

perspectives

POLITICAL ANALYSES AND COMMENTARY

Issue 1
July 2015

AFRICA

#GameChanger

How is new media changing
political participation in Africa?



This edition of **Perspectives Africa** is published jointly by the offices of the Heinrich-Böll-Stiftung in sub-Saharan Africa.



Heinrich-Böll-Stiftung

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#GameChanger

Increasingly, our “online” lives intersect with the lives we live “offline”. As mobile technology expands its footprint in Africa, connections are made and views exchanged through email or chat rooms as much as they are in face-to-face contact. Political discourse and action is coordinated through Twitter, Facebook and Whatsapp as much as through printed pamphlets. In short, information and communications technologies (ICTs) have fundamentally altered the way we do things, from the most personal to the political.

Such platforms have created an unprecedented expansion of our public sphere. It is now readily possible to share ideas across sections of society and national and continental borders. Easy access to information facilitates wider and faster dissemination of news reports, including those captured by ordinary people. Censorship has become harder to enforce. Twitter and YouTube challenge hierarchies by allowing “unknowns” to contend with high profile voices. In some contexts, the anonymity enabled by the internet is key to defying political power and restrictions.

A game-changer, yes. But towards what end? Widespread information exchange can promote violence and prejudice as easily as tolerance and openness. Rapid news dissemination can inform or obscure. Anonymity enables dissidence – but also surveillance. And most importantly, while it may be a forum for breaking down hierarchies, these technologies are open only to those not already excluded through geography, class, gender, race or origin. As Sarah Chiumbu writes in the opening article here, ICTs may “have radically changed the media and communications landscape in Africa”,

but it is no foregone conclusion that they signify “deepening democracy and accountability”.

The idea of enhancing democratic processes with the help of ICTs is not new. Since the end of World War II, three ages of “electronic democracy” can be identified. Between 1950 and 1960, computers were introduced to aid government effectiveness, particularly in the West. The 1970s and '80s was the age of “teledemocracy”, when telephone, radio and television communication became increasingly sophisticated. The present age of “cyber-democracy” began with the emergence of the internet in the 1990s. Each of the preceding periods held dual optimistic-vs-pessimistic views about the meaning of technology for democratic processes. Similarly today, at least in some quarters, the initial euphoria about what ICTs can achieve in Africa has made way for more cynical responses. After all, the hashtag #BringBackOurGirls has proved unhelpful in summoning Nigerian and global political will and resources to bring back the more than 250 girls abducted by Boko Haram in the northern Nigerian town of Chibok in April 2014.

So how is ICT use changing African societies? To what extent are ICTs fostering inclusive and participatory democracies? To what degree do they reinforce existing political and social institutions, practices and exclusions? The articles gathered in this edition of *Perspectives* capture the complex and plural ways in which Africans are attempting to use ICTs to democratise democracy on the continent, the challenges they face, and the valuable lessons learned.

When it comes to advancing good governance and accountability through ICTs,

as Adi Eyal puts it, “technology is there to facilitate and support processes. It cannot solve any problem on its own”. The Tendai project uses mobile technology to help collect evidence about health services, but this evidence becomes politically relevant only once it is used in traditional advocacy and lobbying activities. In Bagega, the tracking of government funds via social media only becomes meaningful when combined with on-the-ground monitoring, mobilisation and consultation. Political changes do not come about simply because social media tools are available or because hashtags are tweeted, but rather because of an effective combination of factors including levels of dissatisfaction with those in power; the legal extent of freedoms of association, expression and information; an active citizenry; and access to ICTs and other resources, as well as the skills to use them.

Politicians in sub-Saharan Africa have started to embrace ICTs as essential tools of the trade – particularly in Kenya, Nigeria and South Africa, where ICT usage is comparatively high. As in other places, social media have become central components of election campaigns. In 2011, for example, Nigerian President Goodluck Jonathan announced his candidacy on Facebook. While ICTs can facilitate political participation, however, it is a challenge to ensure that they do not reinforce the digital divide (and the associated power differential) between, for example, urban and rural folks or between the genders. Connecting online and offline com-

munities is vital, as are projects that directly challenge discrimination. Jennifer Radloff’s contribution attests to the efforts of African women and feminist organisations to appropriate ICTs to amplify the demands and lived experiences of all women on the continent, and to strengthen African women’s influence in cyber-government.

Unfortunately, such initiatives are too often confronted by online intimidation and violence against women, gays and lesbians, and mass surveillance by repressive (and less repressive) states. Moreover, in line with global trends, cyber-security legislation is being used to sneak in provisions that enable government interception of communications and limitations on free speech and access to information. Such developments threaten to undermine the democratic potential of ICTs altogether.

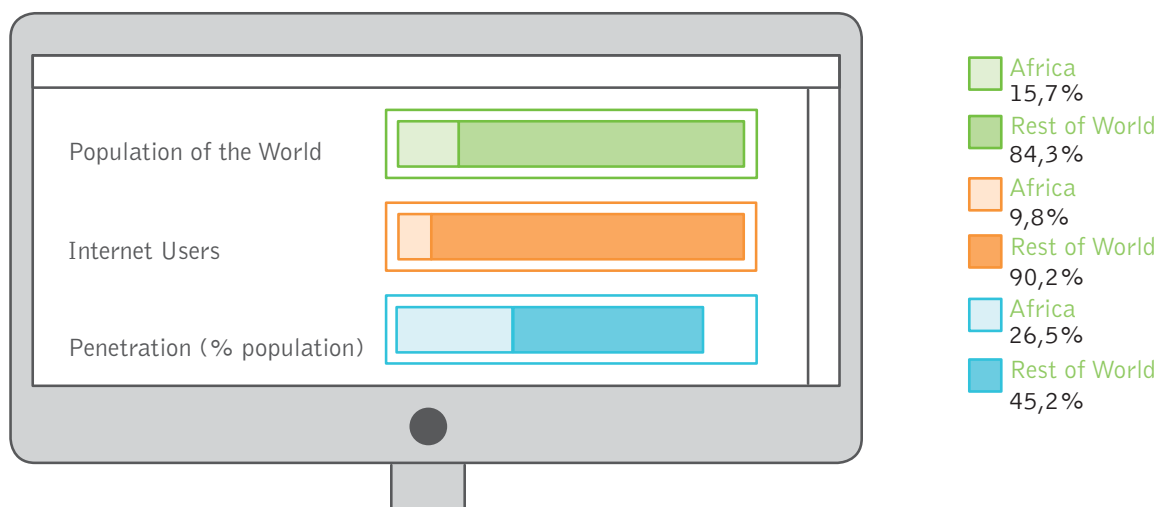
And this is perhaps the most important message the articles in this edition carry: ICTs offer radical possibilities to advance democracy and social justice. However, greater mobilisation and popular education are required to ensure that this remains the case, and that national, regional and continental internet governance finds the correct balance between issues of security and fundamental political rights.

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ICT ACCESS AND USE IN AFRICA

Internet usage statistics for Africa



Source: Internet World Stats: www.internetworldstats.com/stats1.htm

Web Index Rank

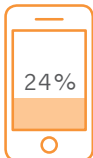
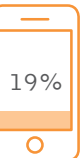
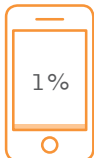
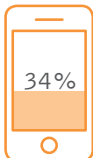
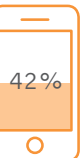
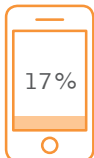
	South Africa	Kenya	Nigeria
UNIVERSAL ACCESS: This index measures whether countries have invested in affordable access to high quality internet infrastructure, as well as investing in the education and skills citizens need to use the Web well.	 55,65	 37,00	 37,28
RELEVANT CONTENT: This index maps both Web use by citizens and the content available in each country, with an emphasis on the extent to which different stakeholders can access information that is relevant to them, in the language that they are most comfortable using and via platforms and channels that are widely available.	 36,17	 36,17	 20,97
FREEDOM AND OPENNESS: This index assesses the extent to which citizens enjoy rights to information, opinion, expression, safety and privacy online.	 56,89	 38,62	 38,01
EMPOWERMENT: This index aims to assess the difference that the Web is making to people, and the extent to which use of the Web by stakeholders is fostering positive change in four key areas: society, economy, politics and environment.	 31,89	 40,32	 19,71

Source: World Wide Web Foundation: thewebindex.org

The highest score is 100. The higher the score the better the ranking.

Cell phone/Smart phone ownership by age

Kenya not shown due to insufficient sample size.

	18-29	30-49	50+
South Africa	 83%  24%	 80%  19%	 64%  1%
Nigeria	 94%  34%	 94%  42%	 81%  17%
Age	18-29	30-49	50+

Source: Pew Research Centre, *Emerging Nations Embrace Internet, Mobile Technology*, 2014.

South Africa

Kenya

Nigeria

Number of internet and Facebook users compared to total population



Total population: 48,375,645
 Internet users: 23,655,690
 Facebook users: 6,269,600



Total population: 45,010,056
 Internet users: 21,273,738
 Facebook users: 2,045,900



Total population: 177,155,754
 Internet users: 67,319,186
 Facebook users: 6,630,200

Source: Internet World Stats: www.internetworldstats.com/stats1.htm

Percentage of internet users who access the internet daily



Percentage of cell phone owners who regularly use their device to access political news



Source: Pew Research Centre, *Emerging Nations Embrace Internet, Mobile Technology*, 2014.

Average price in USD per GB traffic for low, medium and high internet access bundles

	South Africa	Kenya	Nigeria
LOW	 116	 12	 60
MEDIUM	 38	 12	 26
HIGH	 11	 6	 11

Source: Schumann R and Kende M, *Lifting Barriers to Internet Development in Africa*, Report for the Internet Society, 2013.

*Disclaimer: Available statistics on ICT usage and access in Africa can widely differ.

New Media Technologies and Political Participation in Africa

Sarah Chiumbu

Introduction

When a paper on new media and social protests in South Africa was presented at a roundtable seminar at the University of Witwatersrand in 2011, the familiar, almost inevitable view was raised that Africans' use of information and communication technologies (ICTs) is still low compared to other regions due to the "digital divide". In response, one panellist stood up and said: "Yes, it is true that the digital divide exists in Africa – but we also know that millions of people on the continent are connected to the internet and social media platforms. Our attention should then be drawn to consider how these millions are using new technologies. We cannot run away from the real presence of ICTs in sub-Saharan Africa."

Indeed, Africa is connected. Recent statistics show that 26 percent of the population used the internet by the end of 2014. As for mobile phones, "[a] report by Swedish telecommunications company Ericsson said that mobile subscriptions in sub-Saharan Africa were set to surpass 635 million by the end of 2014 – a figure 'predicted to rise to around 930 million by the end of 2019'".

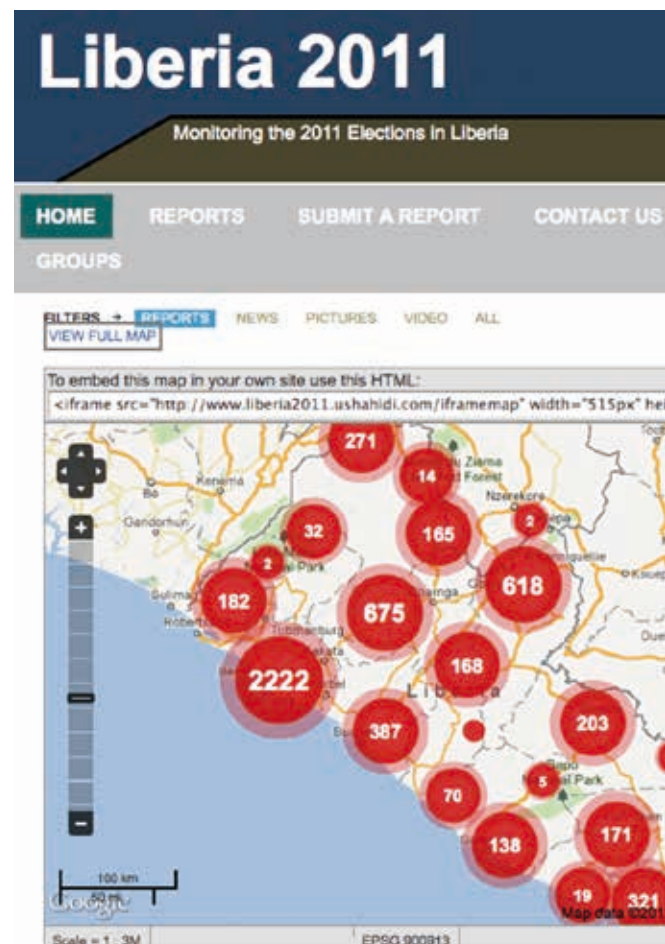
There is no doubt that digital technologies have contributed to a dramatic shift that has empowered individuals and non-state actors on an unprecedented scale. Characteristically networkable, dense, compressible and interactive, ICTs provide (in theory) greater opportunities for political participation and engagement than do the traditional mass media. We have seen new media technologies open up civic engagement across the globe, albeit with tensions and contradictions.

