INTRODUCTION

A Social Science Perspective on Media Practices in Africa

Social Mechanisms, Dynamics and Processes

Jo Helle-Valle and Ardis Storm-Mathisen

The Book and Its Topic

The scope of this book is to contribute to an increased understanding of the social significance of new media in contemporary Africa. For analytical reasons, which will be made clear in this introduction, our approach is to use a few countries for intense, focused, ethnographically based case studies. These are Botswana, South Africa, Zambia and DR Congo. The question about new media's role is a grand one, and in our view it is impossible to ever give a general and definitive answer to it. Still, it is a crucial question to ask, first of all because two occurrences took place more or less at the same time, starting in the mid-1990s: Africa experienced a marked and relatively consistent economic growth (Jerven, 2005, 2015), and during the same period the continent experienced what can only be described as a media revolution. The World Bank, United Nations and other experts on development issues – supported by leading media outlets – declared that the 'Dark Continent' had recovered. This prompted a strong 'Africa Rising' discourse (Jerven, 2005; Taylor, 2016), often closely linked to the growth of new media (see e.g. Amankwah-Amoah, 2019). Statistics showed that most African countries experienced a sustained growth in GDP and other indicators of economic development.[1] As to the media revolution, the changes have been indisputable: computers, mobile phones and the internet

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came gradually from the early 1990s but the penetration rate for both mobile phones and use of the internet took off in the early 2000s.

Africa's mobile phone adoption curve has been spectacular. In a little over a decade, Africa, and not least the sub-Saharan part of the continent, has witnessed the fastest growth in mobile subscribers in the world. The number of connections in this region has grown by 44 per cent since 2000, compared to an average of 34 per cent for developing regions and 10 per cent for developed regions, and is expected to continue to grow in the years to come (GSMA, 2012). Nevertheless, according to the ICT Development Index 2017 (IDI),[2] Africa remains the region with the lowest ICT (Information and Communication Technology) development, due to a rather low standing in economic terms and limited development of a fixed broadband infrastructure (International Telecommunication Union [ITU], 2017).[3] African countries also score low on the socio-economic impact of ICT according to the Network Readiness Index (NRI) (World Economic Forum [WEF], 2016).[4]

Investigating the relationship between social changes taking place in Africa and the changing media landscape is important for political reasons as well. The global development industry has embraced the discourse of new media being the salvation for poor and struggling countries. The World Bank, various UN agencies, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and innumerable non-governmental organisations (NGOs) have identified the media revolution as the main route towards development (Murphy and Carmody, 2015). So have almost all governments in Africa. The countries discussed in this book are no exception and the invested hopes for ICT to have positive outcomes are conspicuously present in their national development plans. This means that questions concerning the relationship between (new) media and development are of crucial social and political significance – the topic has entered arenas in which policy decisions are made. Obviously, good policy decisions rely on good knowledge while inadequate knowledge tends to generate bad policies. Our interest is thus not only academic; it is of crucial importance for all to rapidly expand our understanding of this theme. For it is our – as well as many other onlookers' – opinion that the knowledge we have so far is at best inadequate. New media do have developmental potential but they are not a golden ticket to a prosperous future. Policy failures are already evident and critical voices are becoming more numerous by the day, not least within academia.

In this introduction, we will position our own contribution to this enormous and diverse discourse by first expanding on the academic landscape of media and development. This will then lead us to clarify

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the book's theoretical, analytical and methodological foundation. We will then give short descriptions of the chapters that follow and draw connecting lines between them before we end our introduction with some synthesising reflections.

Development and ICT/New Media

How media use might positively benefit people in the developing world has long been the focus of scholarly work, most importantly with the Chicago School in the 1920s and the Frankfurter School in the 1930s and onwards. Later it evolved as a distinct field of 'Development Communication' in the 1950s and 1960s (Vokes, 2018a, pp. 5ff). With the rapid developments and uptake of ICT[5] since then, the study of media and development has intensified and diversified into various subfields of Media and Communication Studies, with labels such as 'Media in/for Development' (M4D), 'Communication in/for Development' (ComDev)' or 'Information and Communication Technology for Development' (ICT4D) (ibid.; Postill, 2010; Tufte, 2016). It is not within the scope of this book to dig into the specificities of these various strands, except to recognise the most dominant contributions in terms of influence and critical perspectives.

ICT4D[6] focuses on 'the ways in which donor governments, multi-lateral aid agencies, NGOs and developing world governments and their citizens may use media in order to advance their economic, political and social goals' (Vokes, 2018a, p. 20). A narrow approach concentrates on media as institutions by focusing on the 'processes through which development agencies and NGOs might try to engage with a developing world in an attempt to strengthen its media sector, and also to improve the socio-legal environment in which that sector operates' (Tufte, 2016, p. 17). A broader approach looks at 'the interplay and convergence between communication and development' (ibid.). Nevertheless, although there is diversity in the thinking within the ICT4D community, its discourse maintains a positive and technology-deterministic perspective on the prospects of ICTs to transform development processes (Murphy and Carmody, 2015, p. xiv). Since the ICT4D community is well organised, has significant levels of participation of stakeholders and receives investments from transnational media-technology corporations, it has become a powerful agenda-setter with respect to the ICT–development link (ibid.).

As Wendy Willems elaborates in her chapter in this book, the optimistic view of the ICT–development link that can be associated with

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ICT4D perspectives closely resembles the perspectives argued by the proponents of Modernisation Theory. This inherently ethnocentric and normative theory, emerging from the Bretton-Woods agreement in the late 1940s, argued that development equalled modernisation and that modernisation was the striving towards the socio-economic form that had developed in the USA and Western Europe. The road 'developing countries' needed to take was to let capitalism run its course more or less unhampered because if capital and technology were let loose, all the other problems would solve themselves, such as democratic rule, welfare and a just society. Needless to say, its evolutionist perspective on the mechanisms of social change soon proved to be mostly wrong, and was heavily criticised.

