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Rhetoric and Peace at Crossroads: Public and Civic Discourse, Culture and Communication Perspectives

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Noemi MARIN, Lara MARTIN LENGEL / 5
Introduction

Dossier / 9

Bogdan STEFANESCU / 11
Peace talks: indexical master tropes and their potential for conflict in the construction of national identity

Giovanna LEONE, Mauro SARRICA / 33
The making of a civic discourse on controversial historical past: from denial to parrhesia

Joshua FRYE, Macy SUCHAN / 55
Nobel peace speech

M. PHILLIPS-ANDERSON, R. PHILLIPS-ANDERSON / 73
Writing a love letter to your (perceived) enemy: Thích Nhất Hạnh and the rhetoric of nonviolence

Elena FELL / 91
Macro-reasoning and cognitive gaps: understanding post-Soviet Russians’ communication styles

Mulatu Alemayehu MOGES / 111
Ethiopian journalism from self-censoring to silence: a case of reporting on internal conflict

Maria-Sabina DRAGA ALEXANDRU / 129
Global rhetorics of disaster: media constructions of Bataclan and the “Colectiv Revolution” in the wake of 9/11
Anne-Hélène LE CORNEC UBERTINI / 145
La communication publique contre les garants de la paix : l’exemple des signes religieux dans les lieux publics

Rulon WOOD, Julia BERGER, Marouf HASIAN / 173
Public memory, digital media, and prison narratives at Robben Island

Marieke STEIN / 197
De la concertation à la contestation : quand la peur de la rhétorique envenime les controverses sociotechniques

Dominic BUSCH, Jana MÖLLER-KIERO / 215
Sustainability and ethnic peace discourse: in search for synergies from bringing together discourses on intercultural communication and on global sustainability

Varia / 237

Oscar TRAVERSA / 239
Christian Metz and the mediatization

Angelo Maria CIMINO / 255
Mediated Holocaust memories in Italy from 1945 to present

Jairo FERREIRA / 267
Uncertainty and indeterminacy in Brazilian social and media formation: references to think of the problem of recognition in the public space

Notes de lecture et parutions / 287
Introduction

This special issue of *ESSACHESS—Journal of Communication Studies* offers rhetorical and/or cultural-critical perspectives on peace, non-violence, and the role of civic discourse in contemporary times. Intended for both academic and civic readership, the issue covers international scholarship that focuses mainly on the last 30 years of communication and rhetorical perspectives on peace-related discourse, including the historic period following 1989 that created a democratization of public discourse throughout the world, yet engaging even more peace and conflict as paradigmatic perspectives on migration, terrorism, communism, and political and social change. Looking at how the complex relationship between the topoi of *peace* and public discourse of the 21st century continues to remain one of the most challenging dimension both for academic readership and for the citizenry of the world, this special issue *interpellates* (from an Althusserian perspective) areas of communication and discursive studies that highlight distinct and pertinent cultural approaches to peace-related research nowadays. Thus, in order to capture the problematic of peace-related public discourse in the world, as editors, we propose interdisciplinary scholarly contributions that call readership from all discipline such as yet not limited to political communication, rhetorical studies, intercultural and/or international communication, and peace and conflict studies in order to engage with the complex and challenging textures of rhetoric and peace, civic discourse and consensus-building in current times.

Accordingly, the special issue of *ESSACHESS- Journal of Communication* on “Rhetoric and Peace at Crossroads: Public and Civic Discourse, Culture and Communication Perspectives” covers theoretical and case-based scholarship on geopolitics and discourse of peace, on historical public arguments for non-violence, on communication and conflict as cultures of peace, on migration and its peace-related consequences in the 21st century, on nationalism as cultural or political paradigm of national identity as well as on international contexts for the rhetoric of peace. Such a plethora of communication and rhetorical perspectives engages large academic readership from the international arena to examine the challenging studies of unsettled and continuously fluid discourse of *peace* and conflict, with their expansive ranges of civic and public vocabularies that carry culture-specific and culture-general distinct communication styles.