In Africa, political participation and civic engagement have been restricted by both colonial and postcolonial political

and socio-economic realities. The "public sphere" and media systems under colonialism were restrictive and exclusionary, leading black people to create various forms of subaltern counter-public spheres. The postcolonial state did not fundamentally alter the situation and the continent witnessed attempts by successive post-independence governments to limit access to information. Despite the opening up of media space during sub-Saharan Africa's "third wave" of democratisation in



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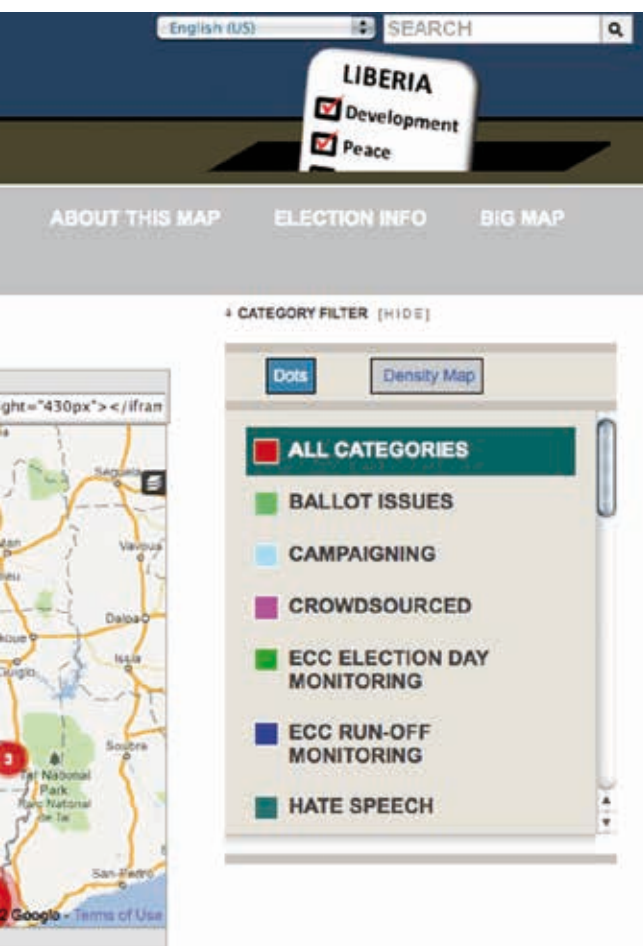


the 1990s and the toppling of many one-party states, restrictions have continued, as freedom-of-expression organisations such as the Media Institute of Southern Africa (MISA) and the Media Foundation for West Africa (MFWA) continue to report. Traditional media's democratic potential has been curtailed by different shades of authoritarianism and economic imperatives. In many cases, colonial laws that had banned or inhibited forms of expression were maintained, and sometimes enhanced.²

Many people hail the proliferation of ICTs as ushering in a “fourth wave” of democratisation on the continent. The new media technologies promise to include a greater number of people in the mediated public sphere. Citizens can bypass both state or market media restrictions, as seen in the Arab Spring in 2011 and food riots in Mozambique in 2010. However, questions still remain about the extent to which ICTs are facilitating political participation and how much this is leading to greater democratisation and accountability on the continent.

The Contradictions of ICTs in (Post-) Repressive Contexts

There is no question of the link between democracy and access to information. No genuine democracy may exist without vibrant media and an informed citizenry, and yet the media–democracy nexus in sub-Saharan Africa has been fraught with challenges. New media technologies appear to resuscitate hope for social and political change in Africa and, indeed, ICTs have been at the centre of the democratic project in many countries. In repressive and post-repressive countries such as Ethiopia, Zimbabwe and Sudan, they have sometimes successfully enlarged the democratic project. At other times, they have been obstructed. In Zimbabwe, for example, ICTs allowed activists and ordinary citizens to sidestep the restrictive media laws passed by the Zanu-PF government between 2000 and 2008. The monopoly on information that the govern-



ing party had held since independence in 1980 was broken as people began to access independent news and discuss politics on social media platforms. ICTs enabled the public to subvert the dominant discourses peddled by the state-owned media.

A key issue is the role of mobile phones in general elections in Africa. In Zimbabwe, election results have long been widely disputed, with allegations of rigging, vote-buying, coercion and other irregularities. In 2008, citizens used text messages to monitor the elections, and any instances of irregularities were shared on mobile phones.³ Similarly, in Sudan's 2010 elections, civil society organisations used the Ushahidi platform to support the independent monitoring and reporting of the country's first multi-party elections in 24 years. With web and SMS reporting, the Sudan Vote Monitor (www.sudanvotemonitor.com) attracted wide interest from citizens and other organisations.⁴ Across the continent, elections are no longer the preserve of political parties, the mainstream media, electoral commissions and observer missions. Citizens are playing a more prominent role in monitoring and safeguarding their votes.

The Ethiopian regime has recognised the power of ICTs to empower citizens and give them a voice. As a result, it has repeatedly censored internet content, closed websites and intercepted SMS messages using highly sophisticated tools. Bloggers and online journalists have been arrested under the country's harsh laws. As the digital infrastructure is mostly state-owned, government is in a position of complete control.

There has also been an increase in states using laws against defamation or subversion to prosecute online expression, and not only against journalists. Citizens have been arrested for comments that are said to offend or to pose threats to national security. The first such incident happened in Zimbabwe in 2011, when a Facebook user posted a message to the page of then-Prime Minister Morgan Tsvangirai that referred to the Arab Spring and the shockwaves it was sending to dictators.⁵ In Kenya, a Facebook user was arrested in 2012 for making a defamatory comment towards an assistant minister in the government.⁶ In 2015, a 25-year-old Kenyan man was jailed for insulting President Uhuru Kenyatta in a post on a social media site.⁷

Man holding a poster during the 2011 protests in Egypt.
Source: Wikipedia



While many governments are clamping down on ICTs, they are also using them for their political campaigns. In the 2011 Zambian elections, political parties for the first time communicated their messages via websites, social media pages and bulk SMS messages. The same happened in elections in Uganda in 2011, Kenya in 2013, South Africa in 2014 and Nigeria in 2015.

From the discussion above, we see that digital technologies offer both opportunities and risks. On the one hand, they offer democratising, emancipatory and mobilising potential. On the other, they open the way for repression and surveillance.

ICT, Social Mobilisation and NGO Movement Building

“We use Facebook to schedule our protests, Twitter to coordinate and YouTube to tell the world.” (Egyptian activist)⁸

Since the 2010/11 Arab revolutions, the role of new media technologies in allowing ordinary people to effectively organise themselves for political change has been a hot topic. Although writers such as Malcolm Gladwell⁹ and Evgeny Morozov¹⁰ warn against techno-euphoria, stating that ICTs reinforce existing political structures rather than transforming them, there is no doubt ICTs facilitated – and accelerated – the revolutions in both Tunisia and Egypt. Since then, we have seen innovative use of these technologies in mobilisation and the adoption of decentralised, non-hierarchical organisational forms in social movements and non-governmental organisations (NGOs). For instance, in Malawi, digital technologies played a central role in prior to, during, and following the national demonstrations against poor governance in July 2011. People gathered, posted and updated information via social networks on a scale not seen before.

At the same time, social mobilisation has been affected by state disconnections and restrictions. Uganda shut down Facebook and Twitter for 24 hours during the Walk to Work protest in April 2011.¹¹ In the 2010 Mozambican food riots, the government ordered cellphone operator Vodacom Mozambique to shut down its SMS services.¹² Similarly, the Central African Republic shut down SMS services of all four mobile phone companies for eight weeks in the midst of political demonstrations against the transitional government that came to

power in January 2014.¹³ In April 2015, during waves of protests opposing Burundian President Pierre Nkurunziza’s bid for a third term, phone lines of private radio stations were cut.¹⁴

Digital Inequality and the Need to Strengthen “Old Media” Ecologies

As ICTs have spread across the continent, those who have little or no access are becoming increasingly marginalised. Although mobile phone penetration is nearing the 100-percent mark in many countries, there is still a divide between those with access to smartphones and those without. As more affluent people get access to faster broadband, those who do not, especially in

As more affluent people get access to faster broadband, those who do not, especially in the rural areas, become ever more distanced from the kind of political participation the new technologies allow.

the rural areas, become ever more distanced from the kind of political participation the new technologies allow. The differentiated uses and knowledge of ICTs, whether through lack of access, lack of interest or lack of computer literacy, is creating “digital inequality”.¹⁵ Those with digital capital participate more fully in digitally mediated spaces and enjoy many advantages over their digitally disadvantaged counterparts.¹⁶

While focusing on the positive changes brought about by new technologies, it is also important to keep in mind that these new forms of communicating, interacting and networking do not replace traditional modes of political and civic engagement. A “communicative ecology”¹⁷ approach explores the modes of communication and media that are available to communities in their locales. Communicative ecology theorists distinguish different “layers”, intricately entwined and mutually constitutive, which can provide opportunities for empowerment: discursive (themes or content of both mediated and unmediated communication), technological (ICTs, TV, radio), and social (community meetings, informal networks, institutions). Our accounts of the relation-

ship between citizens, media and political participation should include traditional (or old), new, and alternative media in their entirety, including such forms as theatre, music, art, spoken-word poetry, etc. A case in point is the Burkina Faso revolution in October 2014 that ended the 27-year presidency of Blaise Compaoré. Organic, people-driven and with little reliance on digital technologies, the revolution managed to gather thousands of people at the *Place de la Nation* in the capital.¹⁸ Their tactics also need to be documented.

Enclosure of the Digital Commons?

The increasing demand for smartphones in Africa has run in tandem with growing state interest in mobile telephony. Through SIM registration – the most pervasive form of control across the continent – service providers are obliged to collect their customers' personal data (name, current address, profession etc.) for the state. Since no registration means no access to service, people comply with procedures whose consequences they might not be aware of, although these regulations have a range of implications for inclusion, surveillance and development.¹⁹

The near silence from African civil society regarding state surveillance could indicate the extent to which African governments have succeeded, quite secretively, to pursue policies and legislation that inspire digital insecurity.

Another area of concern is threats to the privacy and security of users, whether from state surveillance or third-party access. For instance, applications such as Google, which come already installed on most Android devices, have the ability to read and analyse usage and adjust themselves to the user's preferences. Such capabilities can be beneficial to a user, for their convenience and computing genius. However, they can also be compromising in the hands of a state bent on limiting political participation by creating a culture of censorship and digital insecurity.

In the absence of digital literacy, and with the insistence on a single narrative with regards to mobile telephony in Africa

(“mobile is accelerating development”), most governments have created legal frameworks that allow them to build massive surveillance capabilities to monitor and intercept the private communications. In most countries, the vulnerability of citizens to state power has become a permanent feature. ICTs have increased this vulnerability.

The African Union's Draft Convention on the Confidence and Security in Cyberspace notes that:

Africa is faced with security gap [sic] which, as a result of poor mastery of security risks, increases the technological dependence of individuals, organizations and States on computer systems and networks that tend to control their information technologies needs and security facilities. African States are in dire need of innovative criminal policy strategies that embody States, societal and technical responses to create a credible legal climate for cyber security.

Although states have a legitimate responsibility for ensuring digital security for its people, the language of the African Union paints a picture that prioritises restriction above freedom, of digital enclosures rather than an enlargement of scope and possibility. The near silence from African civil society regarding state surveillance could indicate the extent to which African governments have succeeded, quite secretively, to pursue policies and legislation that inspire digital insecurity. Hence, there remains an urgent need for sincere inclusive dialogue that can give as much weight to citizens' rights to online privacy, security and expression as is given to their rights offline. Surveillance of online platforms contributes to an atmosphere of self-censorship.

Conclusion

This paper has taken a mixed view of the role of ICTs for broadening democracy. There is no doubt that they have radically changed the media and communications landscape in Africa, in the process opening up new spaces for communication, political deliberation and free expression. For civil society actors and social movements especially, digital media and online social networking applications have changed the way in which dissent is organised.

However, ICT access and online politi-

cal deliberation or activism in sub-Saharan Africa cannot automatically be interpreted as a sign of deepening democracy and accountability. The euphoria concerning the potential of new technologies to transform society and increase democracy is based on a flawed instrumentalist assumption that technologies by themselves have transformative power.²¹ There also seems to be no direct link between the increase in digital users and improvements in democracy. For example, Nigeria and Kenya stand out for their increase in ICT users, but we also see deteriorating human rights and governance issues in these countries.

Political participation through digital media also seems to be threatened by the

steady rise of various surveillance tactics that are being introduced by governments around the continent. Repression in the offline world seems to be encroaching on digital spaces.

As the dominant, but restrictive, macro-level developmental readings of ICT usage in Africa are slowly giving way to studies that focus on African ICT users and their practices, there is still need for more nuanced studies of the actual relationship between ICTs, democracy and social change. Apart from the few examples in North Africa, there is little documentation from other parts of Africa of how ordinary activists and social movements use the tools of digital technology to enhance their struggles. ■■■

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Tendai: The Benefits of Mobile Data Collection

Adi Eyal

The unavailability of medicines (“stockouts”) at public healthcare facilities can have a disastrous effect on poor families. Sick patients and their caregivers may have to travel far to another clinic, purchase medicine at expensive private pharmacies, or, in the worst case, forego medical treatment entirely while clinics await supplies – a situation that may persist for months at a time. Medicines purchased at private pharmacies can have a significant impact on a household’s budget, possibly wiping it out entirely. Moreover, it exposes families to the ever-present risk of counterfeit medicines that at best have little or no effect, and at worst may endanger the patient.

Tendai, a programme to monitor stockouts at primary healthcare facilities, was implemented by the Southern African Regional Programme on Access to Medicines and Diagnostics (www.sarpam.net) and a network of access-to-medicines advocacy organisations across the region. It sought to collect evidence that could be used to influence policy and improve the delivery of medicines to the poor. Approximately 140 monitors in South Africa, Zimbabwe, Zambia, Malawi, Botswana, Tanzania and Mozambique surveyed facilities over the three-year period between 2011 and 2014.

Surveys were conducted monthly at a chosen set of facilities in order to monitor trends. The data was collated, processed and analysed at a central location and results were reported back to the organisations. Armed with this evidence, access-to-medicines advocates could approach decision-makers in the health ministries to lobby for interventions.