The ICT4D perspective has rightly been met with the same type of criticism. For one, it presents solutions that ignore or neglect key structural inequalities and thereby distorts priorities from core issues of poverty and debt. Secondly, it takes for granted the transformative capacity of technology – hence alerts to a determinism – without investigating how it in fact affects users. Thirdly, its technology-driven solutions in fact perpetuate dependency, inequality and power inequalities, and hamper the development of local economies. Thus, it 'thintegrates' rather than integrates in thick and more sustainable ways (Murphy and Carmody, 2015). Fourthly, there are ethical issues related to the growing power of global corporations that mine data and take control of markets in developing countries. The weakness in the ICT4D approach is, in other words, that it takes a one-sided, optimistic and macro-oriented perspective, and leaves crucial questions unanswered 'regarding whether, and the explicit ways in which, ICTs are transforming multiscalar and embedded power relations, inequalities, and other structural features that have held back African economies for decades' (ibid., p. xv; see also Ojo, 2018). One reason for this, we argue, is that the ICT4D and various related academic approaches have taken a media-centred focus. In this book we argue for the necessity of a more 'society-centred' (Brinkman and de Bruijne, 2018; Miller et al., 2016; Slater, 2013; Willems and Mano, 2017) and 'non-media centric' (Morley, 2009) approach, a theme to which we will now turn.

The Roles of Media in Research

Important reasons for the techno-optimism of the ICT4D-related perspectives are not only that it ideologically resonates well with our neoliberal era but that much of the academic groundwork was delivered

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not by critical social scientists but by model-oriented economists and media researchers. The former operated with macro models that were based on mechanical relationships between input and output. Thus, to fit well into their models, ICT is seen solely as a technology and a production factor. Rightly assuming that information and communication technologies hold the potential both for faster and less costly information flows, and that it is a production sector in itself, it is expected that the introduction of ICT will start a self-propelling growth, if only the mechanisms of the market are allowed to work uninhibited.

The other academic perspective affecting the views of the ICT4D community is media research. Naturally, media are at the centre of their attention and tend to acquire a life of their own, pushing actors out in the periphery of their research. Thus, early media research operated with ideas about an 'audience' who dutifully purchased the technologies and passively took in media content. With Stuart Hall's seminal conceptual pair 'encoding/decoding' (cf. Hall, 1980), introduced in the first part of the 1970s, a more critical view developed on how media content was received. This set off a very productive turn in parts of media studies, too many-faceted to be reiterated here. However, reception and audience studies bloomed, turning their attention to how people actually related to media, and especially its content. According to media researcher Pertti Alasuutari (1999), such research has gone through three phases. First, in the 1970s it basically followed Hall's ideas about three types of media receptions: a hegemonic position (uncritically taking in media content), a negotiated position (critical but positive) and an oppositional position. Soon proven to be insufficiently sensitive to complex realities, the next phase of reception and audience studies held a more open approach, insisting that one needed to take more seriously the variations in media reception – studying not only the class position of the media consumers but also the contexts in which media were consumed. Thus, the new perspective argued that media consumption needed to be empirically studied as part of their everyday life. As for the third phase of such studies, Alasuutari is conspicuously vague, only highlighting the importance of an even stronger social contextualisation of media practices, in which ethnographic methodology was crucial.

Our interpretation of this vagueness is that media studies had not yet taken in the radical implication of this turn away from media-centred approaches. The discipline is diverse but ethnography is not among its strengths. It was not until David Morley in 2009 introduced the term 'non-media-centric media studies' that the full implication of this 'third phase' was conceptualised. In fact, one could argue that the

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full consequence of the radical turn has not yet come into full effect. For instance, Shaun Moores, one of the strongest proponents of the non-media-centric perspective, dedicates considerable space in his book *Digital Orientations* to convincing his fellow media researchers of the wisdom of this perspective despite its 'counter-intuitive' content (2018, pp. 4ff). However, we argue that this is far less counter-intuitive for social scientists.

The reason for this being more intuitively graspable for social scientists than media researchers is that the former habitually place the social or the actors at the centre of analysis. In fact, it was not until Arjun Appadurai published the anthology *The Social Life of Things* in 1986 that putting *things* at the centre of the analysis was presented as a novel strategy within interpretive social science.[7] Thus, what Morley has done for media studies is precisely that – to radically shift the understanding of the role of media. His (very short) article about the non-media-centric approach has of course been interpreted in different ways, but we propose a radical understanding of his Copernican turn – the need to shift attention from the media themselves to focus on how sociality shapes media (elegantly phrased by Miller et al. [2016] as 'how the world changes social media'). Then – and only then – can we look at what roles media possibly play in these practices. There are two very good arguments for doing this, one general and one tied to the topic of this book.

First, although there are good reasons to warn against simplified ideas of media merely being a type of technology – which happen to mediate information – we nevertheless wish to emphasise the instrumental and heterotelic quality of media. Media are technologies, infrastructure and content which people make use of because they are, in some way, found to be useful (cf. Silverstone and Hirsch, 1992). From this, it follows that the *social* significance of media is first of all found by focusing on the practices in which the media are put to use. A farmer calling a veterinary officer for help with vaccinating his goats connects very different people and generates entirely different effects than a young man flirting with a girlfriend-to-be. It is one technology – it can even be the same phone – but the difference the phone makes sociologically is worlds apart.

Secondly, the topic of this book – which is about the social effects of media use – makes the point about de-centring media especially relevant. We want to investigate the ways and the extent to which media play a part in the changes that we see Africa going through. The ambition is to look concretely at the relationships between media and various social processes of change in specific localities. Our main interest is

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not the various meanings media practices convey in themselves, but that media – as technology, infrastructure and content – are crucial parts of social practices. In other words, we are not primarily investigating media as representations of something socio-cultural but as significant parts of processes that make up the social. In this book, media are thus foremost interesting in their non-representational form – we look at their quality as social agents, not as vehicles of meaning (Moores, 2018; Thrift, 1996).

Media being agents makes sense within the analytical framework of Actor Network Theory (ANT). The point is not to endow things in themselves with some sort of magical agency but to insist that agency is about making things happen, making a difference (Latour, 2005, pp. 40ff). Agency should not be fetishised as a force that exists *within* humans but should be seen as various assemblages of humans and non-humans that together bring about a difference in the world. It is the sum of what these assemblages of humans and non-humans actually do that makes up society. Therefore, our job is to trace the various associations between things and people, to study the trails left behind by these associations and then arrive at the social through observations of these assemblages. From this perspective, the social is the result of actions, not their preconditions (ibid.).[8] Media are hence an essential part of making the social happen, just as sociality fundamentally forms media.

