Heart of a Lion, Mind Full of Pride: The Paradox of Teaching E-E as a Heuristic for Homegrown Change in Rwanda

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CONTENTS

Editorial

Articles

Heart of a Lion, Mind Full of Pride: The Paradox of Teaching E-E as a Heuristic for Homegrown Change in Rwanda
Sarah E Ryan

Youth Culture and New Media: A Study of Telecommunications Advertisements in Nigeria
Rotimi Williams Olatunji
Noeem Taiwo Thanny

Emergence of Community Radio: Harnessing Potential Role for Rural Development
Arpita Sharma

A Longitudinal Study of Agenda Setting and Environmental Pollution
Masrur Alam Khan

Case Study

Information Needs of Riverside Communities: A Case Study in Malaysia
Sulaiman Md Yassin

Book Review

Public Relations in India: New Tasks and Responsibilities
Razlan Rashid
HEART OF A LION, MIND FULL OF PRIDE: THE PARADOX OF TEACHING E-E AS A HEURISTIC FOR HOMEGROWN CHANGE IN RWANDA

Sarah E Ryan

"Umutima w'intare!" the students boomed. "Someone with the heart of a lion." Following a round of applause for their brilliant title, the six-person team pitched the pilot of their radio drama, fulfilling the last requirement of the Entertainment-Education (E-E) course at the Kigali Institute of Education (KIE) in the Kimironko neighbourhood of Rwanda’s capital city. They introduced the principles of Umutima w’intare, John, Nyiramiruho, Bosco, Kivanvari, Mujyanama, and Bazikubana, supplementing the long cast of characters unveiled in the classrooms of KIE’s Confucius Center. The characters and plot lines of Umutima w’intare bravely invited dialogue about domestic violence - a contentious topic in Rwanda. Simultaneously, they reinforced the traditional belief that domestic violence is a private matter, one best kept within “the pride.” Umutima w’intare was reminiscent of E-E campaigns crafted by hundreds of my U.S. students - its greatest strength was its palatability, not its transformational messaging. These student projects illustrate a key challenge of teaching E-E as a heuristic for homegrown, or grassroots, change. As novice practitioners invent messages that simultaneously leverage existing beliefs and push important dialogues forward, they run the risk of conflating widespread approbation with meaningful social change. Further, even when focused on the end goal, they struggle to uncover and articulate cultural and institutional barriers to progress. Educators should be prepared to instruct students in the paradoxes of E-E illustrated by academics and practitioners. They should also encourage critical dialogue about the nature of populist social change at home and abroad.

The Paradoxes of E-E: Lessons from the Academy and the Field

Entertainment-Education emerged as a rigorous field of study and practice following the publication of Singhal and Rogers’ 1999 text, Entertainment-Education: A Communication Strategy for Social Change. While the practice of entertaining the masses in order to educate them has existed for thousands of years – incarnated in forms as diverse as Plato’s Allegory of the Cave and Wyclef Jean’s Sweetest Girl (Dollar Bill) video – Singhal and Rogers produced the first social scientific treatise on the topic. Following a brief history of E-E and an analysis of time-tested techniques for successful social change interventions, Singhal and Rogers suggested that a series of core research practices and messaging strategies had yielded nearly universal success across time periods and cultures. The most effective techniques included leveraging cultural values and deploying transitional characters, or sympathetic actors learning to amend their ways, in pro-social storylines.

"Even within their home cultures, it is difficult for students to recognise the underlying causes of social inequity and devise ways to remediate them. Once they articulate the barriers preventing change, Students typically focus more heavily on creating a marketable product than a nuanced plot that will move the culture forward."