The project saw many small successes and a few larger ones. Monitors in Zimbabwe lobbied the ministry of health to resolve stockouts of co-trimoxazole and coartemether, an antibiotic and antimalarial respectively. Stockouts of rabies vaccine were addressed in Malawi, and antimalarials in Zambia. With support from their colleagues, monitors were able to motivate communities to improve the condition of clinics, for example, by fixing boreholes or building waiting areas for patients. Human resources issues contin-



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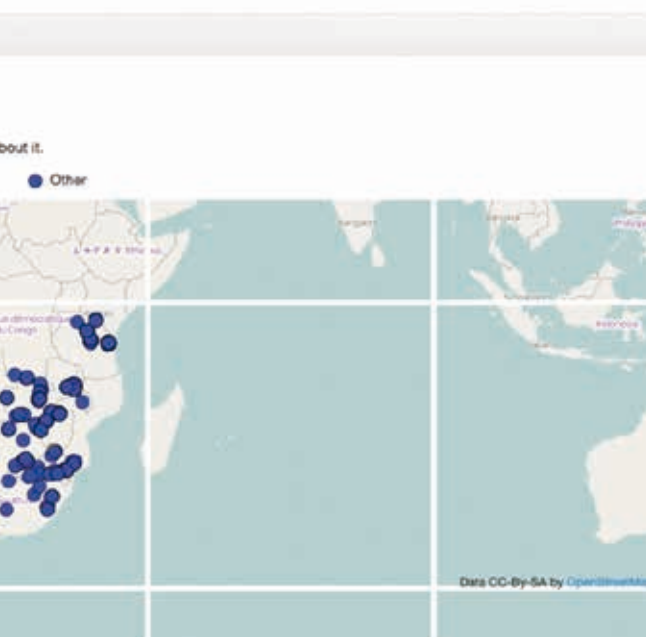
ue to be addressed, with organisations using data from other clinics to provide context to the services available at each facility.

Logistically, this process would have been impossible using traditional “pencil and paper” survey methods. The old methods would typically only allow for one or two waves of monitoring, which would likely require extensive time and resources to complete. Paper surveys could often be lost, data had to be manually captured and processed, and the results had to be disseminated back to organisations. Issues of data quality could enter the system easily at multiple points. Answers might be poorly recorded, and data capture could introduce additional errors.

Enter mobile phones and mobile networks that are available in rural villages, or at least in neighbouring towns. Recognising the inherent difficulties of traditional survey methods, the Tendai project took a gamble on using inexpensive smartphones to improve survey workflow. It perhaps seems like an obvious choice today, but it was a risky decision in 2011.

Mobile phones are actually mini-computers in disguise. Open-source software that can mimic paper-based surveys includes features to enable translation between English and local languages, complex skip patterns, and data validation. Data validation in particular dramatically improves the quality of data collected. Typically, the later in the collection process that data quality issues are identified, the more expensive it is to correct them. “Dirty data” at the analysis stage is all but impossible to correct. By contrast, validation using mobile phones at the point of data capture detects many mistakes, e.g. “this field needs to be a number”, “this field is restricted to yes, no answers”. Even complex validation is possible: e.g. “a surveyed child weighed 10 kilograms last month; it is impossible for her to weigh 20 kilograms now”.

There are other innovations that would be impossible with paper survey methods. Mobile phones can take photos and cap-



Map of facilities monitored.
© OpenStreetMap

ture GPS coordinates. They can be used as voice recorders to collect important qualitative data through interviews. They can integrate with complex sensors such as heart rate monitors and data quality sensors to collect accurate data, often at a low cost.

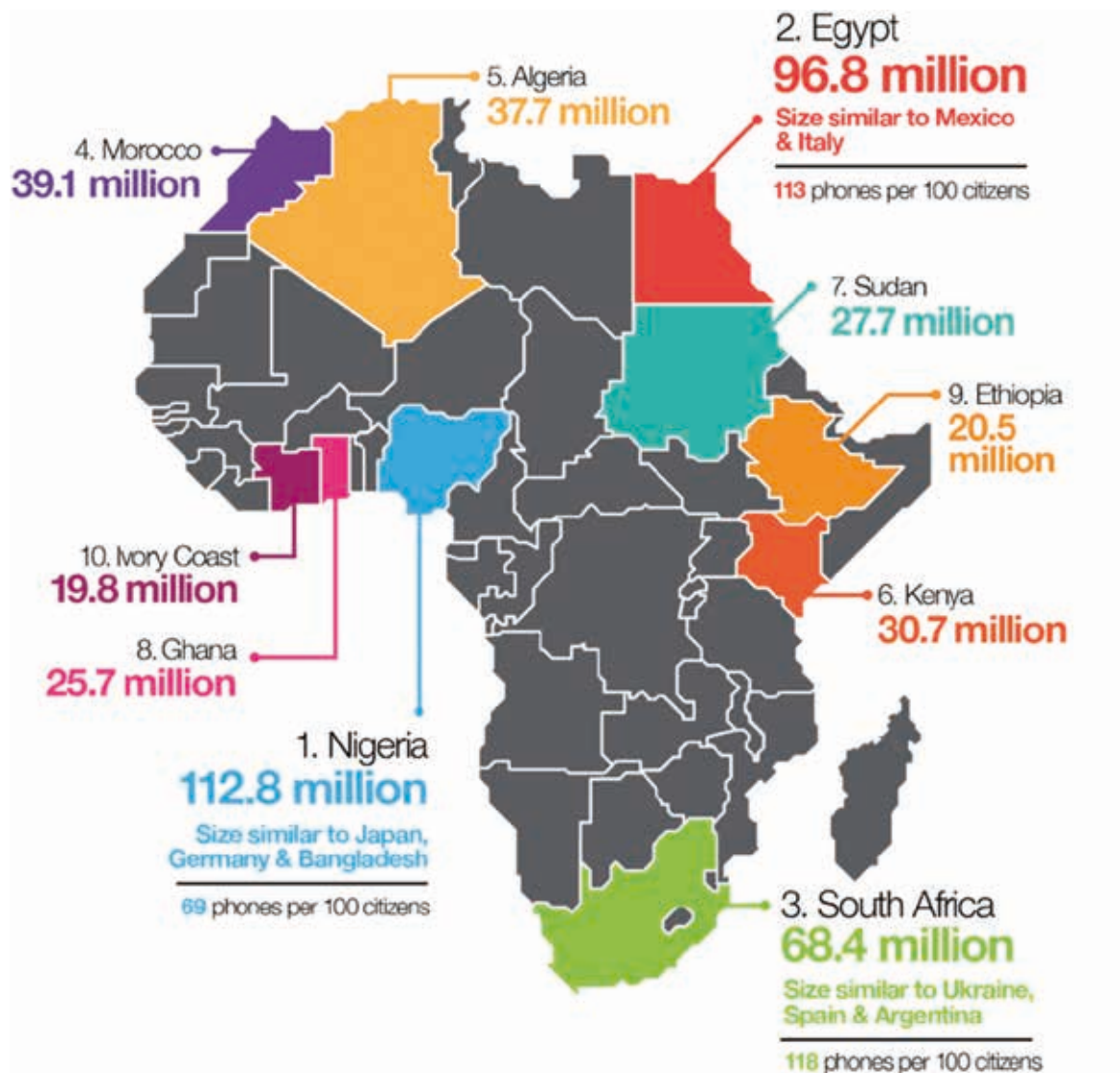
The Tendai project exploited these benefits to allow a rapid transmission from data collection in the field to data analysts and back to advocacy organisations. Previously, by the time data was collected and collated, it was mostly valuable for historic and research purposes. Now, data was available for timely advocacy and response. The collection of GPS coordinates allowed for maps to be plotted, providing more complex analysis relating to, for example, transport routes and the distance to nearby facilities.

One unexpected benefit of the electronic communications platform is that the monitors – often separated geographically, even in different countries – can support each other with technical and operational advice, but also with morale-boosts.

An additional benefit of electronic surveys is the ability to modify them when monitors are already in the field and our understanding of the situation on the ground changes. In the Tendai experience, it was initially thought that stockouts were the main problem facing rural clinics, but anecdotes revealed that shortages of qualified nurses and doctors constituted a more urgent need.

Of course, there are always downsides to technology. Paper never runs out of batteries. Data may be expensive, and the technology difficult to learn. Technical support is often not locally available. It is costly and difficult to repair faulty phones from afar, often impeded by poor communications infrastructure and language barriers. Smartphones, even inexpensive ones, are seen as luxury items and may tend to “disappear”. Finally, it seems that phones are manufactured to self-destruct after 18 to 24 months, which means that this capital investment needs to be renewed regularly. The procurement of the phones themselves was an unexpected challenge. In Zimbabwe, the purchase of a large number of phones would have attracted the suspicion of a ruling party that is wary of surveillance. Consequently, phones were purchased individually to escape notice. In the Democratic Republic of Congo, phones were held in customs for six months, with authorities demanding exorbitant import duties to release them. The project had to be cancelled.

One unexpected benefit of the electronic communications platform is that the monitors – often separated geographically, even in different countries – can support each other with technical and operational advice, but also with morale-boosts. Tendai generated friendly competition between neighbouring countries, each vying to collect more data every month. It is often forgotten that monitors need to be motivated by the work that they do and given consistent feedback, both from their peers and from the project. A project structured in this way can result in a stronger, more committed team. This emerges even more clearly



when reading through case studies written by the country teams. Encouraged by their network of colleagues, monitors felt empowered to use their initiative and devise solutions to problems experienced by their communities.

Is an electronic project more expensive than traditional methods? Anecdotal evidence shows that this is not the case, since the resources required to manage paper-based surveys can easily exceed the initial capital investment of phones and equipment.

The Tendai “model” has been replicated many times since. It was utilised to monitor election violence in Zimbabwe, where the phones proved to be much less conspicuous than clipboards, resulting in less harassment of monitors. It has been used in South Africa to monitor sanitation facilities and the delivery of textbooks in schools, and the disbursement of social grants at social security paypoints. In some cases, governments even recognise “social audits” and external monitoring as essential to their efforts, where there is a distance between government bureaucrats and service delivery points and data reports are unreliable.

All in all, the benefits of mobile technology overwhelm the challenges and any geographically diverse organisation that collects data and administers services should seriously consider the use of smartphones. Still, there is one caveat that should be remembered when designing and implementing any technology-based programme: technology is there to facilitate and support processes. It cannot solve any problem on its own. ■■■

African mobile subscriptions in 2013. With annual growth of 44 percent since 2000, African mobile subscriptions are higher than ever.

Source: <http://www.gsma.com>
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 Infographic designed by @Ivanisawesome

Hacking Exclusion: African Feminist Engagements and Disruptions of the Internet

Jennifer Radloff

The internet is a transformative public and political space. It facilitates new forms of citizenship that enable individuals to claim, construct, and express our selves, genders, sexualities. This includes connecting across territories, demanding accountability and transparency, and significant opportunities for feminist movement-building. – Feminist Principles of the Internet¹

Introduction

Communication is an important connection between women's rights activism and building movements of solidarity and resistance. Communication is the support, the glue, the channel, the fabric that allows our networks to sustain and grow. We construct ourselves, communities and intimate relationships through connecting, be it through speaking, storytelling, touch, writing or singing. We build knowledge from the information, experiences and struggles that we communicate to each other. When we dialogue, debate and meet in spaces of witness, we grow our resistances and strategies more strongly. The internet is a fundamental and potentially transformative public space that can enable and facilitate communication at speed, across borders and through time and space. It is a tool that is political, complicated, gendered, biased and increasingly surveilled and policed. It is a stage for violences that are familiar to feminists living and resisting in spaces outside of the internet. The internet is a space too for incredible creativity and connection and, according to the Association for Progressive Communications Women's Rights Programme (APC WRP) "is an extension, reflection and continuum of our movements and resistance in other spaces"².

As a special issue of *Feminist Africa* on "e-spaces and e-politics" noted:

Since their inception, women's movements have responded to the patriarchal privileging of male knowledge by developing a rich array of alternative communication strategies. From women's collectives, reading, writing and storytelling circles, feminist presses, radio stations and films, women speak out, write and publish, creating new discourses and challenging patriarchal and imperialist legacies that continue to marginalise, erase, and reduce women's contributions to the world, while reinscribing male supremacy by default.³

The Landscape of Exclusion

The 2013 Broadband Commission report notes that there are 200 million fewer women than men online, while two-thirds of the world's population remains without access to the internet.⁴ Although these numbers seem staggering – and in Africa, the gender digital divide is even wider – we can understand why it is neither uncontested nor easy to incorporate the internet and information and communication technology (ICT) into our lives as women living and working in Africa. ICT tools, spaces and platforms were, and are still, sites of privilege. In the 1990s, African feminists debated the new technologies as potentially divisive to women's movements, given unequal access and all the offline social exclusions that were replicated online. These were



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complicated and important debates as conflicts were drawn along lines of class, race, location and privilege. The non-homogeneity of women's movements means that women have different lived realities and contexts, so there is no one response.

However, there have been huge shifts in recent years as ICTs and internet use become integrated into African women's advocacy and mobilisation. Feminist communication-rights activists have consistently worked to give prominence to the critical spaces that ICTs and the internet can provide for us to talk, listen, dialogue and resist. Much of their work is in building cross-movement dialogue to make visible the importance of infusing internet governance spaces with a feminist perspective. The tools and spaces we are now accessing are critical to our activism.

An important current discourse focuses on policies that govern the internet and their failure to integrate gender, the violations that take place as a result, and the need for increased women's participation in decision-making forums.⁵ The task now is to re-frame this conversation and to work towards an internet that feminists want, that will reflect, represent and reposition women's lives on their terms and in their voices, in Africa and globally.

Resistances and Creative Engagements

Central to a feminist approach to ICTs is "to connect questions of gender and communication with the various ways in which race, class, culture, sexual orientation, age, history, colonialism, and the social division

An important current discourse focuses on policies that govern the internet and their failure to integrate gender, the violations that take place as a result, and the need for increased women's participation in decision-making forums.

of labour intersect and shape women's communication experiences and identities".⁶

Creative and strategic examples of feminists using ICTs proliferate from the mid-1990s. At the 1995 United Nations Fourth World Conference on Women, held in Beijing, a women-led initiative provided internet access, electronic communications and information services to over 30 000 women, centralised the potential of ICTs to amplify women's rights struggles, and began a movement to highlight the convergence between ICT issues and women's rights agendas. Led by 30 women from 25 countries, this event showed that the then-new technology was appropriate for and could be maintained by women.⁷ Significantly, it also catalysed advocacy around Section J, "Women and the media", of the Beijing Platform for Action. Recognition of the critical role that the media and ICTs play in both advancing and stifling women's rights began here.