From this, two analytical themes that link directly to media and social change emerge, and need to be discussed. First, what does it mean to give analytical primacy to *practices*? Secondly, how do we deal with *change*?

Practice

Hardly anybody would contest that an idea of, and a focus on practice is important in studies of the social. After all, societies are made up of (among other things) people, and most accord the potential for agency to individuals. So why emphasise practice? The obvious point is found in the history of the social sciences. From Durkheim until today, people – and their actions – have been side-lined for the purpose of highlighting the social as a self-contained and self-reproducing system. A consequence was that what people did – practices – really didn't matter (Helle-Valle, 2010). Thus, a rehabilitation of the acting subject was needed. Moreover, there is a banal methodological side to it: we need to look at what people do, and talk with individuals, in order to understand how society works. So also is the case with media and social change: it is people who use media, it is they who intentionally apply ICTs for various reasons. So we need to look at (media) practices.

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However, the more controversial side to practice theories is how to *handle* our data on people's actions. There is a strong tradition in the philosophy of science, from Plato onwards, to make sense of reality through a framework, which can be labelled 'vertical ontology' (Bryant, 2011; DeLanda, 2006). This implies that we explain regularities and order by way of principles of another ontological sense. In short, this is to apply what Carl Hempel (1966) calls 'Covering Laws' – evoking some kind of ordering faculty which is of a 'higher' order than the empirical findings we attempt to explain (hence the vertical). This logic was most clearly displayed in structuralism, where the Saussurean principle of *langue* explaining *parole* was brought into the realm of social sciences, and in functionalism and structural functionalism in which 'society', 'culture', 'social structure' was seen to have an existence of its own and was used to explain what was observed on the ground.

Many authors who advocate various strands of practice theory do not necessarily dismiss this type of explanation (e.g. Couldry and Hepp, 2017; Reckwitz, 2002; Schatzki, 2002). It is not our task or privilege to place different practice theorists into this or that category; what we want to do is highlight the form of practice theory that has guided the studies in this book, which we would term a 'flat ontology' stance. In short, the argument is that it is logically flawed to introduce causes that are ontologically different from that which shall be explained. As Latour puts it, '… the ways in which *la parole* meets *la langue* have remained totally mysterious ever since the time of Saussure' (2005, p. 167). The problem with such reasoning is that the assumed structures (or 'culture', or whatever term one introduces to designate collective forces) are not real but constructions that researchers introduce as shorthand for behavioural patterns. In other words, they belong to a different ontological order than what we study – the former the 'raw material', the latter a 'tool'. Therefore, the analytical flaw lies in applying such constructed concepts as *explanations* or *causes* to what is happening within the field of study. As Bourdieu puts it, 'any scientific objectification ought to be preceded by a sign indicating "everything takes place as if …", which, functioning in the same way as quantifiers in logic, would constantly remind us of the epistemological status of the constructed concepts of objective science' (Bourdieu, 1977, p. 203, n49). In contrast, a flat ontology-guided practice theory argues that what we use to explain should *only* contain elements that ontologically belong to the realm of what is sought to be explained. It is in this sense that the ontology is flat (DeLanda, 2002; Helle-Valle, 2010). This flatness requires that we study sociality as it flows by and attempt to explain by paying attention to action as it unfolds (and has unfolded in the past) by following actors, tracing networks and

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revealing assemblages (Latour, 2005), thus putting together the details in ways that give better insights into the flow of life. This does not imply that we cannot make use of terms like structure, culture and the like, but we should not use them to explain anything. As Harré formulates it, 'To collect up a set of rules and conventions as an institution is a harmless and useful classificatory device, so long as we do not slip into ascribing causal powers to it' (2009, p. 139).

The significance of this ontological point is that it has analytical implications. First, one needs to contextualise practices. It is not possible to understand an action (including utterances) without thoroughly linking it to the concrete, specific setting of which it is a part. As Malinowski formulated it, 'the conception of meaning as *contained* in an utterance is false and futile. A statement, spoken in real life, is never detached from the situation in which it has been uttered' (Malinowski, 1974, p. 307, emphasis in the original; see also Wittgenstein, 1968, §43). Secondly, if action derives its meaning from the specific setting in which it unfolds, it follows that we need to be extremely wary of generalisations. Patterns and processes found in one setting do not necessarily have relevance in another, seemingly similar situation. The concrete implication of this is the need to make 'thick descriptions' (Geertz, 1984) in order to give sense to the observations described – it is only in their embeddedness that the descriptions make sense.

This then relates to the non-media-centric approach to media-related studies as it highlights the specific setting in which media uses take place. Moreover, it requires a non-representational perspective as the significant forms of media uses we study are not about representations but as practice in themselves. And not least, the perspective demonstrates the significance of case-based studies – it is only through actual events, in their embedded complexity, that insights into the social roles of media can be revealed ('… there is science only in the particular' [Latour, 2005, p. 137]; see also Flyvbjerg, 2006).

How, then, can we make sense of a flat, complicated field of media practices? As we have already indicated, the particularity of practice requires ethnography and thick descriptions (e.g. Storm-Mathisen, 2018). However, if all we could do was tell stories of particular cases, we would not be able to compare, to generalise, or to move beyond the emic perspective. For one, to gaze beyond the particular we need facts and statistics. It is obviously of great importance that we know how large a portion of the adult population in Botswana owns a mobile phone, how many have internet access in Zambia and that perhaps the most limiting factor for Africans to access the internet is economic. This enables us to know something about the conditions in which media-related practices take

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place. If you cannot afford airtime, it is of no use that vital resources are available on the internet. Thus, although quantitative data from Africa (and elsewhere in the world) should be treated with the utmost scepticism (due to variable reliability), we still need this kind of information. Triangulation is thus crucial, methodological as well as analytical (Denzin, 1989). More challenging, however, is to grasp and present the various forces that are at play, from global connections to interpersonal dynamics – which of course are connected. Thus, we need to analytically unite the vast and the small in valid ways, to understand change, processes, comparison and generalisation (cf. Miller's [Borgerson and Miller, 2016] and Slater's [2013] use of the term 'scaling').