Drawing upon the methodology of renowned E-E soap opera creator, Miguel Sabido, Singhal and Rogers contended that successful educators move their students – or audiences – forward by presenting new material consonant with existing values, such as those contained in “a national constitution, laws and policies...” (71). While such official documents often articulate idealised versions of common cultural beliefs, they nonetheless reflect principles that should be well-known and generally accepted by the public (e.g., freedom of the press in the USA). Ideal cultural values provide not only a starting place for a culturally-sensitive dialogue, but also a set of boundaries for new ideas. For example, the most recent Rwandan national constitution defines marriage as a heterosexual institution (i.e., between a man and a woman), a belief widely supported in the country. An E-E storyline about a transitional character embracing a gay couple’s marital union – even if embedded in one of the popular radio soap operas on cutting-edge Radio Salus (i.e., the nation’s most popular radio station) – would be so outside cultural norms that it would more likely result in a rejection of the radio characters, programme, or station than a robust discussion of gay marriage (Barker & Sabido; Gesser-Edelsburg, Guttman, & Israelshvili; Graham). However, a programme suggesting that violence toward gays – like factional violence in general – could undermine the progress of the nation, would comport with nearly every national document produced in the past decade and prevailing public
sentiment. Such a storyline would respect national values while nudging the boundaries of acceptable discussion outward, a key strategy employed by experienced E-E practitioners. It would necessitate a delicate negotiation of anti-gay and anti-violence values in a society with a history of patriarchal discord—a difficult and ethically challenging feat for a novice practitioner (Brown & Singhal; Gesser-Edelsburg, Guttmann, & Israeli-Shvili; Herndon & Randell, forthcoming).

Leading E-E theorists, practitioners, and critics have long noted the ethical quandaries of negotiating communities’ values. Singhal and Brown articulated the core ethical dilemma succinctly in their 1996 E-E review article: “Who is to determine what is right for whom?” (27). Four years later, Guttmann criticised practitioners for failing to interrogate their own values as robustly as audience members’ values. But perhaps the most consistent critic of the traditional E-E values framework has been Mohan Jyoti Dutta. Dutta painted a grim, neo-colonial picture of E-E as “implemented by Western interventionists in Third World spaces, reflecting the power differential in access to the discursive space between the West and the Third World and circulating the voices of the West in the formulation of the problems for the Third World” (221). Dutta was particularly concerned with E-E’s potentially negative influences on discussions of community health. He called for and later refined a model of culture-centered health communication designed to encourage local people to assert power within their communities and over the institutions preventing them from achieving healthy lives. In many respects, Dutta’s work reflected and reinforced the direction that cutting-edge E-E academics and practitioners were trying to move the field (i.e., toward greater community participation. Harter, Sharma, Pant, Singhal, & Sharma), while announcing to funding agencies such as USAID that the era of elite-driven E-E was coming to a close. While such critiques of E-E forged a path for more ethical interventions, they did little to address the pragmatic issues involved in learning the craft of pro-social message and programme design. As Umutima w’intare illustrates, even when interventions emerge from the community, novice practitioners are often more concerned with building an audience than breaking down barriers. Or, if they are focused on moving their societies forward, they often lack experience probing the depths of collective consciousness or negotiating competing values to achieve their desired results. This is especially true in the thorny realm of gender.