In South Africa, the formation of Women'sNet in 1998 helped to bridge the spaces between NGOs and women newly elected to South African's first democratic parliament: "It was a powerful, interactive and valuable opportunity for women and gender activists at that time in our herstory as South Africans, as activists and as women aware of the need to harness ICTs."⁸

In 2002, the African Gender Institute launched *Feminist Africa*⁹, a continental gender studies journal produced by the community of African feminist scholars. *Feminist Africa* deliberately challenges the huge amount of intellectual writing produced in the North about African women's lived realities, whilst acknowledging that Africa's social and cultural processes are inextricably linked to global processes. It uses the internet to enlarge and transform existing narratives of African women.

The appropriation and use of ICTs and the internet by African women and feminist organisations has increased exponentially since the early 2000s. In 2004, Dorcas Muthoni founded AfChix, a mentorship and capacity building initiative for women in computing across Africa. She was inducted into the Internet Hall of Fame in 2014.¹⁰ Anriette Esterhysen was inducted in 2013 in recognition of her transformative information and communication work in support of development and human rights in Africa since 1987.¹¹ Ory Okolloh, a Kenyan activist, lawyer and blogger co-founded Ushahidi, the Swahili word for "witness", a website that uses text messages and Google maps to collect and record eyewitness reports of violence. Ushahidi is now a ubiquitous platform for mapping crisis interventions

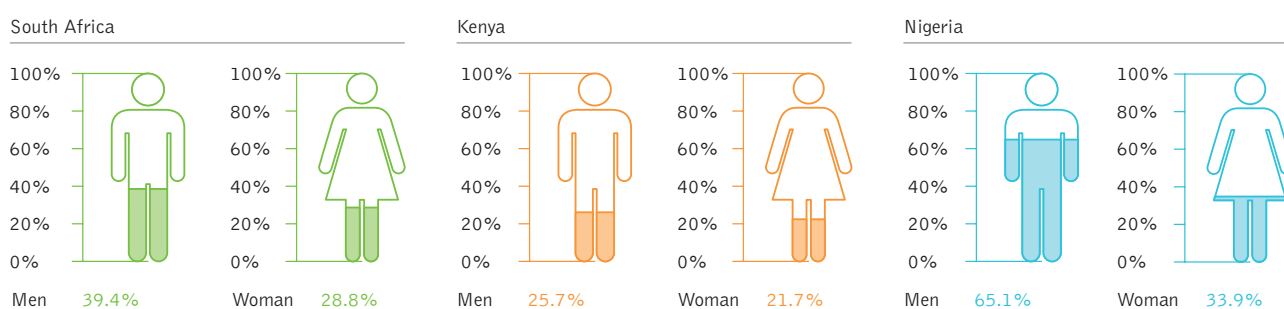
and many other human rights violations.¹² The Kenya-based AkiraChix aims to inspire and develop a force of women in technology who will change Africa's future.¹³ These role models of women in Africa who are active in technology innovation are largely ignored. It is important to inscribe their names in internet historiography.

In 2014, Kenyan women took to the streets to march against street harassment and violent attacks for wearing miniskirts and other supposedly inappropriate articles of clothing. Using the Twitter hashtag #MyDressMyChoice, they generated a global outcry, with thousands of tweets coming from women and men expressing solidarity. In similar actions in South Africa, Uganda and Zimbabwe, women – many of whom are not linked to activist organisations – came together in solidarity and used ICTs and the internet to amplify their demands.

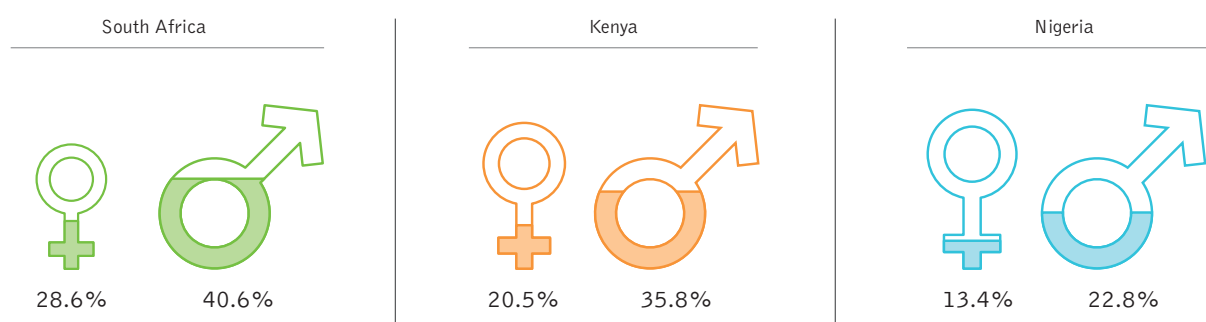
In response to the biased images of African women found online, African feminists began to challenge European and African patriarchal ideals of black bodies and sexuality and to reverse the racist standards of beauty that dominate the media. Nana Dakora and Malaka started a website called "Adventures from the Bedrooms of African Women" because of what they believe is "a serious lack of relevant and useful informa-

Web and gender equality

Share of computer users (15+) that own a personal laptop



Percentage of men and woman (15+) that are using the internet



tion about the sexuality of African women. This blog is a space for African women to share tips, experiences and more".¹⁴ Finding many offline spaces hostile, homophobic and dangerous, queer Africans, sexual rights activists and LGBTI organisations are using the internet as an organising and meeting space. As Sheena G Magenya blogged, "The internet creates an alternate reality for many gender non-conforming women and men – a place with a degree of freedom of expression and existence that is either lacking or limited in their realities and real lives".¹⁵

As feminists, we see our lives as political. We interrogate patriarchal privilege, exclusion and violence, as these are so often the realities that we inhabit. A relatively new frontier, the internet can strengthen and facilitate feminist activism and women's organising. However, this will not be meaningful nor sustainable unless women gain greater access to the internet and greater control over the production and governance of ICTs in order to shape them according to our priorities and realities.

"If the real world is sexist, it is very likely that most of the technology that develops will have the virus of sexism in its core as well. That core will seamlessly define rules and space of the virtual world."¹⁶ Systemic oppression of women exists online as it does offline; it manifests in the digital bodies we create and in the spaces we occupy in-between. Technology has "encrypted the current paradigm of power relations."¹⁷ To continue to claim and to transform the internet, African feminists need to organise locally and globally across movements and differences, and to continually interrogate the dominance of Northern privilege. Statistics speak to the inequities of access between North and South and between women and men.

Principle 1 of the Feminist Principles of the Internet states: "A feminist internet starts with and works towards empowering more women and queer persons – in all our diversities – to dismantle patriarchy. This includes universal, affordable, unfettered, unconditional and equal access to the internet."¹⁸ As one African feminist activist said, the internet can be an escape for "African women and men, who live in spaces that do not tolerate or allow their different ways of expressing themselves and their sexuality. But this escape is the privilege of a few African women and men."¹⁹

It is vital for feminists to work in govern-

ance spaces, such as the multi-stakeholder Internet Governance Forum (IGF) and the recently developed African Declaration on Internet Rights and Freedoms.²⁰ It is equally important to include internet rights in existing protocols, platforms and development agendas for Africa's future and, within this, the centrality of women's rights for any meaningful growth and change.

"If the real world is sexist, it is very likely that most of the technology that develops will have the virus of sexism in its core as well. That core will seamlessly define rules and space of the virtual world."

Online Violences against Women

The Feminist Principles of the Internet state that the misogynistic online and tech-related attacks, threats, intimidation and policing experienced by women and LGBTQI people are "real, harmful and alarming", and that "it is our collective responsibility as different internet stakeholders to prevent, respond to, and resist this violence."²¹ Although as ubiquitous as offline violence, tech-related violence is not seen as "real harm", and legislation to combat it is virtually non-existent. As Françoise Mkuku of the Democratic Republic of Congo says: "Technology-related VAW [violence against women], or eVAW, in the DRC is widespread but not acknowledged because there is a lack of understanding of what it is and how it works."²²

Preventing technology-related violence against women is an important component of creating a safe and secure environment for women and girls in all spheres of life. Online violence is one of the biggest reasons why women leave online spaces or choose to use pseudonyms. Interestingly, choosing anonymity is a hugely contested terrain. Conservative governments use the threat of terrorism and child pornography to try to outlaw anonymity – the tactic that protects women online. "It is our inalienable right to choose, express, and experiment with our diverse sexualities on the internet. Anonymity enables this."²³

Trans people, minorities, those who identify as lesbian, gay or gender-diffuse, and those who work in the field of sexual and reproductive rights and justice, are

particularly under attack. This violence is a serious virus that affects these marginalised group's rights to privacy, freedom of expression and association. When companies such as Facebook, Twitter and YouTube fail to seriously address the violence played out on their platforms, they reinforce a patriarchal response to such experiences.

Online and tech-related violence is part of the continuum of gender-based violence. There is no separation between online and offline violence. In the Democratic Republic of Congo, two teens' private photos, taken by a boyfriend, were posted to Facebook without their consent.²⁴ The offline consequences were enormous, as they were for

Online and tech-related violence is part of the continuum of gender-based violence. There is no separation between online and offline violence.

a women's rights defender in Pakistan who was attacked in a blog post which called for her death. She and her husband were targeted in a drive-by shooting.

Feminists have offered many responses to the growing incidence of technology-related violence against women. Take Back The Tech! is a global, collaborative campaign that was started in 2006. It calls on everyone, especially women and girls, to take control of technology in the struggle to end violence against women. Local, national and global campaigns highlight the problem of tech-related violence and aggregate experiences from different parts of the world, which informs research and feeds into policy and advocacy positions.

The United Nations campaign, UNiTE to End Violence against Women, sets the 25th of each month as "Orange Day", a day to raise awareness and take action against violence against women and girls, and to imagine a future free from such violence. Every year, May 25th focuses on technology solutions to prevent violence and to assist survivors and support agencies.

Securing the Digital Environment

Surveillance by default is the tool of patriarchy to control and restrict rights both online and offline. The right to privacy

and to exercise full control over our own data is a critical principle for a safer, open internet for all. Equal attention needs to be paid to surveillance practices by individuals against each other, as well as the private sector and non-state actors, in addition to the state. – Feminist Principles of the Internet²⁵

Patriarchal control of women's bodies, lives, expression and dissent is exerted in various ways. Both offline and online, surveillance is the norm. Women's right to privacy is critical for the realisation of a full personal and political life, and digital security has become central to any activism that includes the use of digital tools. This is not only relevant in online spaces but for the safe control of tools such as computers, mobile phones and tablets.

Feminists face and experience digital threats in different ways. The more we gain traction, power and space on the internet, the greater the threats become. A tweet sent to #imagineafeministinternet says it succinctly: "Things feminists didn't foresee 'While we were gaining access some others were gaining access to us'".²⁶

Although the internet is borderless, the abuses still mirror the lines of privilege and prejudice expressed in the world. Threats are dependent on where women are located, the bodies they inhabit and the activism they engage in. White women, whether based in the North or South, do not experience the sexualised and raced abuse that is directed at black African women. Understanding the threats faced, their nature and possible consequences, and the strategies, tools and technical responses to counter them is central for feminists to secure online spaces in a hostile environment and to keep our activism safer:

If you say you are a women's human rights defender who is conscious about secure online communications, then you must realise that it is not only you protecting yourself on the internet but also others who you must not put at risk. (Anonymous)²⁷

Conclusion

In order to realise the ideal of all people having easy and affordable access to a free and open internet without misogyny and violence means feminists "taking back the tech". It means inhabiting governance spaces,

exchanging skills and knowledge, and building cross-movement partnerships in order to explore the intersections and strategic opportunities. It means developing a feminist approach to ICTs and the internet. It also means continually interrogating privilege within African feminist movements, as access for some can mean exclusion for others.

It means challenging the discourses in which African women are seen as recipients

of “technology aid” who only need mobile phones for their “development”, rather than seeing the agency of African women technologists who are busy hacking, building, coding and co-creating systems that work for local realities. “Women (need to) see themselves as not just using technology but as stakeholders in the health and regulation and freedoms of the internet.”²⁸ ■■■

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A Double-Edged Sword: The Internet and the Struggle for Equality of LGBTQI People in Africa

Azeenarh Mohammed

In the majority of African countries, same-sex relationships are a criminal offence. In some countries, “offenders” can be punished with death; in many more, with harsh jail sentences. Even in South Africa, the only country on the continent that allows marriage between same-sex couples, the constitution’s aspirations for equality and non-discrimination are regularly contrasted with news about violent attacks on black lesbians in townships around the country.

Fuelled by the homophobic utterances of political and other leaders of society, opposition to homosexuality and gender non-conformity is often expressed in terms of tradition, religion and culture. Ignoring factual history, non-normative sexual orientations and gender identities are regularly dismissed as Western imports and “un-African”. Unsurprisingly, it has been hard for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer and intersex (LGBTQI) Africans to know where to turn when they have problems, want to openly express themselves, or simply to celebrate.

Against this backdrop, the rapid proliferation of information and communication technologies (ICTs) across Africa has provided some welcome relief – at least for those with access to smart phones and computers. The internet in particular has become a space where LGBTQI people can connect with peers and speak openly about their challenges (e.g. Queerlife South Africa, www.queerlife.co.za, or the Nigerian Lesbian Forum, www.naijalez.com). Social media have also facilitated discreet methods of connecting for romance and sexual encounters, such as Manjam (www.manjam.com).

Beyond social activities, the internet is also used by LGBTQI groups and individuals to share information on sexual and reproductive health, to form communities of ideas, and to build and strengthen networks and alliances to advocate equality. Even



Tactics ↓ Tools ↓ Community ↓

USE MOBILE PHONES AS SECURELY AS POSSIBLE

Mobile phones are an integral part of our daily communication. Their capacity for voice and simple text messaging services, and many other uses make these devices invaluable for rights communication and organisation.

Recently, mobile devices with many more functions, such as multimedia capacity (photo, video and audio recording), processing and access to the internet. However, the infrastructure, are fundamentally different from how they were designed, and security challenges, and risks for users' privacy and communications.

It is important to start with the understanding that mobile phones are not secure.

- Information sent from a mobile phone is vulnerable
- Information stored on mobile phones is vulnerable
- Phones are designed to give out information

We will explore these issues, and what a user can do to protect their information.