Change, Causality and Social Mechanisms

The scope of this book is to study how media and social change in Africa are connected. We hold that when something 'social' goes from one form to another, the researcher's job is to give a plausible account of how and/or why. But what constitutes an explanation is not clear. For one, the concepts (explanation, cause, understanding, etc.) are polythetic (Needham, 1975), hence not self-explanatory. For instance, the term 'explanation' conventionally refers to causes of another order and the critique is that this violates logic of scientific thought. Thus, Wittgenstein stated that we 'must do away with all *explanation*, and description alone must take its place' (1968, §109, emphasis in the original), and Latour writes that 'the opposition between description and explanation is another of these false dichotomies that should be put to rest … If a description remains in need of an explanation, it means that it is a bad description' (2005, p. 137). The dominant position among quantitatively oriented social scientists who emulate the hard sciences is to apply an analytical framework of variables (not people) and seek to arrive at explanations by testing out hypotheses that, ideally, have been posited before the research starts. A very different position is found among empirically oriented, qualitatively based researchers who strive for particularistic, thick descriptions. Here the aim is to understand and describe what takes place, not necessarily to explain. A third position is post-structuralist, discursively oriented, in which causal explanations are often non-existent, or at least well hidden. Some have even turned this into a virtue, like Jeffrey Alexander who wrote in *Handbook of Sociology* that 'sociology should pay less attention to "explanation" and more to "discourse"' (1988, cited in Hedström and Swedberg, 1996, p. 282). In all cases it can be argued that causality either represents a problem, or is more or less

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ignored. In the latter case, it tends to be dismissed as uninteresting, while the 'anthropologist' will argue that reality is too complex to be reduced to a set of causal elements. For variable-based research, explanation is considered important but is critiqued for either postulating correlations and suggestive causality, or – because it is quantitative and based on variables – becoming so oversimplified that it does not fit well with the realities on the ground (Hedström and Swedberg, 1998, pp. 15ff).

Thus, given our topic and our theoretical stance, we want to explain but cannot do this in the form of 'laws' or grand connections – simply because we do not believe that such compelling causality exists within the human sciences. However, changes are not haphazard: the fact that people know most of what is happening around them and have good reasons to believe that they know what will happen tomorrow is an indication that most things do in fact stay the same, and that what exists of changes does actually hold a certain predictability. Most of us take for granted that new media will develop further, and that more people will be online and that the world is overheating and will continue to do so unless some radical political efforts are implemented. But we do not know whether such policies will be implemented, nor do we know if Africa will become a better place for most to live.

Men make their own history but they do not make it just as they please (Marx, 1954, p. 10), nor do they necessarily achieve what they want. It is the same with media in Africa; their presence is the result of human action but the ways in which they are used and the effects they have on people's lives are not necessarily intended, or wished for. What happens within the field of media involves billions of people and ICT devices, hence resulting in innumerable processes and dynamics, which are impossible to unequivocally predict. However, with our ambition to provide insights into the roles that media play in a changing Africa, our theoretical perspective's prohibition to apply explanations of a vertical type, and insistence on situational particularity, we believe that an ideal explanation is an account that both makes actions understandable and seeks to suggest minute causal connections between elements within the field of practice. We suggest that the solution to this challenge is to focus on processes, that is, flows of action where a set of actions generate other actions and together form certain types of results (Storm-Mathisen, 2019). This can give a comparative and generalisable potential to our material. Processes have a universality that transcends particular practices and provides a tool for linking our ethnographies and themes in ways that enable us to paint a larger picture. We thus draw attention to the ways in which various concerns and wider

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dynamics intersect, and tend to generate certain outcomes (cf., e.g., Barth, 1981, pp. 77ff).

What we want to do is to combine the ambitions of the hard sciences, in terms of explanatory rigour, with the reality of the social sciences – heeding the fact that we deal with people, who are reflexive, have free will and are hence in principle unpredictable. One such approach is what is known under the term 'social mechanisms'. This sprang out of analytical sociology, a spin-off from rational choice theories and other 'hard' forms of sociology. However, it also has links to Critical Realism (Bashkar, Harré), which is rooted in much more reflexive, critical forms of philosophy like those of Bakhtin, Vygotski and Wittgenstein. Jon Elster, who is among the early advocates for social mechanism reasoning, defines it as 'frequently occurring and easily recognizable causal patterns that are triggered under generally unknown conditions or with indeterminate consequences' (2007, p. 36; see also Gross, 2009; Helle-Valle, 2019). The crucial point is that it seeks to create an ordered, realistic model of what influences what in a complex social setting by identifying some types of *causal tendencies* that we find occurring with some frequency, and identifying under what conditions the mechanisms are triggered and under what conditions they are suppressed or modified. Thus, we believe we need to discard the very idea of Covering Law types of reasoning and in its place *empirically* investigate the kinds of causal relations that actually do exist. To take an example: ICT4D and Modernisation Theory rest on ideas about causality derived from a Covering Law logic. Had the central theses in these perspectives been treated as mechanisms, not laws, it would have a lot more explanatory force. The tendency that capital generates more capital is empirically and logically a solid one, so is the assumption that ICTs are labour saving. However, the problem is that it is only under certain conditions that these mechanisms actually operate. The critiques from various strands of dependency theories are doing just that – pointing out the conditions that tend to hinder the capital-generating potential of capital. What we argue, then, is that generalisations can only be reached by investigating empirically the processes that media-related practices tend to generate – to make them explicit and analyse how different mechanisms are combined.

Our insistence on letting people's own life worlds and concerns be the starting point of research, and openly exploring the various consequences of their actions, accords well with postcolonial critiques, brought to the fore by reflections on 'theories from the south', decolonisation and indigenous knowledge (e.g. Comaroff and Comaroff, 2012; Denzin et al., 2008; Tomaselli, 2005). The perspectives vary considerably

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but one thing they all share is the concern for the uneven power relations between those who do the research and those who are studied. In short, conventional academia's tendency to simply reproduce images of 'the Other' and thereby reinforce the objectification and hence powerlessness of people in the Global South calls for a reconfiguration of the very practice of conducting research. Although we can in no way claim to be acquitted of such a role, we believe that this work's theoretical foundation frees us from some of the criticisms. The open, investigative, 'flat' and emic approach (cf. Tomaselli, 2005, ch. 7) is a necessary precondition for building a sound understanding of what is really going on, how sociality actually works.[9]