In terms of gender equity, modern Rwanda is perhaps the world’s most paradoxical nation. In 1999, just five years after the genocide, Rwanda’s Parliament passed a law enabling women—even widows—to legally inherit land, a radical departure from existing laws and customs (Benschop; Powley). Two years later, Parliament passed an anti-violence law aimed at protecting children from “exploitation, neglect... abandonment, and forced or premature... marriage” (Powley). In 2003, Rwanda ratified a widely-lauded gender sensitive Constitution, which created a number of new policies and institutions including the National Gender Monitoring Office (NEPAD). Shortly thereafter, Rwanda increased the number of female police officers and created “gender desks” at local police stations and within the military to handle gender based violence complaints (UNIFEMa; Rwanda National Police). In 2008, female candidates won 56 percent of seats in Parliament, earning the nation an auspicious distinction as the country with the ‘most women in Parliament (UNIFEMb). Despite these legal victories, Rwanda is still one of the most dangerous places to be female. Rwandan women and girls are at great risk of being the victims of violence in their homes and communities. In a recent United Nations-Rwanda report, Rwandan interviewees suggested that most women are physically abused by their husbands. More than one-third of pregnant women face “intimate partner violence”, according to a recent medical study (Ntaganira, Muula, Masaisa, Dusabeyezu, Siziya, & Rudatsikira). When interviewing a Rwandan public servant in New York City, I asked what percentage of Rwandan wives are physically abused by their husbands. She replied grimly, “all of them are.” While familial violence is certainly lower than her assessment, it is a pervasive part of the culture, as Danielle de Lame noted in her renowned anthropological treatise on rural Rwandan life. De Lame recounted conversations about gender in which prevalent cultural beliefs were expressed, for example: “a man who [does] not beat his wife [has] lost interest in her” (208-209) and “[a] woman who has never been beaten doesn’t know she is a woman” (416). Thus, while statistics of gender based violence vary greatly in national and international reports and personal interviews, insiders and outsiders concur that the nation has not yet been able to secure basic safety for women despite its role as a world leader in gender reform. The 2007 national rape statistic – 2935 reported rapes in a nation that likely witnessed hundreds of thousands or even millions of sexual assaults (United Nations-Rwanda) —
illustrates one of the main obstacles to progress: victims do not come forward to the police. While the reasons for their non-reporting are varied, one pervasive cause is the prominence of the pride narrative, which suggests that individual men are the rightful protectors of their families. Lions are the guardians of their prides, even when they are the ones occasioning violence within them.

The Lion, Lioness, and Police Officer: A Radio Drama Destined for Low Ratings

There is an illustrative [Rwandan] myth about Mutwale, a lion who rules over his fertile land, the imagined territory of Turibo. Then an invading group of lions, headed by Kabutindi from the far off territory of Mahanga, tries to conquer the kingdom and change the subjects' culture. Mutwale refuses to change his culture, 'to betray his culture, his own identity and that of his people.' War follows brought by the power and evil from Kabutindi and Mutwale is sent into exile. At the end of the lesson, the school children are asked to: 'Give some concrete examples drawn from real situations of the history of Rwanda which are inspired by the story.' Clearly, this lesson teaches that the monarchy was a golden period of cohesion that was disrupted by outside forces. The story ends with the vacant throne and a lonely lion in exile.

- Ananda Breed, Senior Lecturer at the University of East London and researcher of ‘Theatre in Post-Genocide Rwanda’, recounting a parable printed in a Rwandan secondary school history workbook.

Traditional Rwandan culture is rife with references to lions and prides, metaphors for competing families headed by fierce male protectors. Poetic imaginings of the long-ago rule of lions recounted a simpler time of honor and order (Breed; Constans). Majestic lions were contrasted with “sickly hyenas and vultures” aiming to profit from violence and discord (Peterson xiv), an allusion to greedy foreign usurpers. During the genocide, lion parables encouraged the protection of other people’s family members – especially potentially dangerous men – as a brave and worthy deed (Kohen). Lion and pride narratives even suggested the proper gender segregation of work: males “protected” their homes and families by fixing roofs, for example, while females secured food and tended to the young (CGCD) Public Lecture; Ryan and Balocating). The 1994 genocide greatly upset this “natural order.” The immediate violence of the genocide followed by the diminishment of the pride engendered great hardships for women and men.

Rwandan women still suffer the physical, emotional, and interpersonal ravages of the genocide. During the genocide, hundreds of thousands of women were raped (Newbury & Baldwin; Chu & Brouwer). Female HIV/AIDS and sexually transmitted disease rates skyrocketed, especially among younger women (Chu & Brouwer). Widowed women were vulnerable to eviction from their land (Carpenter; Ryan & Balocating; Totten). Many acceded to new marriages or protective sexual arrangements in order to survive (Sharlach). Following the genocide, when women sought judicial remedies for the sex crimes they had endured – often via the gacaca, or people’s, courts – they encountered judges with little sensitivity toward gender based violence or the use of rape as a weapon of war (Carpenter; Naraghi-Anderlini).