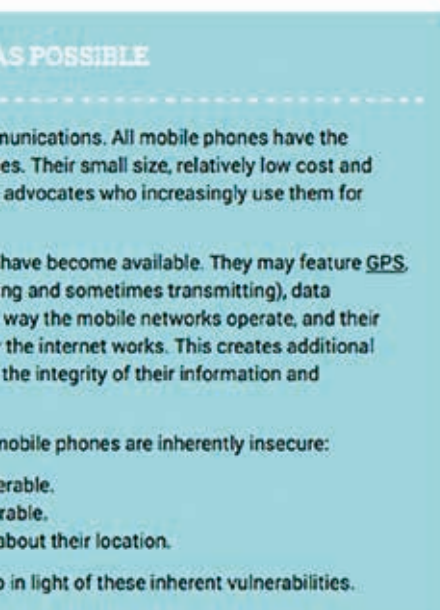
JUMP TO

- MOBILE DEVICES AND SECURITY
- MOBILITY AND SECURITY
- BEST PRACTICES FOR PHONE SECURITY
- BASIC SECURITY
- TEXT BASED COMMUNICATIONS - SMS TEXT MESSAGING
- FUNCTIONS BEYOND SPEECH AND MESSAGES



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funding is crowdsourced from Africa and the rest of the world through the internet. Money has been raised to support victims of anti-gay laws and homophobic violence in Uganda and LGBT refugees awaiting settlement.¹



Another fundraising programme helped to keep open a safe house in southern Nigeria. Since March 2012, House of Rainbow has provided protection to persecuted LGBTQI people in the country. The demand for this unique service is unprecedented in the wake of a new wave of criminalisation of gay people.²

It is, however, important to stress that ICTs are a double-edged sword: very real dangers reside within its tools and platforms. There are growing concerns about privacy issues for social network users and owners of online and mobile devices as their online movements are easily tracked and communications intercepted. This poses a general risk to everyone – but more so for advocates of human rights and transparency, journalists, or vulnerable groups such as LGBTQI persons in countries that criminalise sexual or gender non-conformity.

Homophobic state administrations and even members of the public are discovering new ways to attack LGBTQI persons using online technology for surveillance, entrapment and extortion, bullying and harassment, and to spread hate and negative stereotypes. Fake profiles on gay dating sites or social networks are used to lure people into compromising situations: believing that they are arranging a genuine meeting, they are in fact being set up for arrest, attack or blackmail.

In 2014, a Nigerian newspaper published an article about men who had created a vigilante group to entrap and blackmail gay men on the internet. Shockingly, the story focussed on how these groups helped to “rid society of these ills” rather than the insidious crimes committed. Newspapers and online media in Uganda continue to

publish names, photos and addresses of LGBTQI persons to humiliate and incite violence against them, even after the tragic murder of rights activist David Kato in 2011, shortly after he had won a lawsuit against a magazine that had identified him as gay, published his name and photograph, and called for him to be executed.³ In Cameroon, the arrest of a young man accused of homosexuality put every person on his mobile phone contact list at risk as police systematically tried to profile, investigate and entrap everyone he had been in contact with.⁴ In Egypt, police reportedly post fake profiles to entrap gay men and prosecute

and Grindr – can be a potential danger for outing the owner's sexual preferences.

In response to these threats, tech-driven NGOs like the Tactical Technology Collective have started to build a digital security guide for LGBTQI groups in Africa and the Middle East.⁷ They provide tips and tricks on storing information safely on computers for individuals and organisations that are likely to be raided; how to remain anonymous and bypass censorship in countries that block LGBTQI information; and how to use mobile phones and internet cafes as securely as possible. Networking applications such as Grindr have also warned users in Egypt about police setting up fake profiles.

There is no doubt that the internet has opened new spaces for LGBTQI groups in Africa to explore their identity, access information, reach out and make connections, but a lot of pitfalls also exist. Apart from the dangers discussed here, there is also the problem that a large number of people are silenced because they do not have access to the internet, and even those with access are often unaware that these sites exist. With new ideas like internet.org – a “Facebook-led initiative bringing together technology leaders, nonprofits and local communities to connect the two-thirds of the world that doesn't have internet access”⁸ – more people will be able to enter these spaces and more voices can be heard. ■■■

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them with evidence gathered during their staged encounter.⁵ Digital messages are also being used against LGBTQI persons. Cameroonian Jean Claude Mbede was sentenced to three years in prison for sending an SMS that said “I'm very much in love with you” to another man in 2011.⁶ Just the presence of certain dating apps on ones' smart phone – like Dattch, Brenda, Purpll, Jack'd

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Sauti Mtaani: Promoting Youth Participation in Governance

Jane Maina

The potential of Africa's growing youth population fuels the narrative of a continent on the rise. In Kenya, however, young people have been largely marginalised in governance as well as in development. Unless this is addressed, they are likely to be a threat to peace, a hindrance to development and an obstacle to building a strong democracy.

The 2010 Constitution of Kenya explicitly provides for the inclusion of all population groups in all decision-making and governance processes. It also introduced a devolved system to decentralise the government and promote citizen participation. Other laws that give effect to the constitutional provisions for participation include the County Government Act, which mandates county governments to facilitate the establishment of structures for citizen participation. In theory, government has moved closer to the people – but the reality on the ground tells a different story.

Interactions with young people reveal that they lack knowledge, information, skills and platforms for engagement. This is where Sauti Mtaani comes in. Sauti Mtaani, a Swahili phrase that loosely translates as “Voice in the Hood”, is a web-based platform developed by the Community Education and Empowerment Centre (CEEC) with the support of the Heinrich Böll Stiftung. With a website (<http://sautimtaani.co.ke>) and a short code (21393), the platform aims to facilitate civic engagement between youth and the members of county assembly (MCAs), their local elected representatives. The devolved system of governance established 47 county assemblies, and each MCA represents a ward, which is the lowest electoral unit within Kenya's electoral system.

How does the platform work? Using the short code, the youth send free text messages from their phones to their respective MCA. It is important that the platform is free of charge because the participating wards are in low-income areas of Nairobi. The MCA gets an alert on his or her phone and responds to the messages from any web-enabled device. This response is received on the sender's phone and simultaneously posted on the Sauti Mtaani website. The MCAs are thus able to communicate with the youth even when they are away from their wards. To enhance interactions and to encourage healthy competition between the wards, the platform is complemented by a Facebook page and group. In a departure from traditional methods of engagement, Sauti Mtaani facilitates youth participation where young people are most at home – in the field of information and communication technology (ICT). Indeed, the idea came from the evident popularity of mobile phones and social media among urban youth. A platform that combines the use of a short message service and Facebook seemed ideal for this target group.

Many MCAs and youth in the participating wards appreciate the platform for bridging the gap between them. The MCAs like the ease with which they can reach a huge segment of their constituency and the youth are pleased that many of the issues they raise are being addressed. In one ward, they expressed concern about the county government's plans to renovate a traders' market without consulting them. The MCA drafted a petition



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calling for consultations with the traders, including the youth, and filed it at the county assembly. Consequently, the views of the youth are being incorporated in the rebuilding plan. In another ward, the youth raised the alarm over a grabbed piece of land that was meant for a playground, and the MCA is working with relevant authorities to ensure it is returned to the public. In all the participating wards, MCAs are addressing such issues as street lighting, road networks, lack of or contaminated water, burst sewers, and student bursaries. The MCAs also use the platform to provide information to the youth on resources that are earmarked for them as well as linking them with employment opportunities in industries within their wards. Obviously, the MCAs do not have solutions for all the issues raised, but at least the platform ensures that the youth are listened to.

However, the implementation of Sauti Mtaani has not been entirely smooth sailing. A 2014 study by iHub¹, an innovation hub for the technology community in Nairobi, points out a number of demotivating factors in the use of ICTs to improve governance. These include limited penetration, lack of strategies, high costs, poor ICT skills, citizens' ignorance of their rights, fear of retaliation, tools not suited to users, mistrust of leaders, and lack of action once an issue is raised. CEEC, which is not an organisation that specialises in ICT, had to go through a steep learning curve and encountered a number of these challenges during its journey. To start with, getting the design of the platform right was not easy. The MCAs and the youth were happy with the concept in principle, but the first platform that was set up proved to be cumbersome, difficult to use and costly. Thanks to feedback from the different stakeholders, a more user-friendly and cost-effective platform was designed.

Sauti Mtaani is a new concept and its adoption will inevitably face challenges. For the youth, these include apathy, lack of understanding of MCAs' mandate, mistrust of

Creating public awareness.
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politicians, a belief that the MCAs will not respond to issues raised, and ignorance of their own rights and duties. Some youth fear that the platform, being a purely ICT tool, will put a physical distance between them and the MCAs. This calls for complementary online and offline engagement. For the MCAs, challenges include fears that the platform will be used to incite youth against them, reluctance to be held accountable, and poor understanding of governance issues. The platform can only work if both the youth and the MCAs buy into it. Strategies to mitigate the challenges include training the two key groups in leadership and governance, involving them in the design and improvement of the platform, familiarising them with its use, and popularising it in the wards, as well as being flexible enough to change what does not work.

The platform is appropriate for urban youth, most of whom own phones, are ICT literate and spend much of their time online. This raises the question of whether Sauti Mtaani is creating an urban/rural, literate/illiterate and young/old divide. The fact that about 70 percent of the users are male also leads to the question of whether the platform perpetuates the gender divide. The answer to these questions is that Sauti Mtaani is not a “one size fits all” panacea for governance problems. Just like any other tool or intervention, the platform functions alongside other efforts.

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Yet Sauti Mtaani is starting to demystify political leadership, and many participating MCAs now understand that they are accountable to their constituents. Politicians in Kenya have long been treated like small gods. Once they get into positions of leadership, they acquire gatekeepers who make it difficult for their constituents to reach them. The platform is slowly bringing down these walls by ensuring that the youth have easy access to the MCAs. The volume of messages and responses is testimony that it serves a useful purpose.

Sauti Mtaani is a good example of how ICT is redefining governance in Kenya. Starting from the ward level, it can be replicated at other levels of governance all the way up to the presidency. Its uniqueness lies in the fact that it does not define the content but simply strives to empower individual agency. For the participating youth, citizen participation is now becoming a reality and governance has indeed moved closer to them as envisaged by the Constitution. The platform is ensuring that the youth are no longer relegated to the periphery but become actors in their own development. ■■■

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The Internet Is Afropolitan

Interview

Achille Mbembe

Achille Mbembe discusses the history and horizon of digital communication and identity in the African continent with Bregtje van der Haak. Mbembe suggests that what some regard as the explosion of the Internet is really just the continuation of the age old cultures in the new age of the Afropolitan.

Bregtje van der Haak: The introduction of the mobile phone has caused huge changes, especially in Africa. Do you think the convergence of phones with internet connectivity will produce a similar kind of shift?

Achille Mbembe: Definitely! The introduction of the mobile phone in the continent has been a revolution in the ways in which people relate to themselves. The way they treat them, the way they take care of them, signals a shift in the modalities through which contemporary Africans understand themselves, how they relate to each other and more importantly to the world, in the sense that hardly any African today can be considered to not be connected to the rest of the world, the rest of the continent. The internet will play exactly the same role. It helps Africa to leapfrog the kind of technological evolution other continents and societies have undergone.

Do you think the techno-utopian vision of bringing all knowledge to everyone is possible?



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Technology is nothing without the capacity to make people dream. That is where the power of technology resides. It is embraced insofar as people believe in the promise of inheriting it, of improving their own lives, making it better and freeing themselves of structural constraints. The internet intensifies that capacity to dream and that narrative of liberation, which was invested earlier on in other kinds of utopias – revolutionary and progressive. Narratives of liberation, the promise of total liberation is now residing in two things: On the one hand in the religious and on the other hand in the commodity and in technology. Commodity, technology and religion are being fused in a new manner. The internet itself has become an electronic religion in the service of the ideology of consumption. That is the importance of the key role played by multinationals and other big companies. The danger of this is that the political, as we understood it earlier on, is almost emptied out now. As a friend of mine was putting it recently: “The political is becoming a business for the losers.”

Could Internet also reinvigorate the public sphere, the political?

Intermittently. It is a powerful tool for mobilisation, for speedy circulation of all kinds of messages, not all of them progressive. It can serve whatever purpose, but it is not enough to create a public sphere. It is very evanescent, ephemeral, in the sense that, there is no way in which we can do without the face-to-face encounter. This is absolutely central to the political. Internet is a means, it is not the end. But we live in a conjuncture in which we are made to believe that it is the end. There is no longer any distinction. I think that that is not sustainable for those who would like to change the current social world order. This confusion of means and ends is extremely dangerous and it serves the interests of the powerful. But the culture of our times puts us in a situation in which we have to believe the distinction between means and ends doesn't mean anything any longer. A political critique of the internet has to start from there.

This is what has been completely eliminated in the promotional clips made by Google and Facebook. They simply say: we want to bring the Internet to everyone, so the world will be a better place. It's a very simple, one dimensional message.

The Internet has become a religion. Internet pretends that it is salvation. You own salvation if only you get hooked on Internet, because then Internet will bring all that is needed for you to be happy.

Facebook and Google both have devised strategies for global expansion. Do you think there is a parallel with the times of imperialism? Now Google and Facebook are competing for the parts of the world that are not yet connected to their networks.

Yes, it is more or less the logic of dominion. It is part of the planetarisation of capital, but this doesn't operate in the same way in every single space. One of the major spatial forms that is typical of the geography of our time is the enclave, the offshore, the zone. It is not a flat globe. It is a globe that is segmented, so people are hopping and jumping over large chunks of territory that are not at all connected. One sees it very vividly in Africa. We have an extractive economy that is connected to a very abstract and financial economy in this huge space, which is unequally connected first of all among itself, and then with the rest of the world. It seems to me that this geography anticipates what the globe is becoming.

You have referred to Africa as the last frontier. What do you mean by that?