We are aware of our privileged position in that we have a life-long training in understanding and representing socialities and are linked to institutions and hence power structures that those we study are not. However, in our view this does not by necessity place us in an exploitative position vis-à-vis those we study. We not only hope that our specialised knowledge can be put to use for good purposes, we have also actively sought to give back in ways that we can. To concretise: we – the editors – wanted to disseminate our knowledge in useful ways to the local community in which we spent so much time. The initial idea was that we, in cooperation with local institutions, would arrange an inclusive seminar so that we could find ways to merge our expert knowledge with the villagers' expert knowledge through a dialogical process (cf. Slater, 2013). However, we found through our preparatory dialogues that it would most likely not work in the inclusive and productive ways we had envisaged. Instead, we ended up making a web page with and for the villagers about the village. It became clear that outside competence and money was needed to construct and maintain a web page.[10] Moreover, early in the process of deciding the web page's content, certain local business interests pressed for exploiting the page to their own commercial ends, detrimental to the voiced interests of most villagers.[11] We engaged in open dialogues with different villagers, and ended up using our privileged position to put our foot down on some suggestions; we had the final say on the terms of the web page. Thus, we used the power vested in our position but we believe we used it in a way to exploit what Foucault calls the productive potential of power; to use power to promote a positive sociality.

Our understanding of practice, as well as our empirically founded emphasis on the various social mechanisms that are in operation in the socialities we study, represent the foundation on which we will now seek to draw lines between the different chapters, suggesting some types of causal tendencies that can be found across space and contexts. This,

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then, should give some room for sensible generalisations. But first we need to give short accounts of the chapters in this book.

The Chapters

The book seeks to cover areas in people's lives that are of concern to them. Of course, with a handful of researchers and data from five different countries in Africa we can only provide samples of the highly diverse socialities that exist in these countries. Still, we believe that they reveal processes and dynamics that have relevance to more than their specific sites. We have organised the chapters along central lines of concern: economy; gender and social relations; and localities.

Chapter 1, 'Digital Development Imaginaries, Informal Business Practices and the Platformisation of Digital Technology in Zambia' by Wendy Willems, which also introduces the section on economy, attends to the relationship between ICT and economic change by looking at how informal traders in the New Soweto Market in Lusaka use their mobile phones for economic gains. She launches critical perspectives to digital imaginaries of the economic development in Africa as well as to understandings of the role of social media through the lens of users, and argues for the need to situate media practices within the systems of power of which they are part. Willems finds that simple phones, smartphones, mobile internet and social media have offered a 'number of opportunities to small-scale informal businesses' for strengthening existing networks and scaling up and developing new business networks, for instance efficient ways of communicating with customers, cheap and instant ways of sharing information with traders and quick money transfers to suppliers. However, she also identifies constraints related to the situation in the market as well as changes in the internet itself, and explains how these work as factors in a dynamic whereby these new technologies have not really transformed informal businesses in significant ways. Firstly, face-to face contact as well as building mutual trust remain important preconditions for scaling up informal business networks in this informal market. However, trust is currently hard to obtain on the social media platforms to which these vendors' internet use is constrained. Secondly, the growing platformisation of the internet in Africa constrains the development of local IT businesses, violates (mobile) net neutrality and raises concerns about threats to privacy.

In Chapter 2, 'Botswana's Digital Revolution: What's in it?' Storm-Mathisen and Helle-Valle discuss different 'scaling devices' for understanding what lies in Botswana's digital revolution: on the one hand

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macro-level statistical indexes about ICT and business and, on the other, how people actually engage with scaling practices and ICT devices to position themselves in business. By combining insights from quantitative and qualitative data generated through various means by the two authors during fieldwork in Gaborone and a semi-urban village in 2012, 2015–2016, 2017 and 2018, they discuss how, and the extent to which, digital tools and services can be said to have become part of Batswana's business concerns and practices. Despite a general enthusiasm and rather high investments in ICT, the authors find that its socio-economic impact remains low, and they point to how the significant digital divides, the high costs and lack of transparency are factors in a dynamic that produces this outcome.

Introducing the next section, Gender and Social Relations, Katrien Pype's, '*Bolingo ya face*: Digital Marriages, Playfulness and the Search for Change in Kinshasa' (Chapter 3) analyses uses of new media in another realm of sociality, that of dating, romance, sex and matrimony among independent women in Kinshasa. Pype centres on one case – Flavie, a single mother – and describes how her clever, strategic uses of social media have set off a new rhythm in exchanges of affect. Marrying a wealthy man is the ultimate goal but she makes sure that the relationships she engages in will provide monetary returns along the way. Depicting how Flavie uses more than one smartphone and plays with alter egos online, Pype exemplifies activities that aim at enhancing social connectivity, and how communicating in social media requires situated knowledge and different tactics at various stages to gain attention, affect and money from these partners. She argues that notions of work and play better describe these digital performances than ideas of offline vs. online, for two reasons. The ultimate goal of the digital play is the realisation of corporeal relationships, hence the off- and online practices most often are deeply intertwined. Secondly, the terms 'play' and 'work' fit into emic categories of how courting should be finalised into a legally binding relationship. Thus, although Pype highlights the increased responsibility of the individual in urban space, it shows how new media practices fit into and symbolically interact with local (offline) conventions related to sexual relationships.

In Chapter 4, 'Texting Like a State: Knowledge and Change in a National mHealth Programme', Nanna Schneidermann describes and analyses the first national m-health (mobile health) programme in Africa, MomConnect. MomConnect is a free text message broadcast of information by the state to expecting mothers. These mothers receive weekly messages from week five in their pregnancy through to the first year after birth. Although MomConnect can be received on simple

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phones, the assemblage of actors and technology is complex: phones, computers, databases, representatives of the state apparatus, developers, clinic personnel and not least expecting mothers. Schneidermann critically discusses this intervention from 'different sites': the state, midwives and nurses at clinics, the pregnant mothers, and researchers and politicians. She finds that MomConnect is understood in contrasting ways by different actors. The state and the developers see it as a tool to overcome barriers to health care access and ensure citizen rights; by engaging pregnant women in 'direct conversation', they hope to produce good mothers. Clinic workers partly share this view, but in a situation of understaffing they also judge it as a stress producer. As for the expecting mothers, they respond positively in questionnaires but the fact is that very few use it. Schneidermann points to a number of elements that constrain the intended effects and argues that the intention was never a simple 'transfer of information', but rather to effectively govern the relations between the state and the individual.