Many women reported being re-traumatised by their experiences in the legal system (Carpenter). Negative incidents reinforced their beliefs that such matters are better dealt with inside the family. But as women turned inward for protection and support, they found damaged and angry male relatives and partners.

In the spring of 1994, millions of Rwandan men were literally and symbolically tortured and emasculated. In one of the more gruesome instances of genocidal violence, Tutsi men were castrated to ensure the destruction of their lineage (Taylor). They were also raped and sexually humiliated in an attempt to demonstrate their weaknesses (Lautze, Raven-Roberts; Sivakumaran). Rwandan men, both Hutu and Tutsi, suffered the loss of property, the abuse and death of family members, and the destruction of their society and country in the span of one springtime. And though millions of men did not participate in the killings, they were not able to stop them either. Called to protect their families from unprecedented violence, many men did what they had to do to survive – they hid or ran away. Those who had felt emasculated in the past, raped women as they slaughtered; those emasculated by the genocide, visited gender violence on women in the years following the tragedy. Today, many Rwandan men are afflicted by post-traumatic stress, guilt, and rage. Feelings of inadequacy are heightened by the nation’s high unemployment (Kezio-Musoke), which denies most rural men the opportunity to economically protect or provide for their families. These circumstances – echoed in post-conflict societies throughout the world – foster a climate ripe for domestic violence. And, like many societies around the world, Rwanda has historically suppressed reporting of domestic violence due to concerns with “privacy and the sanctity of the family” (Gordon & Crehan). But Rwandan leaders and women’s rights activist have challenged this
Cultural tradition since the genocide, and in many ways, the culture has begun to change.

In the aftermath of the violence, women gained power in Rwanda. More than one-third of households were headed by women, who quickly learned how to pay taxes, fix roofs, and otherwise safeguard their families and assets (Newbury & Baldwin; Ryan & Balocating). Women’s groups formed throughout the country, particularly female agronomy associations in rural areas (Ryan). Women mayors and parliamentarians were elected and passed landmark reforms (Hernden and Randell). Gacaca courts throughout the nation recognized rape as a genocide crime and women were urged to reveal their attackers (Chu & Brouwer). National and local politicians ratified gender-based violence laws and crafted administrative protocols for processing domestic violence complaints. Policymakers, academics, and progressives urged Rwandans to reinvent their society. Gender was at the forefront of these discussions, and elites seemed to agree that the rule of the lion should be replaced by the rule of law. This change was underway by the time our class convened in the Confucius Center of KIE. Throughout the early 2000s, Rwandan society embraced the rule of law. Retributional violence largely ceased following the passage of new codes and no-nonsense police enforcement. Rwandans overwhelmingly respected the rulings of the gacaca courts, even when they allowed genocide perpetrators to return home after confessing to their crime (Gusongoirye). Citizens routinely reported crimes to officials at public town hall meetings (e.g., those following compulsory communal labor, or umuganda). They seemingly embraced the short and long-term plans outlined by the Kagame Administration — even naming their salons and sundry shops “Vision 2020” after the first strategic plan. Of course, Rwandans have typically obeyed official dictates (Uvin). But the early 2000s were different. Rwandans began to trust that certain domestic disputes could be settled in public forums. But extending that line of thinking to gender-based violence would be a hard-sell according to my students. A story about a lion, lioness, and police officer? Who would tune in for that?

**Umutima w’intare: A Family Drama that Reinforced Traditional Values**

Umutima w’intare could have been called “John’s Family”, as all plot lines began and ended with John, the patriarch. As the students envisioned him, John was a “negative” character who “never listens to women because they are a ‘domestic asset’ and subscribes to the old culture” (KIE project group #2). Despite his status as one of the characters that listeners were supposed to reject, John retained power over his fictional family throughout the project pitch. His wife, Nyiramiruho, acted as his enforcer, attempting to domesticate their renegade daughter-in-law, Kivanvari. Kivanvari was the only truly “transitional character” in that she was considering family planning, an innovative and potentially pro-social idea. Her husband, Bosco, blindly followed his father’s footsteps (KIE project group #2). Though the students wanted Bosco to serve as a transitional character, they had not figured out how he could change his ways in a believable manner. They asked for their classmates’ help in brainstorming how a dutiful son might balance the teachings of his father with the desires of his wife.