Bogdan STEFANESCU in his remarkable article that opens the special issue develops a four-fold typology of tropes that pertain to national discourse in order to uncover their potential for conflict. The master tropes of *antithesis, simile, metaphor* and *irony* embody structuring discursive principles that highlight a cultural deixis, that is a relationship between national self and its cultural other,
embedded within nationalist rhetoric. While presenting as a case study Romanian discourse of modern and contemporary times, this theoretical approach articulates a four-fold complex and salient paradigm extremely useful when examining all nationalist rhetoric and international contexts of conflict. Giovanna LEONE and Mauro SARRICA examine the pragmatic effects of distinct rhetorical strategies focusing on literal social denial of ingroup violence, taking as their case study the war crimes committed by the Italian Army during the colonial invasion of Ethiopia (1935-36). By exploring the intersection among theories of narratives on national past, social representations of history, conflict discourse and intergroup reconciliation processes, the authors argue for the need to introduce the Foucaultian concept of *parrhesia* as a challenging yet necessary pragmatic move that displaces social myths and assists with the reconciliation processes. Their research invites scholars interested in communication practices and civic discourse analysts to re-evaluate literal social denial when confronting past history and its multiple connotations for the discourse of war crimes of the 20th century.

Moving from war narratives to peace-building discourse, Joshua FRYE and Macy SUCHAN investigate Nobel Peace Speech as a unique international site for public discourse in which Nobel Peace Laureates’ speeches embody crossings between domestic and international issues increasingly pertinent to global audiences. As they analyze the genre of Nobel Peace Speech, the authors define the repetitive form of normative liberal principles and values that function as rhetorical *topoi* for such public discourse. Thus, the authors identify *topoi* such as freedom and justice, appeal to the inviolable, inborn right of human beings to exercise certain political and civil liberties as well as the expectation of equality of protection from totalitarian and tyrannical abuses worldwide, arguing for the importance of rhetoric in maintaining an international vocabulary of peace. Following with rhetorical narratives of and for peace-building, Michael PHILLIPS-ANDERSON and Rachel PHILLIPS-ANDERSON explore the discourse of Vietnamese Buddhist monk and peace activist Thich Nhat Hanh and the role of love in his theory of nonviolence, highlighting his letter on Iraq War addressed to US President George W. Bush and his stand on nonviolence. Invoking the longstanding rhetorical history of letter writing (*Ars dictaminis*), the two scholars contextualize Tich Nhat Hanh’s love letter to one’s perceived enemy within the tradition of nonviolence rhetoric promoted by Mahatma Gandhi and Martin Luther King, Jr.

As communication styles in international contexts tend to lead to conflict and/or cultural misinterpretations, Elena FELL provides a comprehensive cross-cultural analysis of the ways in which post-Soviet Russians and Westerners relate to information, unveiling communication challenges for constructive dialogue. Scholars interested in Russian and post-Soviet cultural identity will find this study very useful, as the author highlights the cultural vocabulary of intuition, arguing how sincerity, emotions, the cultural metaphor of Motherland among
Introduction

others, all permeate public and cultural narratives of Russia. While focusing on presenting the cognitive panorama of past and present Russian identity, the author includes literary references (from Tolstoy, Dostoyevsky, Turgenev, to name a few) along with contemporary film and educational examples as cultural arguments that mark complex (and different from the West) communication styles that function in nowadays post-Soviet culture. Adding to communication styles and the distinct challenges in international contexts, Mulatu Alemayehu MOGES presents conflict reporting within the domestic scene as offered by Ethiopia (2005-2013), depicting cultural difficulties encountered by journalists of two major English-written daily newspapers and the role of self-censorship that justifies journalists’ decision for inclusion and/or exclusion of ethnic-related conflict stories in the mentioned media. Utilizing content analysis and interviews for data collection, the author offers a unique insight into journalistic challenges that explains Ethiopian media culture of that time, finding that marginalization of reports on internal conflicts, omission of ethnic issues, lack of self-reliance, fear-induce reporting and ultimately silence, all impact Ethiopian reporting on internal conflicts in the country.

