans (Blake, 2009 and 2010).**
- **The construction is built upon the following premise: that the African is inherently inferior; barbarous, ahistorical; amoral; lacking in any sense of governance; and many other attributes that rendered the African as a person/continent that needs and indeed requires Euro-Americans to civilize and guide them.**

- **Such a construction takes away any possibility of Africans to demonstrate moral behavior other than that inculcated in them by Europeans and Americans. Likewise, Africans even today by such reasoning are incapable of governing themselves without the intervention of Europeans and Americans – in fact the West as a whole.**

- **Kasoma argues that “Black Africans do have their own conceptions of what constitutes right or wrong, and good or bad in human actions. It does seem, “ he continues, “that in African thinking, a good action is one that is performed for the benefit or service of other persons, either individually or collectively. Conversely, a bad or wrong action is one that arises from purely selfish motives.**

- **For the African, it is the survival of the family, clan and community that matters more than that of the individual” (1994, pp.26-27).**
- **The implications for the moral judgment and conduct of the African journalist are evident: publishing articles, particularly known to be false and injurious to an individual or an institution for personal gain (brown envelop journalism for example) runs contrary to African ethics; articles that provide and exacerbate division and hatred among individuals, communities, and ethnic groups are antithetical to African values and ethics.**

- **Relying on the Western interpretation for the basis for insurgencies that centers their interests demonstrates a lack of preparedness to deal with the imperatives of the present because our discipline and praxis are deeply rooted in the Eurocentric paradigm, and its ethics.**

- **When one reflects on the role of journalists in the mayhem during the electioneering campaigns and subsequent voting in the Ivory Coast, Kenya, and Zimbabwe just to mention a few, one cannot but conclude that there is a need to revisit the moral foundations for journalism and development in Africa.**

NEW PERSPECTIVE

- **One that identifies the architectonic African ethical principles found across the continent under the rubric of Maat.**
- **I wonder how many in the audience today are familiar with the ethical principles of Maat.**

MAAT

- **An ancient African Ethical System that served as the guiding principles for the conduct of all in society.**
- **Its origins are to be found in Kemet, ancient Pharonic Egypt, thousands of years before Christ.**
- **Maat, according to Obenga, is the “personification of law, order, rule, truth, right, righteousness, canon, justice, straightness, integrity, uprightness, and the highest conception of physical and moral law” (1996, p.3).**

- Included also in the Maatian principles are *harmony, honesty, respect for hierarchy (read “elders” as well), obedience and unity.*
- So important was Maat to the ancient Egyptians that it was recognized as a Goddess. Ethics raised to the level of deities make its principles sacred and should not be compromised.
- In fact, one strives to practice Maat in order to satisfy the Gods. Maat is not just an issue of “Good” and “bad” or distinguishing between “right” and “wrong.”

- **Maat is a way of life.** It is life dedicated to its core principles. Given the central locus of Maat in the life of the African, it is one that is inculcated through instruction. One of the most exemplary works on Maat and its role in communication and governance is the text written circa 3000 BC by Ptah-Hotep, titled: *The Instruction of Ptah-Hotep*.

- **The book is not only important in terms of its content guided and rooted in Maatian principles, but it is an instruction of a vizier who was preparing his son to govern. The essential lesson in the text is that one should be guided by Maat in all undertakings, notably when entrusted with the responsibility to govern.**

- **From Ptah-Hotep, we also learn about the importance of free speech. In fact, “speech” is the driving force and requires instruction. Thus he writes:**

- **“Here begin the proverbs of fair speech, spoken by the Hereditary Chief, the Holy Father, Beloved of the God, the Eldest Son of the King, of his body, the Governor of his City, the Vizier, Ptah-Hotep, when instructing the ignorant in the knowledge of exactness in fair-speaking” (Blake 2009 and 2010, p. 103).**

- **He insists that people should be free to express themselves. One could understand the importance given to free speech because of the tenets of Maat, that center harmony, truthfulness, justice, fairness and the other virtues celebrated in the core principles.**

- **Abdication from Maatian ethics could result in disunity, societal disequilibrium and an overall breakdown in the normative system of the society at large. The role of the journalist, in ethical terms is one of ensuring unity, the promotion of harmony, honesty, truthfulness, fairness, justice and all of the constituent elements of Maat.**

- **Guided by such ethical principles, the journalist has to be properly schooled in Maatian principles. In essence, preparation to practice journalism performance requires him/her to be versed in Maatian principles.**

- **The use of terror tactics is not confined to dominant and other non-state actors. States use terror tactics on their citizens and their enemies. So research, teaching and reporting on “terror” mainly from the perspective of state actors fail to meet the ethical standards found in Maat.**
- **Balance is a fundamental Maatian ethical principle so are unity, harmony, justice, truthfulness, and rightness, among others.**

- **We clearly see an interface at this juncture between intercultural communication, rhetorical theory and analysis, and ethics forming a nexus in which research, pedagogy and praxis in communication is grounded.**

- **Maatian ethics may appear to be a set of ethical principles that would not create room for dissenting opinions, particularly when one considers “obedience” as an integral part of the core principles. That would be an erroneous stance because I have pointed out that there is room for free expression within the context of Maat.**

- **Maatian principles emphasize “obedience,” only to the extent that those in authority are worthy of being obeyed, through their actions as they run their homes, organizations or govern societies.**
- **If the governors contravene Maat, the society has the responsibility to remove such rulers. This is precisely why rulers take the responsibility to “instruct” their heirs, inculcating in them the core principles of Maat.**

- **The new perspective calls for a compulsory instruction in Maatian ethics for all academics and practitioners. Furthermore, instruction in and practice based on the principles of Maatian ethics demonstrate to the world that African ethics predate Greco-Roman/Euro-American ethics, and a major contribution to ethical theory in every aspect of life.**

- **With Nyamjoh in mind, we as Africans through our adherence to Maatian principles particularly in communication research, pedagogy and praxis have a contribution to make to the global community.**
- **Journalism in particular, engaged in the reporting on activities in this era of terror and dominant non-state actors is better served by Maatian ethical principles than professional code of ethics that simply mimic the West.**

FINALLY...

- **I appeal for a change in paradigm that would center the foundational approach, and the normative foundational basis in the study of intercultural communication, rhetorical theory and analysis as well as the normative foundational systems guided by Maatian ethics.**

- **It is up to academics in Mass Communication/Communication Studies departments to ascertain that the crop of students in all levels receive instruction along the way in intercultural communication, rhetorical theory and analysis, Maatian ethics together with the extant core course requirements in order to prepare them well to work productively and meaningfully in the era of terror and dominant non-state actors.**