Two “positive” characters existed outside of the family structure: Mujyanama, the village health advisor, and Bazikubana, a neighbor who tried to mediate village disputes. Though both characters were scheduled to appear throughout the first season, they had minor roles. Neither possessed great facility or agency. They occasionally dropped by the family compound with middling pieces of information or advice, but otherwise minded their own business. The real drama unfolded among the family members. And because three out of four were completely loyal to the patriarch, progress was limited.

Somewhere in the storyline, domestic violence occurred — it was, after all, the self-selected focus of the students’ project — but the details were hazy and the incident was kept within the family. The two positive characters did not appear on the scene following the incident, and the victim did not consider the possibility of legal recourse. While the details of Kivanvari’s injuries and reactions to the abuse remained unclear, John emerged as a comic genius. Though the students had never seen the classic U.S. television series “All in the Family”, their John was reminiscent of the lead character, Archer Bunker. Unfortunately, John lacked the educative irony of his alter-ego. His lines engendered uproarious laughter, but held few lessons. At the conclusion of their presentation, President Barack Obama delivered a stern epilogue about the evils of hitting one’s wife (note: the students were allowed to choose “anyone” they wanted to deliver their lasting lesson). Then, the students opened the floor for questions.

As the students answered questions about Umutima w’intare, I was reminded of dozens of other Q & A sessions I have witnessed in University classrooms. When queried about the potential impact of their radio drama, the students highlighted its marketability and potential viewership. John was funny, they reminded us, and the family shared
many commonalities with other Rwandan families. Interpersonal issues such as the challenge of relating to in-laws would resonate with listeners. They would tune in to hear familiar dramas unfold; they would experience parasocial empathy with characters like themselves (e.g., father, mother, son, daughter-in-law). And they would stay tuned for months, the students explained, because the stories would be fast-paced and entertaining. The group had worked hard to sow the seeds for dramatic plot development. “But impact,” I explained, “can also relate to how society will change as a result of the programme. How will this soap opera change Rwanda?” “It will cause families to discuss how domestic violence is wrong,” one male student answered earnestly.

While family discussion was a laudable outcome, I wanted the students to speak on aspects of structural change, institutionalised gender discrimination, and the like—just as their leaders and parliamentarians were. I hoped that they would leverage emerging cultural support for the rule of law. At the very least, I wanted them to interrogate the “old culture” of John’s imagination. I lobbed more questions; they became confused. In the end, they departed the stage amidst uproarious applause, and I awarded them an A for their project. After all, they had invented a radio drama in the span of three weeks during their first-ever E-E course—in their fourth language. That seemed like “A” work to me.

But the experience solidified a realisation I had come to over years of teaching communication for social change units and courses: students struggle with the concept and praxis of entertaining the masses in order to engender social change. Even within their home cultures, it is difficult for students to recognise the underlying causes of social inequity and devise ways to remedy them. Once they articulate the barriers preventing change, students typically focus more heavily on creating a marketable product than a nuanced plot that will move the culture forward. Their focus makes perfect sense. It is easier to entertain than to change the minds and hearts of the people. Experienced E-E practitioners struggle to balance marketability and impact too. But in the hands of students, the “sellability” focus can undermine the message, or—as in the case of Umuitima w’intare—reinforce the negative values preventing social transformation. But this is why students have instructors to accompany them along their educational journeys.