The book's Chapter 5, 'New Ways of Making Ends Meet? On Batswana Women, Their Uses of the Mobile Phone – and Connections through Education', Ardis Storm-Mathisen discusses how the mobile phone has entered into the dynamics that create different economic situations for women in Botswana. Drawing on nine months of fieldwork (2015–2017) in the Kalahari village locality and in the capital Gaborone, she focuses on women of different generations and uses three exemplary cases to illustrate how mobile phone use is connected to everyday concerns and life situations. She finds that whereas all three women have increased their use of the mobile phone over the years, and that their different socio-economic frameworks – with education as a core factor – have a strong effect on their use, their mobile phone-related practices have not significantly changed their ways of earning money. These women's uses of their mobile phones (even the simplest kind) nevertheless have a socio-economic impact because they have enabled changes in the ways in which they deal with their concerns. This impact is most significant in that they enable new forms of multitasking. For instance, the ability to cater for children and kin while working elsewhere is made much easier with social media. Changes in women's communication strategies are not only linked to new technologies in themselves, or to changes in their socio-economic situations, but are part of complex dynamics where changing constellations of mobility, new ways of building and upholding social capital and education are important factors.

The section on Localities and New Media starts with 'The Public Inside Out: Facebook, Community and Banal Activism in a Cape Town Suburb' (Chapter 6) by Nanna Schneidermann. She describes how

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social media are used to construct the space between the private and the public in a relatively wealthy coastal suburb of Cape Town, a city characterised by extreme inequality and spatial segregation. Schneidermann's empirical focus is a Facebook group 'Muizenberg Notice Board', an online 'community' of seven thousand members. She explores the banal online activism of community-making through practices of sharing and boundary-drawing in this group and highlights three cases to demonstrate how unremarkable events become the basis for mobilising and contesting ideas about 'community': litter in public spaces; petty crime; and unaccompanied children in public spaces. She finds that personal experiences and emotions of residents in the Muizenberg area were at the centre of all three cases. She argues that although their mediated context ties in with globally circulated media forms, they are rooted in and given meaning by the specific context of post-apartheid South Africa, where affect and subjectivity dominate the forms that public expression takes, perhaps as a reaction to the apartheid regime where individuality of the self was denied by racial categories. Moreover, she argues that the concept of community in the Muizenberg Notice Board group and the unquestionable objective of wanting to have a 'community' puts at stake the violent ways in which the city continues to be racially, economically and socially divided. Thus, Schneidermann's contribution is a case of wider currents of turning the private and the public inside out in the political realms of the New South Africa.

In Chapter 7, 'From No Media to All Media: Domesticating New Media in a Kalahari Village', Jo Helle-Valle applies insights from fieldwork in one village in the Botswana part of the Kalahari over a period of almost three decades, to focus on changes that have taken place, and discusses the ways in which the media revolution has played a part in these transformations. In short, he finds that new media have indeed changed sociality in many ways – for instance, how people keep up relations to kin and important others, how funerals are conducted and how cows are surveyed. However, Helle-Valle argues that the social impact of people's new media use is less than the ubiquitousness of media ownership suggests. One reason for this is that media use is highly skewed in relation to age and economic standing, another that institutions in the village have so far not been able to utilise opportunities that are supposed to be available. Concerns and perspectives have shown little change and new media seem to have made a difference only within some areas of village life.

In the book's Afterword – 'The Electronic Media in Africa, with an Addendum from Mauritius' – Thomas Hylland Eriksen takes a bird's-eye perspective on the questions the book asks, with a view

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from the African multi-ethnic island state and small-scale society of Mauritius. He argues that it is obvious that the mobile phone and internet have transformed everyday life for those who can use them, but that it is equally obvious that the great disparities with respect to conditions for use in different places contribute to how these changes take place. Eriksen highlights six structural features of particular relevance to Africa: scarcity of money; weak states; recent but very rapid new media uptake; the significance of the informal sector; distinct and unpredictable uses; and distinct imaginaries and public controversies. According to Eriksen, Mauritius is different from mainland Africa on most features. Firstly, Mauritius 'has always been modern' – it was from the outset a multicultural and global place, it is a relatively wealthy society and the political system shows little resemblance to mainland Africa. Still, the national dream of turning the country into a knowledge economy remains only a dream. Secondly, Eriksen highlights ethnic vs. non-ethnic life worlds as a central tension Mauritians have to negotiate as they navigate their practical challenges of the everyday. He finds that the ways in which Mauritians use the internet strengthen rather than weaken Mauritian identity. The reason for this is that online activities facilitate shared conversations and negotiations about common concerns and group identity across previously separated social and economic boundaries. Nonetheless, kinship has remained important as an organising principle, both in practical matters and in relation to identity. Eriksen argues that new media have entered into this in both transformative and conserving ways. They offer new possibilities for Mauritians to discover their Mauritianness and to be cosmopolitan and inclusive online, but also strengthen the communality in everyday life where crucial resources continue to flow through kin and ethnic networks. Thus, new media offer new possible identifications and ways of transcending time and space so that people can secure their sense of belonging in a complex society by being both cosmopolitan online and communally oriented in the practicalities of the everyday. However, as Eriksen notes, for new identities to be societally important and transformative, the structural arrangements of society will also have to change, which has not yet happened.

Syntheses

A core quality of new media is that they transmit information faster and in more massive and efficient ways than before. People can be reached almost any time and anywhere, people can talk, texts and pictures can

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be sent, any kind of information can be accessed, people and things can be traced. Thus, it is within connectivity that new media make a difference. This explains why we find in all our research that they affect relationships between people – they simply revolutionise the ways in which people relate to each other. However, how new media are used, by whom and with what effects differs enormously. This diversity can – to some extent – be coupled to differences in competence, concerns, wealth and opportunities in various aspects of life. Still, irrespective of their social position, people try to make the best out of what they have, including new media. Thus, media's quality as a connector and people's (more or less) strategic mind-set mean that the term 'social capital' is especially relevant. Capital is accumulated labour, which has the capacity to produce profits. According to Bourdieu, it is 'impossible to account for the structure and functioning of the social world unless one reintroduces capital in all its forms' (1986, p. 242) because the unequal distribution of it fundamentally structures society. His main contribution to the understanding of capital, and its application in the social sciences, is that it takes many forms; economic capital is only one – albeit in one sense the most important one (ibid., p. 252). It is only when we acknowledge the other forms that we can fully understand the ways in which capital works. Bourdieu singles out economic, cultural and social capital as the main forms. Cultural capital is mainly tied to education (in its widest sense) while social capital is defined as 'the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships' (ibid., p. 248). However, people cannot live on relationships and education alone, and the crucial issue is how the different forms of capital can be converted into each other. Herein lies the dynamic and processual quality. On the one hand, different forms of capital tend to reinforce each other; much of one tends to generate more of the others. This works in all directions. There are, on the other hand, obstacles to capital conversions. Successful conversions require competence and resources. Thus, the crucial issue in respect to this book's theme (and the fact that most people lack money) is how people are able to convert the (potential for increased) social capital that comes with new media into economic advantages. All the chapters in this book can (but need not) be seen in this perspective.