It is the last territory on earth that has not yet been entirely subjected to the rule of capital. Its mineral resources have hardly been exploited. It is the last major chunk of the universe which has not yet been entirely related to its many different parts. Just imagine that to go from Casablanca to Cape Town you spend almost the entire day in a plane. It's a huge continent. But we don't have any railway from Casablanca to Cape Town or from Cape Town to Cairo. We don't have the kind of inter-American highways. It is a last frontier of capitalism in a sense that even for a major power like China its economy can only operate through the provisioning of basic resources from the continent. And after China, it will be Africa.

Many people surveyed in Asia and Africa say Facebook is so important to them that the rest of the Internet doesn't exist. Are we living in a Facebook world?

Yes, definitely. The phantasm of living on many different planes at the same time. It seems to me that the capacity of Google, Facebook lies in tapping into deep and hidden fantasies of the human being and turning them into products that are then sold and bought on a market that is global and that triggers new forms of interactions we have not seen before.

But it is also a way to publish and to disseminate ideas.

Yes, definitely. But I was more interested in the kind of self that emerges in the crucible of these new technologies, and how these technologies become an extension of ourselves and erase the distance between the human and the object. Human beings are no longer satisfied to simply be human beings. They want to add to who they are attributes of the thing and of the object.

I'm referring to the extent to which our own relationship to ourselves and what surrounds us changes, because of the kinds of technologies we practise or exchange; this capacity for multiplication and reproduction changes something in our mind set. This communion and fusion between the living human being and the object or the technology is at the source of new forms of being we have not seen before. They have serious implications for those who are interested in the question of the political and of liberation. The task earlier on was to make sure that the human being is not an object. Emancipation meant I cannot be treated as an object. Whether I'm a rational being, a woman, or a worker, I want to be treated as a human being. Now, if the human begins to desire to have some of the attributes of the object, then what is emancipation all about?

Is there a specific African turn in all of this?

That's where Africa becomes really interesting because in Africa cosmologies, African systems of thought before the colonial era, and even now, a human person could metamorphose into something else. He or she could become a lion and then a horse or a tree. And that capacity for conversion into something else was also applied to economic transactions. You were always transacting with some other force or some other entity. And you were always busy trying to capture some of the power invested in those entities to add them to your own powers. So, to if one wants to think in those rather essentialist terms, Africa is a fertile ground for the new digital technologies, because the

philosophy of those technologies is more or less exactly the same as ancient African philosophies. This archive of permanent transformation, mutation, conversion and circulation is an essential dimension of what we can call African culture. The Internet responds directly to that drive and its cultural success can be explained by the fact that it meets at a very deep level with what has always been the way in which Africans transact with themselves and with the world. And that, in fact, Africans have been postmodern before postmodernism. If you want to have any idea of the world that is coming, the world ahead of us, look at Africa! You'll see the symptoms and the expressions of that world that is ahead of us. And most readings of the continent have not been able to highlight that because they are looking backward rather than in a future orientated manner.

So, in a way, you're saying that the digital world is an African world?

Absolutely. In fact the world of Africa, the pre-colonial world, as well as the world of now, has always been somewhat digital. And what we see now is the reconciliation of that culture and a form that is coming from outside. But where are the forces that will help to domesticate this form and orientate it toward social ends, of justice of equality, of freedom, and of democracy, rather than toward further aggravation of inequalities predation and looting?

The idea is that Africa was digital before the digital. And when you study the cultural history of the continent carefully, a number of things come to the fore in terms of how African societies have constituted themselves and how they operated. First, they constituted themselves through circulation and mobility. When you look at African myths of origin, migration occupies a central role in all of them. There is not one single ethnic group in Africa that can seriously claim to have never moved. Their histories are always histories of migration, meaning people going from one place to the other, and in the process amalgamating many other people. So circulation and amalgamation, you compile the gods, you conquer one ethnic group, you defeat them militarily, and you take their gods as yours, or you take their women as your wives, and therefore they become your parents.

Then, second, extraordinary plasticity – the capacity to embrace what is new, what is novel. Plasticity and the eagerness to experiment with the new was seen everywhere in the continent. People will not believe in the God of Muslims in the same way as people in Saudi Arabia. Senegalese Islam is very different from Islam in Iran or Saudi Arabia. Take forms of currency, in West Africa for centuries you had all the moneys, all the currencies were used. You go to Zimbabwe right now, you can use the dollar, the rand, the pound, the yen, that multiplicity of things. You keep changing one thing into another.

This flexibility and this capacity for constant innovation, extension of the possible, that is also the spirit of the Internet, it is the spirit of the digital, and it is the same spirit you will find in pre-colonial and contemporary Africa. And what needs to be done is to construct the encounter, the reconciliation between those forms and the cultural archive that is still part of everyday life, with the purpose of building a society that is Afropolitan, and that is committed to ideals of freedom and liberty.

How do you reconcile the idea you just elaborated on, the digital world as an African world, with the limited success of African apps and technological innovation?

It seems to me that there is no other part of the world where people are forced by bad circumstances to innovate as much as in this continent. It's a constant, permanent innovation. If you do not innovate in ways

of thinking, in ways of making things, you won't be able to survive. But how do we make sure that this inexhaustible capacity for innovation is at the service of a bigger kind of creation that can propel the continent, can help it to stand up on its own feet and to become its proper centre?

How do we make sure that institutions do not hinder that capacity for innovation? The possibility that the Internet might help to solve that institutional dilemma is something we have to think about creatively. It might very well be the wedge that helps to cut the Gordian knot of suppression between institutions and innovations.

The Chinese and the Indians are coming here to get something from Africa, but the Americans and Europeans are still stuck with the idea they need to bring it something ...

Yes, that is the big divide. The divide of the early 21st century is exactly between those who think that this is a land of charity, where you bring something to these poor people who hardly manage to live, and those who come here because they know that it's the laboratory of the future and that there are things here that can be harvested. The West, of course, is still an important player, but new players are coming in, new connections are being made for those of us who live in a place like Johannesburg for instance. It's easy to see that. Just catch a flight going to Shanghai or to Mumbai or to Sao Paulo, and compare it to a flight going to New York or to London. These are two entirely different worlds. On the one hand the world of the future and on the other the world of the past. Where is it that the continent wants to go, with whom? And what are the forces that have to be mobilised to make a difference?

Do you think increased internet connectivity will dissolve the boundaries between countryside and cities, or will the city belong to the connected people and the countryside to the disconnected?

First of all, we are noticing a reduction of the distance between cities and rural areas, an intensification of the circulations and transactions between these two. People are moving constantly back and forth, to the point where it is becoming a bit difficult to say what is urban and what is rural. In a place like Kinshasa for instance, according to those who are studying the city, you see a ruralisation of the city and an urbanization of the rural.

This is the trend that will intensify in the coming years. In a number of countries, we have seen an increase in the electrification of rural areas. In southern Cameroon for instance, most of the villages are now electrified. And with electricity comes all what we were talking about: television, internet access, mobile phones and so on. What we will see is the densification of all kinds of networks, both human and technological, which will reshape the entire African spatial map.

Do you think that with increased connectivity, internal African borders will tend to dissolve?

What we will see is a pluralization of borders, in the sense that we will still have these physical borders, colonial borders. But then these physical border will be superseded by all kinds of interactions, most of them virtual. This is already happening, so gradually the idea of physical borders will be delegitimised because of the intensity of virtual traffic which may lead to the reshaping of national entities. I think the future is wide open, but the contestation of borders will increase, even more so because Europe is now out of reach for many Africans. You will have an increase of urbanization. If you travel today from Lagos

to Accra, it's like one big coastal city. In 50 years nobody will know the borders of Lagos, because it will expand physically from Lagos to Accra. So the question is political: do we anticipate this? Or do we wait for it to happen chaotically and in a disorganised manner?

But culturally and psychologically, will this contribute to a new kind of pan-African mindset and identity?

It will contribute to the emergence of something I call the Afropolitan mindset, in the sense that there would be more circulations within this incredibly huge continent. I told you about the 1 million Chinese. In Angola and Mozambique, over the last five years, we have witnessed the return of 18,000 Portuguese some of whom had left during the colonisation, others just coming in. You have people coming in from South Asia. Moroccans coming from the north and establishing themselves in major cities in South Africa. So Afropolitanism is the cultural movement that accompanies these historical processes, some of which are totally new. It's more than pan-Africanism, it's something that makes of Africa the point of encounter of different migratory movements.

In some places, we see new borders being established with the use of technology, for example here in South Africa.

That is typical of the era of globalisation the world is undergoing. It is also typical of the era of financial capital which for its reproduction constantly needs to exempt itself from any obligations to a specific location, thus increasing the importance of the offshore for instance.

Do you think totalitarian regimes in Africa could turn into technologically assisted totalitarian regimes?

If totalitarian regimes in Africa want to become more sophisticated in their control of the people they could do it, but I'm not sure they have the means or the intelligence. Sometimes, totalitarian regimes are quite stupid.

In the best case scenario, five to 10 years from now, where will we be?

In 15 years we'll have an entirely different continent. You will have populations that will be moving around at a faster pace than now: You will have more physical connections between the different parts of the continent; you will have a larger middle class; you'll have enclaves of poverty, unemployment, even warfare; you will have many more people coming and settling in the continent, especially people coming from Asia; and you will have, since it is the topic of our conversation, millions of people who will be even more connected to the new technologies.

Incidentally, the very poor will benefit from those developments. The biggest challenge will of course still be how to put people to work. Internet alone will not solve political issues. We have to reinvest in the political, meaning in forms of struggles, social and political struggles aiming at, and creating better just societies. ■■■

This interview has first been published in the Chimurenga Chronic (May 2015 edition). Visit www.chimurengachronic.co.za for more information.

Follow The Money: How ICTs Ensure Accountability in Public Spending in Nigeria

Azeenarh Mohammed

In March 2010, one of the worst lead-poisoning epidemics in history was discovered in Zamfara state, Northern Nigeria. Its root cause was unsafe practices by artisanal miners working in the area. The miners crush and grind ore to extract gold, in the process releasing dust that has a high lead content. Children and adults were exposed to this dust when they were labouring in the processing site, when relatives returned home with dust on their clothes and hands, or when processing ore in their homes. Water and food sources were also contaminated with this highly toxic element.

In most countries, children with more than 5 micrograms of lead per decilitre of blood would be admitted to hospital. Prior to this tragedy, the worst recorded case of mass lead poisoning took place in Kosovo in the 1990s, where about a hundred people had lead levels in the range of 50–200 mg/dL. The levels of lead in the blood of affected children in Zamfara had reached 300–400 mg/dL by the time they received treatment from Médecins sans Frontières (MSF, Doctors without Borders). The incident in Zamfara affected eight villages, and led to the death of over 400 children and the poisoning of thousands more.

The government of Nigeria pledged to remove the contaminants in all the affected villages through a process called “remediation”. By the beginning of 2012, all but one village, Bagega, were remediated. Due to a lack of funding for the environmental clean-up of their village, the children of Bagega could not be treated as they would be immediately re-exposed to the toxins.

Although the government promised to make funds available for Bagega’s remediation in May 2012, it took sustained advocacy action by a group of activists, under the banner of an online initiative called Follow the Money, to force the government to release the funds.

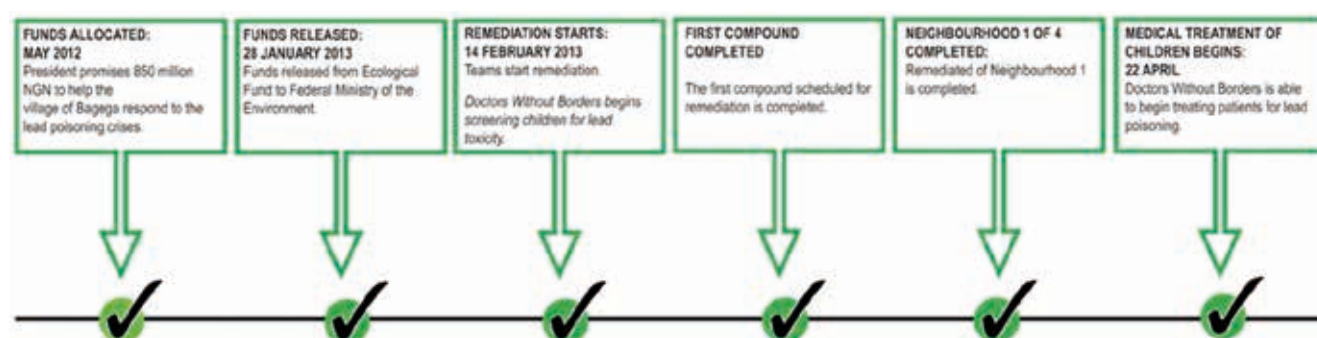
The group began by engaging with the Zamfara Lead Poison Stakeholders’ Forum, several government ministries, representatives of the miners, community leaders, media, community organisations, the state security apparatus, and other stakeholders around the issue. However, as all traditional avenues of engagement seemed to fail, they decided that more innovative ways of building pressure on the government were necessary. Using the tag #SaveBagega, activists, civil society and celebrities were encouraged to share the story of Bagega, including on President Goodluck Jonathan’s Facebook wall. In addition, the campaign crowdsourced the phone numbers and email addresses of those responsible in government. In less than 24 hours, the contact details of state and federal representatives, senators and ministers were shared and re-tweeted millions of times with appeals to email, call and text them with demands to save the children of Bagega. A breakthrough came almost immediately: in January 2013, Senator Bukola Saraki, chairperson of the environment committee, announced on Twitter that the president had approved the immediate release of US\$5.2 million for the remediation of Bagega.

Previous campaigns in Nigeria had often only raised awareness and then hoped that



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government would deliver on its promises. Follow the Money, which had been able raise awareness to unprecedented levels by using social media, decided to take its activism further. The campaign began to follow the movement of funds from the date of their release from the ministry of finance until they reached the remediation service providers, TerraGraphics. Such information is generally hard to obtain and, although the campaigners had some sources within the administration, they had to rely mostly on comparing the initial budget proposal and its costs with what they could observe on the ground in terms of the amount of equipment provided, staff employed, days worked, etc. Overall progress was documented step by step on the campaign's webpage (see figure) and then disseminated via Twitter and at townhall meetings with the affected community. Throughout the process, the activists worked closely with the community to ensure that the funds were used for their intended purpose, and that the unsafe mining practices and their effects were minimised.



