Preface

Ethnic conflicts have been with humanity from time immemorial. Moreover, in most instances, ethnic conflicts are primary obstacles to community development and progress. However, during the traditional and pre-technological era, such conflicts have often been small scale or contained within limited geographical localities. But with the advent of globalization, what Marshall McLuhan prophetically referred to as the Global Village, ethnic conflicts have taken on new forms and also impacted on larger numbers of people, in much wider geographical ranges than most previous ethnic conflicts.

Communication and media are acknowledged to be important for the study of ethnic conflict. Scholars recognize that groups interacting in conflict resort to some level of communication (Ellis & Maoz, 2012). Nagda (2006) emphasizes the importance of the communication process in analyzing varied outcomes of intergroup contact. Intergroup communication contact experiences can result in positive outcomes for improving relations or the alternative outcome of negative judgments.

This collection is focused on communication and media perspectives on ethnic conflict, and also includes theoretic understandings shared from other disciplinary approaches. Each chapter is written from a deep grounding in the history of research on ethnic conflict. There is an underlying desire in these studies to employ all possible theoretic approaches for understanding the practices that can reduce the incidence of ethnic conflict (Kanbur, Rajaram, & Varshney, 2011). Communication approaches offer alternate intergroup interaction experiences, which may result in positive collective change (Ellis, & Maoz, 2012).

Compellingly, communication and the media now play pivotal roles in contemporary ethnic conflicts across the globe. Uses and misuses of communication and the media result in overt and covert impacts on ethnic conflict. This collection, Impact of Communication and the Media on Ethnic Conflict contains 17 peer-reviewed chapters, of which most are empirical in nature, exposing the varied types of ethnic conflicts occurring in different parts of the world – from Africa to Europe to the US to the Near East as well as the Far East.

The collection is divided into three section. Section 1, titled Communication Frameworks focuses on the study of ethnic conflict from the theoretical frameworks of communication studies. Section 2, titled New Media Impacts addresses how media and communication technologies impact ethnic conflict studies. Section 3, titled Ethnic Conflict Interventions offers reports of efforts at reducing or prevent ethnic conflict. The three sections should work together to cover an introduction and more in-depth studies of communication and media approaches to ethnic conflict.

Randall Rogan opens the first of the 17 chapters by arguing that although Osama bin Laden was killed in 2011, the radical ideology that underscored his actions and those of his followers continues to
live on in his many written and spoken communiqués. Rogan indicates that other prominent al-Qaeda leaders of the jihadist movement, including Ayman Al-Zawahiri, Abu Basir, and Anwar al-Awlaki likewise took up the pen, along with the gun, to express their support and interpretation of jihadism for their fellow violence-minded brethren. The author identifies thematic narratives that spokespersons of al-Qaeda use to frame the characterizations of self and other as manifested in texts published in *Inspire* and disseminated for consumption by Western, English-speaking audiences.

The next chapter focuses on Nigeria’s Middle Belt Region conflict where Bala Musa examines the role of traditional and new media in ethnic conflicts. Bala argues for peace journalism and a new ethic for ethnic conflict reporting, suitable for both professional and citizen journalists, in order to rebuild and develop the community. Still on Africa, Seif Sekalala reflects on Rwandan Former Refugees and Genocide Survivors (FRGSs) and provides the reader with the results of analyses of a Rwandan genocide survivor narrative, a news article about another Rwandan survivor, and his own family’s experience of the genocide.

Steven Gibson and Darla Anderson discuss the cross discipline contributions that are available for the study of ethnic conflict. They highlight a perspective on ethnopolitical conflict in which researchers from diverse fields of study make contributions across disciplines. Researchers in social sciences, political science, economics, and cognitive science have produced theoretic constructs to aid in the analysis of ethnic conflict. Gibson and Anderson, after presenting an overview of the diversity of research methodologies and approaches to ethnic conflict, offer suggestions for how theoretic approaches from different fields can be applied to empirical cases in ethnic conflict.