For instance, in Chapter 3 Pype uses Flavie, a single mother of three, as a paradigmatic case to reveal the dynamics of 'romance' among independent women in Kinshasa, and the role of social media in these processes. Facebook and other social platforms provide her with new opportunities for getting in contact with men. While pre-social media

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required face-to-face contact, she can now use social media to establish contact with prospective lovers. It requires skills – not significantly different from those needed in face-to-face encounters, but other skills nonetheless – in balancing a romantic exclusivity on the face of it and at the same time keeping her suitors in ignorance of each other. Obviously, this is an exemplary case of the uses of social capital. Flavie's main aim is to turn her social capital (her network of potential sexual partners) into economic capital – either by marrying a wealthy man or at least by insisting that her lovers be generous.

The parallels to our work in Botswana are striking: the same sexual networking, the same strategic uses of social media and the same concerns about balancing the instrumental and emotional aspects of these relationships. However, there are some notable differences. While Flavie's long-term strategy is to find a husband, the independent women in Botswana have options that their Congolese counterparts lack. Botswana is a wealthier country than DRC, resulting in a net immigration to the country. Thus, the ideal partner in Botswana is not an expat but a local resident. Of greater significance, however, is that because Botswana has a functioning welfare system (albeit very modest compared to Europe), including social security, student grants, government schemes and so on, the risks associated with living as a single woman are bigger in DRC than they are in Botswana. This explains that while Flavie's expressed goal is to find a husband, her Botswana counterpart does not necessarily see this as the ultimate goal. In fact, with the security net in place, pursuing a strategy of establishing her own household, with children but no man, is a realistic and, for many, the preferred choice for Botswana women. Most consider men to be inherently unreliable and prone to adultery and therefore argue that it is better to keep men as generous lovers than cheating husbands (Helle-Valle, 1999, 2004). Their social environment makes the risks smaller, as there are ways to be taken care of in case their choices turn out to be unsuccessful. This is a major factor in explaining that while in DRC we find that 25 per cent of households are female headed (DRC Health Survey, 2014), the number in Botswana is strikingly high – approximately 50 per cent (Statistics Botswana, 2018).

Another point that can be made by comparing romancing of this sort in DRC and Botswana is that it might be argued that new media do not in fact make a big difference. For one, the practice of sexual networking was commonplace thirty years ago (cf. also Cohen, 1969 for similar practices in Nigeria more than fifty years ago) and the same strategies were applied, but of course without social media. Given that the gross number of sexual relationships has not increased significantly due to

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social media – which there is no reason to believe – the net effect is that the women are forced to purchase smartphones and buy airtime in order to keep up in the race to find men. In economic terms, what has happened is that although the 'production level' remains the same, the costs of entering the game have increased. Thus, although new media have become a necessary and conspicuous part of a field of practice, their effect on the outcome can be close to none. Of course, new vulnerabilities emerge and dynamics are altered, but it illustrates what we consider an important warning when studying the significance of media on African sociality: it is important not to confuse a conspicuous presence with assumptions about its significance for changing sociality. The latter is something that needs to be empirically investigated, not taken for granted.

A striking issue in Flavie's dealings is trust. She can certainly not take promises made by romantic partners at face value, but the game she plays implies deceit also on her part. The language game of romance requires her to present her relationship with a man as special and exclusive while the fact is that most of the time she is involved with several men simultaneously. Thus, the field of practice she engages in is generally associated with extremely low levels of trust. The issue of trust reappears as central in several of the other chapters as well. For instance, Willems describes in her chapter how mobile phones were made part of the business practices of the informal vendors in the Soweto Market. The vendors' various uses of the mobile phone strengthened their existing business networks as they made communication between customers and suppliers more efficient. This effect was, however, restricted to those relationships where mutual trust had already been established offline. Their uses of new media had not substantially helped to scale up their business networks for economic benefit. What was a concern for these vendors were the risks involved with trust in business relations. If they were to send goods to a customer or send money to a supplier, they had to be quite certain that they would receive the requested money or goods in return, otherwise they risked losing money rather than earning it. Thus, to be successful in using mobile communication in business, beyond just using it to inform or chase customers, trust was a necessary precondition. Many informal vendors therefore refrained from doing this unless they had first established mutual trust through face-to-face encounters. This is also why many of the informal vendors in the Soweto Market did not trust the opportunities offered on online platforms such as buy-and-sell Facebook groups, even though these in many ways mirrored the informality and lack of regulation of their local market. Despite the opportunities for finding customers more easily, for selling

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a particular item or finding goods otherwise difficult to obtain, their concern with relationships established through these platforms was that they were dealing with strangers, thus more risky relations. Their fears stretched from cybercrime to that of getting into trouble with the police for dubious origins of goods to that of transferring money to strangers. Thus, although the use of digital media had introduced a positive change, reducing travel and transactional costs for the vendors, their lack of trust in relations established through digital platforms constrained their use of these platforms to expand their business networks and improve economic outcomes.