The campaign only stopped monitoring the implementation when all the affected children were treated by MSF.

One mother commented, "Our children are now responding to treatments and feeling much better. I am very happy and I thank the team at Follow the Money". Another young man in the community added, "With information provided by Follow the Money, I know how much is meant for remediation and how much is my daily payment as a labourer in the remediation exercise".

The success of Bagega has inspired more action as the Follow the Money – which formally registered the non-governmental organisation Connected Development (CODE) in April 2013 – moved on to campaigns such as #NGFloods, which crowdsourced information and mapped areas affected by floods, #WomenCookstoves, which tracks the distribution of clean cookstoves, and the use of a specially built app, Uzabe, to track and prevent violence during the 2015 Nigerian general elections.

However, while the use of new media and technology helped to ensure that government is more responsive, Hamzat Lawal, the CEO of CODE, stresses that, "We wouldn't be so successful if we weren't working behind the scenes and connecting online and of-line actors to collaborate on the same issues. You have to work in advance to get all the necessary information and target people who can amplify the message. And when social media gets your message heard, you have to have a plan for what people can help you do from their phones and computers."

Although the use of information and communications technology was evidently only one element of the success of Follow the Money, one can only watch with optimism as the internet and social media become available to more communities and marginalised voices in Nigeria. ■■■

Visualisation of how the funds allocated for Bagega were spent.
© followthemoneyng.org

Internet Freedom and Repression in Zimbabwe

Natasha Msonza

But in a healthy democracy, government should never say "trust us". A healthy democratic society is one whose government never demands your blind trust. That's because strong rules and procedures are in place to ensure that the government doesn't get out of line. — Daniel J Solove¹

In early 2015, two unrelated events dealt a major blow to any notions Zimbabweans still had about the existence of freedom of expression and democracy: the forced disappearance of civil society activist Itai Dzamara² on 9 March and the raid on *The Source*, a local online news service, on 26 March. Dzamara's disappearance sent a clear message to all activists that freedom *after* expression in Zimbabwe is indeed an illusion. *The Source* was raided after Econet, Zimbabwe's largest telecoms company, and its banking unit, Steward, obtained a court order³ to search the newspaper's offices and have some stories written about the company, based on allegedly "stolen" information, removed from online. The raid also swooped up a lot of information unrelated to the case.

What is interesting about the two cases is the differences in the nature of subsequent public reaction. For Dzamara, at the time of writing, the outpourings of concern from civil society and human rights activists have been delivered only in the form of media statements and online petitions. There were no marches or offline campaigns for his release. For *The Source*, over 100 journalists and media practitioners have converged to protest in solidarity, to march and to deliver a petition against abuse of the media to Econet, some of whose officials reportedly played an active part in the raid. As this action was targeted

against a private company, it was generally considered innocuous. In an environment where democratic space has been systematically closed, it appears that the online realm remains – relatively speaking – a "safe" space from which to protest such sensitive issues as forced disappearances.

However, perpetrators seem to fall victim too. In March 2015, Econet issued a press statement to confirm that the company has, on a number of occasions, gone to court to prevent law enforcement officers from taking the call data records of specific customers. This verified what we have always suspected about the Zimbabwean government: that it frequently and actively demands records of the personal communications of various "persons of interest". Econet has never actually published any transparency reports about this or disclosed the number of requests made by the government or the courts to hand over user data. However, the majority of ordinary Zimbabweans are aware that local telecoms companies generally comply with government directives and are obligated to do so under various pieces of legislation.

While internet access remains limited in Zimbabwe due to high data costs, the number of mobile phone users has nevertheless increased rapidly over the years. The proliferation of affordable Chinese-manufactured generic mobile phones has made them the most accessible technology device among the population, with penetration of over 103 percent.⁴ Meanwhile, the Zimbabwean government, which is dominated by the ruling Zanu-PF party, enjoys massive control over the state media.

Despite the government's attempts to close in on online spaces, the inter-



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net remains a platform for the majority of Zimbabweans to share realities different to those punted by state media. Increasingly, the media, civil society and ordinary people see digital communication technologies as central tools to reclaim freedom of expression and foster democratic participation, enabling them to document, circumvent and expose repressive state apparatuses.

For example, while the registrar-general's office has consistently refused to allow citizens their right to free access to the voters' roll⁵, the "My Zim Vote" initiative let Zimbabweans check their voter registration status online. Kubatana.net has been providing human rights and civic education information for years, making it accessible to the general public from a centralised online source. "Mobile Community Zimbabwe" empowers citizen journalists to tell the alternative Zimbabwean story using mobiles, in a context where private media outlets are restricted and highly polarised. Described by *The Guardian* newspaper as the "comedians getting away with satirizing Mugabe's government"⁶, Magamba Network is a group of protest artists who "hide in plain sight" by distributing their video skits and shows via social networks, WhatsApp and DVDs to creatively criticise and poke fun at Mugabe's regime. The Twitter handle @263Chat popularised the hashtag #263Chat, around which Zimbabweans regularly congregate to discuss pertinent and contemporary national issues. Through this popular space for sharing and venting, the opinions of participating Zimbabweans are storified and disseminated for advocacy purposes.

In response to the central role played by information and communication technologies (ICTs) in the political upheavals in

North Africa and the Middle East, there are indications that Zimbabwe's government seeks to increase its control of ICTs – and mobile phone communications in particular. However, such attempts are not new. As far back as 2005, the Zimbabwean government intermittently jammed the radio signals of stations it perceived as critical, such as Voice of America and SW Radio Africa who broadcast from abroad.⁷ In 2007, the government enacted the Interception of Communications Act (ICA), which empowered it to monitor telephonic and online communications using sophisticated surveillance technologies acquired from China. The Act does not clearly define the circumstances under which this can be done and also requires service providers to intercept communications on the state's behalf. The International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH)⁸ also listed Zimbabwe for buying video surveillance and communications- and location-monitoring technologies from the US-based company Verint.

In response to the central role played by information and communication technologies (ICTs) in the political upheavals in North Africa and the Middle East, there are indications that Zimbabwe's government seeks to increase its control of ICTs.

In 2013, the Postal and Telecommunications Regulatory Authority (POTRAZ) was shifted from the ministry of transport, communications and infrastructural development to the office of the president and



Baba Jukwa on Facebook.

cabinet (OPC) – which also oversees the Central Intelligence Office (CIO) and other covert intelligence operations. While this move was explained as an effort to “improve regulatory independence”, it clearly facilitates information sharing between these agencies. In line with this explanation, in October 2013 the Statutory Instrument (SI) 142/2013 Postal and Telecommunications (Subscriber Registration) Regulations came into force, obligating all mobile and telephone subscribers to provide personal information to be incorporated into a centralised national database managed by POTRAZ. Among other things, the regulations enabled POTRAZ to hand over the personal information of subscribers to law enforcement officers without a warrant or any judicial oversight. The instrument was repealed after intervention by members of the legal and constitutional parliamentary portfolio committee, due to concerns about infringements of constitutional rights to privacy and freedom of expression.⁹

POTRAZ is now mulling over a cyber security bill intended, among other things, to control content sharing on social networks and to deal with social media “infractions” by prosecuting individuals found to be “abusing” cyber platforms. Thus far, it has been shrouded in secrecy, with authorities providing little information on its measures. It will likely become another tool for

repressing free expression and online information sharing, while facilitating greater government surveillance.

The bill was announced at the time when Sunday Mail editor Edmund Kudzayi was undergoing trial for espionage and treason in connection with the anonymous online political blogger and whistleblower known as “Baba Jukwa”. Baba Jukwa notably shared damaging inside information about Zanu–PF party meetings, allegations of voter fraud and planned assassinations, among other things. Although charges against Kudzayi were eventually dropped, his incarceration marked the first time a Zimbabwean had been indicted purely for social media activities deemed insurgent. It was also the first time that Zimbabwe’s government used Section 31 of the Criminal Law Codification Act, which criminalises circulating offensive content, controversial opinions or anything deemed to be insulting to the person of the president or his office, in relation to social media activity.¹⁰

Before fingering Kudzayi, the government had launched a national witch-hunt to unmask Baba Jukwa, including allegedly sending emissaries to Facebook to try to force the social media giant to assist their investigations. Kudzayi’s subsequent arrest sent a clear warning to any would-be anonymous bloggers who attempted to criticise the regime via online platforms.

A Widespread Lack of Awareness and Engagement

The fact that the government has been angling for control of electronic media through legislation and acquisition of intrusion and detection software should have prompted public concern. Yet despite these well-documented activities, ordinary Zimbabweans appear relatively unfazed, largely due to a limited appreciation of the immediate or future implications. Their pervasive lack of interest or comprehension indicates the alarming extent to which they have not engaged with such issues.

To make matters worse, many Zimbabweans have been led to believe that they must surrender their privacy in order to be more secure. Those on the security side of the debate have made powerful arguments to encourage people to accept this tradeoff and POTRAZ has successfully convinced citizens that they have nothing to worry about when they have nothing to hide.

Part of the problem comes from the fact that citizens have long looked to the government to provide national security. However, the protective role of the government has morphed over the years into a stifling repression that now necessitates protection from the government itself. In practice, the government has become a source of considerable insecurity among its citizens, and state security has become synonymous with protecting the security and survival of the ruling party.

The creation of central databases of personal information, for example, can leave citizens vulnerable to the government's unchecked use of such to look for patterns of "suspicious behaviour". Its desire to

wantonly use telephone wiretapping technology to obtain information about critics and political opponents should make the privacy of phone communications a public concern.

Civil society and the media have to play the critical role of building public awareness of cyber-security issues and engaging with the state, parliament and the minister, as well as using legal avenues, if required. The

However, the protective role of the government has morphed over the years into a stifling repression that now necessitates protection from the government itself.

constitution of Zimbabwe guarantees the enjoyment of freedom of expression: i.e. the freedom to hold opinions and to receive and impart information without interference, and freedom from interference in their correspondence. Recognising that access to the internet is crucial for the enjoyment of these rights in the digital age, the Digital Society of Zimbabwe, a network of digital security technologists and privacy advocates, was born to empower human rights defenders through digital self-defence training and effective use of the technologies of freedom. However, more is needed. Civil society should monitor the implementation of new norms and rules in the area of technology and cyberspace. Such engagement would be critical to foster principles of participation, transparency and accountability, which in turn can deepen trust between the state and citizens. Sadly the government generally views civil society with great con-

tempt, often accusing the latter of attempting to facilitate “regime change”.¹¹

The civil society strategy might also include serious engagement with lawmakers, particularly concerning cyberspace issues. As the repeal of the POTRAZ regulations indicate, the legal and constitutional parliamentary portfolio committee has been willing to listen to civil society concerns. Further gains can be achieved through insisting on public hearings, facilitating multi-stakeholder participation and raising awareness on this issue, while actively monitoring parliamentary bills and

submitting position papers to influence positive outcomes.

Ultimately the current situation in Zimbabwe presents a slow evolution of collective civil-society efforts to ensure that cyber security matters are not conflated with the building of a surveillance machinery. There is no better time to speak out and reclaim civil liberties like the freedom of speech and the right to privacy that are currently under threat from the surveillance state. It has to be done now, before all windows through which to negotiate necessary and proportionate measures are closed. ■■■

- 1 Solove D.J., 2011, *Nothing to Hide: The False Trade-off between Privacy and Security*, New Haven and London: Yale University Press, p 209.
- 2 Itai Dzamara, a strong critic of President Robert Mugabe’s regime, is known for being the man who hand-delivered a petition to the president that demanded his resignation and for leading a campaign dubbed “Occupy Africa Unity Square”.
- 3 It is unclear how Econet managed to get the controversial court order. After the raid, it was seen to be unconstitutional, largely because the company and its lawyers used the cover of the deputy sheriff to conduct the raid themselves.
- 4 Postal and Telecommunications Regulatory Authority of Zimbabwe (POTRAZ), 2013, *Sector Performance Report, 4th Quarter*, December.
- 5 This is allegedly because it was suspected that the roll has been tampered with over the years in order to facilitate election rigging, and contained phantom voters and fictitious addresses. A Research and Advocacy Unit (RAU) voters’ roll audit report highlighted critical discrepancies in the period leading up to the 2013 elections.
- 6 Ramaswamy C, 2015, “The Zimbabwean comedians getting away with satirising Mugabe’s government”, *The Guardian*, 6 April. Available at <http://www.theguardian.com/world/shortcuts/2015/apr/06/zambezi-news-comedians> [viewed 11 July 2015].
- 7 Freedom House, 2008, *Freedom in the World 2008*, 5 September. Available at <https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/freedom-world-2008#.VaH3dFzlc5Q> [viewed 11 July 2015].
- 8 International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH), 2014, “Surveillance technologies ‘Made in Europe’: Regulation needed to prevent human rights abuses”, 1 December. Available at <https://www.fidh.org/International-Federation-for-Human-Rights/globalisation-human-rights/business-and-human-rights/16563-surveillance-technologies-made-in-europe-regulation-needed-to-prevent#> [viewed 11 July 2015].
- 9 However, POTRAZ had already had at least eight months during which it could have granted access to its databases to state agents. POTRAZ’s amended regulation (SI 95/2014) had the same wording as its predecessor, with the only difference that state agents were now required to produce a court order before subscriber information could be accessed. This was again repealed.
- 10 In other cases, a teenage boy was arrested after posting a joke on Facebook that the president had died and was being preserved in a freezer, and a University of Zimbabwe student was arrested and charged with attempting to “cause insurgency and terrorism” after he allegedly emailed Baba Jukwa.
- 11 In 2011, 46 Zimbabwean activists, trade unionists and students were charged with treason for viewing videos of the North African uprisings at a meeting themed “Revolt in Egypt and Tunisia: What lessons can be learnt by Zimbabwe?”. See <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2011/feb/24/zimbabwe-charged-treason-egypt-protests>.