Charles Okigbo and Seseer Mou then link recursive inter-ethnic violence to the failure of development communication in Africa. The duo highlight some of the historical inter/intra-ethnic violent incidents against the backdrop of ineffectual development communication strategies and practices that could have prevented or at least ameliorated some of the violence. They also address some challenges for development communication research and make suggestions on how to tackle them.

The book also has a chapter on how new media impact on ethnic conflicts in which Chad Painter and Erin Willis examine the story of George Zimmerman, who shot and killed Trayvon Martin on 26 February 2012. The duo argue that news values that are considered important when reporting crime and violence, as well as the frames used to tell the story, must be understood. This is especially important because in the story in reference, it could have been expected that the reporting could have typically followed a known stereotypical script where the perpetrator is black, and the victim is white (Gillian & Iyengar, 2000); but in the case of Trayvon Martin and George Zimmerman, the authors hold that the script does not fit. This chapter is followed by “race riot” reflection in which Jennifer Heusel argues that the current rhetorical expressions of “race riot” emphasize a faith as well as a suspicion of a postracial United States. Referring to the George Zimmerman trial, Heusel argues that when people’s discursive cues for “race riot” are influenced by a belief that post-Civil Rights legislation has produced a postracial society, racial violence against people of color remains legitimate while exercised by those enforcing law and order.

Next, Sonia Jawaid Shaikh investigates the universal themes in the violence-legitimizing communication of elites during inter-group ethnic conflicts. Using a comparative content analysis conducted across communication from elites who have been internationally recognized as having played some kind of leadership role for in-groups that have committed acts of violence against out-group, the study established that across countries and temporal spans, elites bolster in-group and out-group distinctions and identity through their language choices, but typically avoid outright dehumanization as commonly
assumed. Moreover, they excessively create non-falsifiable statements about current, past, or future events; and employ allegations against the intentions, plans and activities of the out-group. These non-falsifiable statements make a bulk of their speech or broadcasts.

Agnes Lucy Lando, in the next chapter, exposes a covert ethnic conflict in Kenya. This is the subtle plight of the Somalis of Kenyan origin who find themselves in constant conflict with the “other” Kenyans. Based on 2014-2015 research findings, this chapter indicates that the ethnic plights of Somalis of Kenyan origin are largely media engendered and can, to a great extent, be resolved by media practitioners deliberately embracing objectivity, ethics, and professional research while reporting on any issue. Based on a thematic analysis of news coverage from five major news sources, Bobbi Van Gilder and Zach Massey examine the Islamaphobic discourse that is perpetuated by the news media coverage of the ISIS beheadings to explain the potential influence of news media on viewers’ dissociative behaviors, and the justifications made by social actors for such behaviors. Specifically, this chapter seeks to explore the ways in which intragroup identities are strengthened (ingroup bias) through outgroup derogation. On ethnic conflict on social media, Benjamin Brojakowski seeks to understand the types of impression management strategies used by individuals on Twitter when confronted with an accusation of racism or ethnic intolerance. He reports study findings that Twitter users manage their digital impressions through Avoidance, Intimidation, Justification, Support, Victimization, Acceptance, and General Statements.

Julianna Kirschner’s Paris memorialization weaves two narratives of life in France. First is the story of cultured France told in statues and in cultural fixtures like the Pantheon, and the second narrative is the act of writing on these sculptured spaces. The monuments advancing the French narrative left an open space that people have filled with their own commentary and symbolism. The author calls this notion reverse storytelling, which is the communicative act of altering a physical narrative.

The next chapter by George Stairs examines aspects of the Sunni-Shite ethnic conflict. Although they differ in their interpretation of Islamic law, and in certain rituals, both Sunnis and Shiites share their faith in the Quran, the Prophet Muhammad’s teachings, and many of their prayers. This chapter looks at the historical origins and relevant factors for the contemporary conflicts, then lays out the theoretical underpinnings of its primary argument, that the Sunni-Shia divide has been weaponized and used as a tool by certain individuals and state-level actors. While looking specifically at the local level Syrian conflict, and the regional Iran-Saudi Arabia struggle for hegemony, Stairs also examines the role that communications technology plays in facilitating the spread of these narratives.