In light of global emergence of recent violent events such as terrorist attacks and destructive accidents, Maria-Sabina DRAGA ALEXANDRU engages readership with a fascinating study on two tragic events in France and Romania and the respective media constructions of narrative of disaster and mourning. Advancing the argument that a new disaster rhetoric trend is occurring in media-based narratives of such tragedies, the author examines discourse strategies such as the personal and the public ethos of such collective disasters, the rhetorical space construed within journalistic reports as well as reactions of the multitude of audiences when facing collective trauma. Anne-Helene LE CORNEC UBERTINI develops in this issue a comprehensive socio-cultural study of the absence of reciprocity between citizens and respective public institutions on the right to utilize religious signs within their cultural communities at large. The systematic analysis method supports an exhaustive research both on religious signs in very recent times in France as well as a compelling scholarly argument made for the thorough examination of the schism between citizens’ discursive and cultural needs within secular governance unwilling to acknowledge public debate and participation. Rulon WOOD, Julia BERGER and Marouf HASIAN demonstrate in their study the necessity to engage a triangular approach where ethnographic, rhetorical and critical-cultural perspectives carry significant implications in the narrative proposed by Robben Island, South Africa, the small island off the coast of Cape Town, where Nelson Mandela was held for 27 years. An important contribution along with Truth and Reconciliation Commissions studies on strategic use of discourse on peace and national unity, the authors’ outstanding study presents a compelling research perspective that explains how public memory, digital media, and museum rhetoric emphasize themes of triumph over oppression as rhetorical and historical justifications for nation building public argument. Marieke STEIN offers a fascinating case study
on the social and cultural implications of public deliberation practices and civic participation in the recent French debate over the Coal Bed Methane case in Moselle, France. Highlighting the absence of symmetry on rhetorical participation between civic voices and political representatives of official governance, the author reminds readership of the importance of deliberative rhetoric in democratic contexts, of the complex cultural practices that divide political and civic training in public speaking in current times as well as of the role of deliberation in controversies that impact civic communities.

As the end article in the guest issue, the extensive study by Dominic BUSCH and Jana MOLLER-KIERO focuses on sustainability and ethnic peace as inherent to current political discourse. Moreover, the normative frameworks included as part of intercultural research make the case for sustainability discourse to be located at the crux of political dialogue for social change. Arguing that ethnic peace discourse and sustainability rhetoric bring together theoretical and pragmatic approaches, the study identifies a large number of normative cultural orientations that bridge together discourses and perspectives imperative for the creation of a consensual peace discourse in the world.

In conclusion, in this special guest issue Rhetoric and Peace at Crossroads: Public and Civic Discourse, Culture and Communication Perspectives, the multitude of scholarly threads of inquiry intersect communication and rhetorical research and provide novel interrogations for interested scholars from all over the world to continue to examine the rich texture of peace-related discourse, in its uneasy, challenging and continuously fluid relationship with academic studies on the history and/or cultural contexts pertinent to peace and peace-building in current times.

We would like to thank in particular our contributors, editors and the entire ESSACHESS community of reviewers who worked to create this special issue. Special thanks are going to Dr. Stefan BRATOSIN and Dr. Mihaela-Alexandra TUDOR whose guidance and assistance makes such scholarly endeavor a valuable process and a rewarding experience. We are confident that the international scholarly communities interested in political, rhetorical, communication and intercultural studies will find the articles dedicated to the mentioned areas of research to be useful and inspiring as this guest issue represents an academic invitation to engage with peace and peace-building discourse as necessary dimensions in a globalized world.

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