Between Privacy and Access to Information: Threats and Opportunities in Internet Regulation

Gabriella Razzano

Introduction

Africa is experiencing an internet revolution. It is estimated that 50 percent of Africans will be online by 2025 – up from 16 percent in 2013.¹ The current and expected growth in both utilisation and the relevance of the internet to African lives highlights the importance of legal and policy measures to regulate its use.

The internet is a new frontier that can provide greater access to information for more people than ever before, but in doing so, it constructs a massive web of information that makes personal data vulnerable to interception and misuse. Unsurprisingly, therefore, the need to balance privacy with access to information dominates the debate.

This particular tension shows that the internet affects a variety of rights in a variety of ways, exposing the artificiality of talking of the internet as a right without also acknowledging it as a context in which access to a variety of rights is contested.² What begins to emerge is a plethora of rights areas that could be impacted through policy and law to enhance or inhibit the online environment.

Current Threats

The adoption of internet-related regulation has been piecemeal, resulting from *ad hoc* responses to the rapid emergence and relevance of new information and communication technologies (ICTs).³ Importantly, it has occurred in a context of increasing emphasis on national security⁴, much of it born from the focus on international terrorism following the September 11 attacks in the United States and the subsequent wave of repressive anti-terrorist laws, such as the Uniting and Strengthening America by Providing

Appropriate Tools Required to Intercept and Obstruct Terrorism Act, 2011 (“Patriot Act”). In Africa, the rising impact of Islamic fundamentalism (in many senses, a reaction to the United States’ post-9/11 policies) ensured that national security has remained at the forefront of policy discussions.⁵

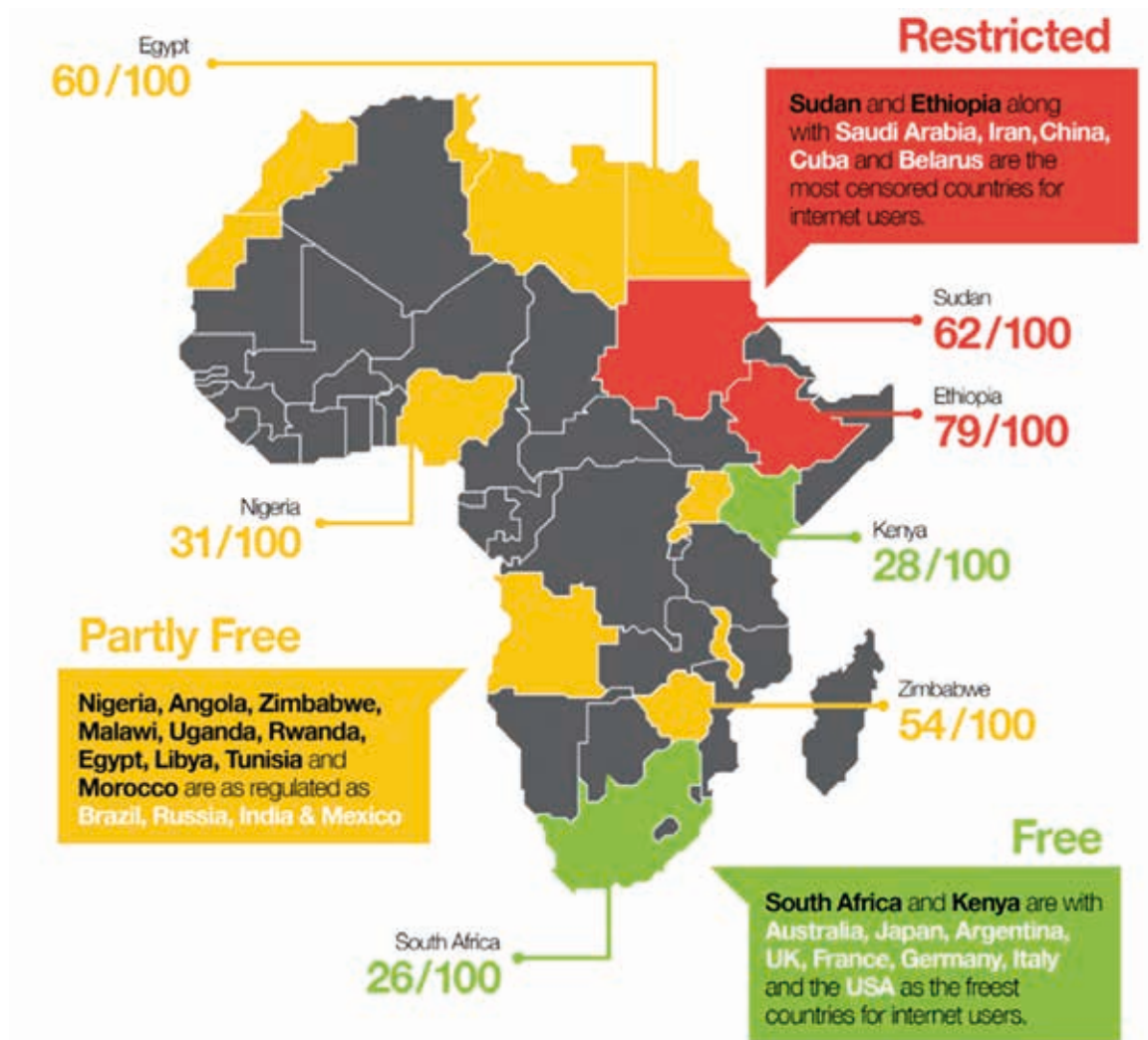
Although the online space undeniably presents real threats, the “national security” discourse is often exploited by states to introduce interventions of considerable breadth and retrogressive laws.

Although the online space undeniably presents real threats – such as new opportunities for the propagation of criminal acts ranging from hacking into personal and government systems to phishing and fraud syndicates (also known as 419 scams) – the “national security” discourse is often exploited by states to introduce interventions of considerable breadth and retrogressive laws. The “rise of the securocrat”, as this phenomenon has become known, can be understood as resulting from the prioritisation of national security principles throughout *all* administrative functions. This has promoted increased secrecy across the board⁶, affecting both online and offline liberties and access to information.

In South Africa, for example, the emphasis on national security led to the introduction of the Protection of State Information Bill – legislation that would severely threaten access to information by the public and the media through the broad classification of records, with stiff criminal sanctions for release.⁷



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African internet censorship. Countries were given a score out of a 100 based on the limits placed on online content, obstacles to internet access, and violations of user rights - lower scores equal greater internet freedom.

Source: <http://www.freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-net/freedom-net-2013>
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National security discourse can be abused to directly threaten internet freedom through ICT regulation. Ethiopia's Anti-Terrorism Law of 2002 broadly authorises the interception of communications under the guise of national security and has actively been used to both monitor and charge journalists and human rights activists.⁸ This follows a regional trend that includes the Regulation of Interception of Communications and Provision of Communication-Related Information Act, 2002 in South Africa and Zimbabwe's Interception of Communications Bill, 2007, where the breadth of law and opaque oversight remain causes for concern.

The emphasis on national security thus clearly begins to impinge on citizen privacy. The issue of mass online surveillance by state agencies was brought to the fore through the revelations of Edward Snowden in 2013. Snowden leaked classified information that the United States government, through the National Security Agency's PRISM programme, was engaged in mass non-consensual surveillance of

citizens. However, the domestic regulation of communications interception has also been abused in practical cases. For instance, an American citizen of Ethiopian dissent sued the Ethiopian government in 2014 for infecting his computer with spyware and monitoring his computer usage.⁹ In terms of *mass* surveillance, African governments have also been guilty of such violations, procuring surveillance technologies from popular German producer Trovicor.¹⁰ The Egyptian government has frequently been outed for mass surveillance of social media through its Social Networks Security Hazard Monitoring Operation.

Mass surveillance may also detect and uproot journalistic sources, as well as allow for the storage of data that may be used to threaten them¹¹, posing a risk for both the sources and the journalist themselves. Even the specially protected communication portals that exist online may be infiltrated by those with enough know-how.¹² This is why threats to online security have begun to be seen as threats to freedom of expression.

The Snowden revelations also brought

attention to the lack of adequate legal protection for whistleblowers in many countries. The internet presents opportunities both for anonymous disclosures and for tracking those who make them, as well as making it difficult to ascertain the authenticity of information and its sources. Recognising this threat on our continent, activists in 2015 launched Afrileaks (www.afrileaks.org), an African-specific portal to facilitate anonymous disclosures between journalists and sources.

Because of the profound intersection of privacy and access to information concerns, the regulation of these areas must be considered together. One good example is the Office of the Australian Information Commission (www.oaic.gov.au), which oversees both access to information and privacy.

Opportunities for Advocacy

Several regional and international legislative initiatives present particular opportunities for advocating openness and freedom online. In many ways, this is due to the internet's peculiar relationship to jurisdictional boundaries: effective regulation requires international collaboration.

The African Union's (AU) recent adoption of the Convention on Cyber Security and Personal Data Protection presents a unique opportunity to address citizens' privacy concerns. The Convention provides a framework through which all African states can attempt to regulate cyber crime and enhance the protection of citizen's personal data. This guidance is vital: as explained above, the patchwork character of Africa's laws is a key weakness, making harmonisa-

tion difficult. Yet, given the cross-jurisdictional nature of cyber crime, consistency is imperative for practical interventions.

A further development is the African Declaration on Internet Rights and Freedoms, a regional initiative drafted by a wide array of African civil society organisations. Much like other human rights instruments that preceded it, such as the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights of 1981 or the Windhoek Declaration on Promoting an Independent and Pluralistic African Press of 1991, the Declaration formulates a comprehensive rights-based framework that contextualises the various concerns arising from the fluid internet landscape. Critically, it asserts that the foundation of internet regulation is openness and freedom, as opposed to prioritising national security, secrecy or even privacy.

The Global Principles of National Security and the Right to Access to Information (2013) is another powerful instrument with the potential to counter some of the legislative threats to online openness and freedom. Drafted by an international alliance of academics and civil society, the Principles' central message is that the public interest should override national security concerns that would otherwise result in the withholding of information.

These instruments for positive change now need domestic implementation: activists should focus on challenging anti-progressive legislative developments through championing compliance with them.

On the national front, there is a notable increase in the drafting and adoption of access to information laws.¹³ These could be greatly strengthened by concurrent passage of laws that provide adequate protection of personal privacy.¹⁴ For instance, South

Africa's Protection of Personal Information Act, 2013 created an information regulator with oversight of both personal privacy and access to information. The Malawian Draft Bill on Access to Information demonstrates that newer legislative iterations can specifically consider the proactive disclosure of information through online-access and open-government data initiatives.

Conclusion

Because the internet intersects with all aspects of our lives and across all human

rights, threats to freedom of expression and access to information online can occur through a variety of legislative and practical interventions. The broad array of threats is made more difficult to counter by the piecemeal regulation of the internet and the obvious complications of jurisdiction. It is a new frontier – and a new frontier of profound importance for the African continent. Activists must stay abreast of legal developments in the area, not only to act against threats but, perhaps more importantly, to exploit the radical and disruptive new ways the internet can be used to advance social justice. ■■■

- 1 McKinsey & Co, 2013, *Lions Go Digital: The Internet's Transformative Potential in Africa*, McKinsey Global Institute, Johannesburg, p 13.
- 2 This paper will address the internet as a particular context in which rights exist, rather than as constituting a right itself. See further on this topic: Razzano G, 2014, *A First Step to Getting a Grip on the Internet and Human Rights*, Open Democracy Advice Centre and La Rue F, 2011, *Report of the Special Rapporteur on the Promotion and Protection of the Right to Freedom of Opinion and Expression*, Human Rights Council, Seventeenth Session Agenda Item 3, United Nations General Assembly, 16 May.
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- 5 Sulemana M, 2015, "Islamism in West Africa: Context and enabling factors", *Counter Terrorist Trends and Analysis*, 7:2, 19–23.
- 6 Waterfield B, 2008, "EU plan: The rise and rise of the securocrats", *The Telegraph*, 7 August. Available at: http://blogs.telegraph.co.uk/news/brunowaterfield/4841723/EU_plan_The_rise_and_rise_of_the_securocrats [viewed 17 April 2015].
- 7 The Act has been passed by parliament and is currently with the president awaiting signature into law.
- 8 The CIPESA report provides a good summary of East African trends in relation to threats against internet freedom. See: Collaboration on International ICT Policy in East and Southern Africa (CIPESA), 2014, *State of Internet Freedom in East Africa 2014*, May 23. Available at: http://www.cipesa.org/?wpfb_dl=76 [viewed 11 January 2015].
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- 10 Electronic Frontier Foundation (EFF), 2012, "Spy tech companies and their authoritarian customers, Part II: Trovicor and Area SpA", 21 February. Available at: <https://www.eff.org/deeplinks/2012/02/spy-tech-companies-their-authoritarian-customers-part-ii-trovicor-and-area-spa> [viewed 7 July 2015].
- 11 King G, 2014, "The NSA puts journalists under a cloud of suspicion", Committee to Protect Journalists. Available at: <http://cpj.org/2014/02/attacks-on-the-press-surveillance-storage.php> online [viewed 20 July 2014].
- 12 Spiegel, 2013, "Snowden document: NSA spied on Al Jazeera communications", 31 August. Available at <http://www.spiegel.de/international/world/nsa-spied-on-al-jazeera-communications-snowden-document-a-919681.html> [viewed 20 July 2014].
- 13 Mohan K, 2014, *Factsheet: Freedom of Information in Africa*, Africa Check. Available at: www.africacheck.org/factsheets/factsheet-freedom-of-information-laws-on-the-african-continent [viewed 20 April 2015].
- 14 CIPESA, 2014, op. cit..

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Publication information

Publisher	Heinrich-Böll-Stiftung e.V.
Publication Date	July 2015
Editors	Keren Ben-Zeev and Jochen Luckscheiter with conceptual support from Benjamin Ace.
Copy Editor	Helen Douglas
Cover Image	Mūchiri Njenga
Layout/Typesetting	Catherine Coetzer, c2designs
Infographics	Tamzyn La Gorce
Printed by	Asset Print, Cape Town



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About the artwork

Title: Run KT Run (2015)

Material: Digital print on cotton rag paper

Courtesy of the artist.