The impact of communication and the media on ethnic conflict, as the chapter by Z. Hall indicates, underscores far reaching consequences that can involve life and death. Hall holds that rhetors must be responsible stewards of their messages and be selective in choosing rhetorical devices appropriate for the circumstances. She explains that satire is not an effective, stable, or safe rhetorical device for resolving conflicts involving sacrosanct values in opposition with each other. The chapter demonstrates, through the example of the Jyllands-Posten cartoon controversy in Denmark in 2005, satire is an unstable rhetorical device, having the potential for multiple readings. For instance, when used to mock and ridicule, the visual and textual language of the cartoons dehumanizes millions of people, whether intended or not. As religious and ethnic minorities, Muslims may experience treatment influenced by the cartoons. She argues that cartoons have the potential to generate fear and animosity that did not exist previously thus cautions extreme rhetors employing decivilizing language to achieve goals to protect even the most cherished of Western values.

Agnes Lucy Lando and Samuel Kochmay present a unique form of ethnic conflict that has persisted for over a century. This is the inter-tribal and cross-border cattle rustling custom among the Northern
Kenya pastoralists as well as with pastoralists in other parts of Kenya and the neighboring countries of Ethiopia, Sudan, and Uganda. Cattle rustling remains the oldest, persistent, and the most complex conflict in which all attempts by the state and non-state actors have yielded less than satisfactory outcomes. These raids cause human and material loss, displacement of families, fleeing teachers, school closures, and student dropouts. Attempts to solve this problem either exacerbate the conflict or just produce short-term peace. The authors refer to this lacuna as the missing link and proceed to argue that cattle rustling is embedded in the deep roots of pastoralists’ traditional culture and communication. Eventually, Lando and Kochomay propose a culturally appropriate model to address cattle rustling.

Eddah Mutua and Susan Kilonzo argue for a peace model emanating from the grassroots – Amani Mashinani – which engages community members to learn about themselves, consequences of their destructive choices, and, how this reflective process compels them to move forward. Overall, this chapter, explicates Amani Mashinani as a model that represents processes of peace building among conflicting ethnic groups as culturally and spiritually bound, victims of ethnic conflict as change agents of their own realities rather than passive victims waiting for international or national intervention, and, peace building as a practice of everyday life and embodied in activities that enhance lives of those affected by violence.

Another approach to ethnic conflict resolution is peace through sports as presented by Samuel Kochomay in the final chapter. By providing a sneak preview of the effectiveness of the Peace Race, a sports for peace intervention organized among Pastoralists in Kenya and Uganda, Kochomay begins with setting up the context by tracing the practice of sports for peace, its development and making a mention of the schools of thought on the efficacy of sports for peace. He then proceeds to examine the efficacy of the peace races by focusing on its successes and challenges, exploring the utility of peace races in the conflict cycle and the place of celebrities in peace building. The chapter ends with suggestions for improvement of the efficacy of peace races.

The chapters included in this collection will be useful for individuals interested in challenging information and approaches to understanding ethnic conflict in the world today. The book is suitable for use by higher academic institutions as teaching tools for causes and possible solutions to ethnic conflict, by NGOs and religious leaders interested and/or involved in conflict resolution, as well as by governments and political groups genuinely interested in alleviating long-lasting conflicts. For many communication practitioners, especially in contemporary times of citizen journalism, the book is useful in enlightening persons using new media on the far-reaching effects their activities on social media can impact.

Together, taken in overview, these 17 chapters present a variety of types of ethnic conflicts, the role and impact of media and communication in ethnic conflict, and possible interventions that could be employed to mitigate ethnic conflicts. The 17 chapters in this book make paramount the importance of scholars and practitioners responsibly using and consuming, within each appropriate context, the written, spoken and drawn forms of communication to understand and mediate ethnic conflict. We believe this book will be of value to students and scholars interested in ethnic conflict in general and in options for conflict resolution that have been attempted empirically.

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REFERENCES