Conclusion: Why and How We Can Teach Students about Changemaking

Discussions of social change—especially homegrown change—are an important part of any course or curriculum. In fact, one of the best possible outcomes of higher education would be the graduation of students able to create change in their lives, families, communities, and the world. When we train culturally-sensitive changemakers, we produce individuals capable of solving problems, mediating disputes, and leading the way forward. They require tools such as Entertainment-Education and other pedagogies of the popular to complete their work. And, they need to test out these tools in social change laboratories, or University classrooms. But as students undertake social change experiments, it is our job to critically interrogate their assumptions, methodologies, and results. We might begin to do so by asking the following 15 questions of our apprentices:

1. How would you know if you had not gotten to the root cause of a problem or social ill?
2. How would you know if you had developed an exhaustive list of all of the people and institutions connected to the problem or social ill?
3. How would you determine what people in a society or culture already believed about a particular issue, problem, or social ill?
4. How could you be sure that your data was accurate or trustworthy (e.g., reliability, validity)?
5. How would you decide if a certain value or belief was good for you? For society?
6. What words would you use to describe this goodness (e.g., fairness, justice, equity)?
7. How would you determine which stories, metaphors, and images resonated with a particular group of people?
8. Once you determined this information, how would you use it pragmatically and ethically?
9. How would you begin a discussion with someone very likely to disagree with you about a very important topic?
10. How would you begin a discussion with 1,000,000 people very likely to disagree with you about a very important topic?
Heart of a Lion, Mind Full of Pride: The Paradox of Teaching E-E as a Heuristic for Homegrown Change in Rwanda

11. How would you engage in a discussion with someone trying to convince you to believe something you will (likely) never believe?

12. How would you know that the change you desire in your life, your community, or the world is positive or good or constructive (i.e., not negative or bad or destructive)?

13. How would you validate this conclusion (i.e., of positivity)?

14. Once you determined that you were doing something good, how would you determine if it was working?

15. If you failed to produce the change you sought, how would you react?

Questions such as these can aid students in developing the self-critical and methodologically rigorous habits of mind required of skilled practitioners. We should be prepared to lead students through such exercises and to devote considerable time to addressing difficult questions of intention, enactment, impact, and assessment. Further, we should drive home the point that generating interest among the people is an important first step in occasioning new dialogue—not the end goal. In all of this, we must never forget the lasting lesson of Umutima w'intare: Entertainment-Education is a sophisticated tool that is easy to misunderstand or misappropriate—even by those with lion-sized hearts.

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**YOUTH CULTURE AND NEW MEDIA: A STUDY OF TELECOMMUNICATIONS ADVERTISEMENTS IN NIGERIA**

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The first telecommunications company introduced into the Nigerian economy by the British colonial administration was known as the Posts and Telegraph (P&T), a government-owned telecommunications outfit that was re-branded at political independence as Nigeria Telecommunications (NITEL), following the merging of the P&T with Nigeria's External Telecommunications (NET). “The network was an elite system that served the interest of the European colonial administration while Nigerians did not receive (any) service”, observes Onwumechili (2001). In 1999 when Chief of Olusegun Obasanjo assumed office as the President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria there were about 400,000 telephone lines in existence. He eventually introduced the Global System of Mobile Telecommunications (GSM) in 2001. Two operators, MTN International Ltd (later MTN (Nig) Limited) and Econet (later V-mobile, now Zain) were initially licensed. Globacom entered the market in 2003, a company which in addition to GSM services also became the Second National Operator (SNO). The fourth GSM operator Etisalat entered into the arena in 2008.

**Collier (1994) says that culture is “a historically transmitted system of symbols, meanings and norms” and that culture is what people think, feel, say and do at any particular time. Moreover, we see culture as dynamic, learned, transmissible, interrelated, cumulative, universal, yet relative. Because culture is subject to constant changes, it is regarded as non-static or dynamic.**

Olatunji and Laninhun (2009) report that between 1999 and 2007, the mobile telephone sector of Nigeria’s telecommunications industry witnessed a rapid growth. There were 35,000 GSM lines in 1999, which increased to about 37 million lines at the end of 2007 and has climbed to over 80 million lines at the close of 2010. The present researchers are interested in exploring the dominant cultural patterns exhibited by youth models in the telecommunications advertisements in Nigeria.

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