Several of the book's chapters also illustrate that processes of building trust vary with the types of networks in question, who are connected and how. Some networks are open (buy-and-sell), some are closed to non-members (Facebook groups), and the digital competence of the given actor and digital divides among members in the networks are factors in how trust is dealt with and thus the outcomes of the network. The type of network Pype describes in her chapter is built by a private actor. Flavie uses the opportunities offered by digital media tools and networks as a private person to establish social contacts for her own concern, to better her chances of meeting men who can help support her family. Flavie's engagements here are time-consuming but it helps her to establish new particular relations to particular persons, and to establish a network that she can seek to activate to convert to economic capital in times of need. The maximum variation of this example in this book of a network of scale and scope is the one the South African state seeks to build through MomConnect (Schneidermann's chapter) or the Radio Frequency Identification (RFID)-based network of cattle and cattle owners in Botswana (Helle-Valle's chapter), and there are many other types of networks on this private–public continuum. Schneidermann describes for instance how the Muizenberg Notice Board on Facebook creates a novel kind of space for people with shared (political) concerns in a community, whereas Eriksen describes how blogs create spaces for negotiating cultural and national identity in Mauritius. The assemblages that are built in these different networks and the intended and actual outcomes of them are very different. In the MomConnect case, the motivation of the state is clearly linked to bio power (Foucault), to change the behaviour of expecting mothers for better child–mother health (and to reduce societal costs in this respect). The state has engaged developers to build a system for this purpose, a system to which expecting mothers are to subscribe to receive one-way SMS messages with what the state defines as relevant educational information (although there is a feedback loop).

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The information that the mothers receive is controlled and mass communicated by the state as sender (unlike Flavie, who controls but customises), and it is also a system that allows the state to survey users and harvest data from them. Flavie is not able to connect to all the men she contacts, and far from all her contacts become a source of income for her, but some do, hence she is able to convert some of this social capital to economic capital, enough to send her children to school. In the case of MomConnect, the main problem is similar; not all women subscribe, and those who do and who receive the messages do not always find it useful. In fact, many do not find it useful at all, partly because they read the information through the voice of the person who made them subscribe (the care workers) and partly because the information does not connect to their main concerns with survival (cf. Callon, 1986). The intended conversion of the social capital collected through the network created by MomConnect to the expected socio-economic beneficial outcomes does not happen because the state has not managed to make their own concerns relevant to the mothers. Thus, the mothers are functionally unconnected (even though some data are harvested from them). This then highlights the fact that very different actors with different concerns, motivations and power to control others engage in activities to establish new connections with the help of rather similar digital technologies (i.e. messaging services). Whereas the connections are established by a shared interest/concern in the case of Flavie, it is less shared and disrupted by diverging interests in the case of MomConnect.

What we have done so far in this section is to point to important processes and dynamics that we find are in operation across sites and countries. This does not provide an overview in the sense that we can present clear, general answers to the question of the relationship between media and social change. However, we believe that this strategy points to some social mechanisms that are in operation and thus gives a better understanding of the issue, and provides explanations for the diverse and seemingly chaotic landscape of media practices. The cases are of course grossly simplified, as real life is extremely complicated. Let us therefore provide some suggestions for how these various mechanisms can be combined. Chapter 7 provides an example of composite media-related practices. Funeral processes in the Kalahari village have indeed been affected by new media, but in unpredictable ways. On the one hand, increased accessibility has reduced the time needed to gather relatives for the burial. This could have generated faster, cheaper funerals. However, changing expectations about what a proper funeral should be, partly triggered by the massive presence of social media, have had

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the opposite effect.[12] More expensive, almost lavish rituals are now the rule, and improved connectivity has led more people to attend. We find the same mechanisms at work in weddings. Today, getting 'properly' married puts many couples in debt, which can take many years to repay (van Dijk, 2017). Another example is the complicated assemblages around cattle in Botswana. This involves relationships that range from man vs. beast – which can be very close and emotional – via state-driven, new media-linked systems that include RFID-tagging and surveillance of vaccination, to global production networks involving the EU. The network of relationships can be described as a success, also because it includes the unanticipated effect that cattle thefts have been dramatically reduced.

To sum up so far: social capital is indeed central – all the chapters bear witness to that. However, it is not the only form relevant in relation to media. New media are highly relevant in relation to cultural capital – that is, various forms of formal and informal education. Most important is the fact that most young Africans get their introduction to and education in using new media through schools. To the extent the infrastructure is there, and working, ICT is an integral part of education in most African countries. Moreover, as Storm-Mathisen highlights in Chapter 5, access to social networks acquired from schooling is used in peer relationships, further improving their competence to exploit life opportunities, including those that are digital. In addition, it seems that such competence is highly valued among youth all over Africa. Thus, a premise for developing and realising the potential for a digital future is to be found in the young's cultural capital (education).

The chapters in this book have concentrated on the everyday, the nitty gritty of everyday life. This is what we can say something about with a degree of certainty. However, the topic of change and media in Africa also requires a look at the most important form of capital – the economic. Economic concerns are directly or indirectly a theme in all the chapters, simply because they are among the most pressing needs faced by many Africans. However, we find that the link between new media and economic concerns mostly goes through social capital, whereas education (cultural capital) most often serves as a premise for realising the connection between social and economic capital (cf., e.g., Chapter 5 in this book). Therefore, we also need to look at the economic sector in order to get the bigger picture. Are there signs of a developing ICT production sector? Or e-commerce? Simply stated: is the continent turning into a knowledge economy?

For this we need to turn to other researchers' work. Murphy and Carmody's book *Africa's Information Revolution* (2015) is in this respect a

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valuable source. They have studied small, medium and micro-scale enterprises (SMME) in Tanzania and South Africa. Their findings are not good news. They contend that, 'While the social implications of ICTs are arguably disruptive and transformational … their mere diffusion is not resulting in the creation of a knowledge economy in Africa. Instead, our findings indicate that sub-Saharan Africa is becoming an informationalized agrarian and resource-extractive economic region' (ibid., p. 210). According to them, the main reason for this is that the ICT revolution happens within a continued structural inequality that reproduces unequal global positions. The initiatives that institutions like ICT4D and the World Bank support do nothing to rectify the fundamental, structural impediments to sustainable development. Murphy and Carmody distinguish between imminent development – the intended policy-related measures taken by governments and NGOs – and immanent development, which refers to the structural inequalities generated by global production networks (i.e. world capitalism). 'All told, our analysis details how new ICTs do not obliterate the (immanent) structural constraints or factors accompanying a political economy of neoliberalism, but are instead absorbed into this context in ways that selectively rework extant economic regimes and patterns of uneven development' (ibid., p. xxviii). Their gloomy prediction for Africa's future is that 'the particular path [to modernity] being followed across Africa will not, it appears, lead it to the type and level of development of Europe or North America. This raises the key questions about who benefits from the celebratory "rising" discourse, and how mainstream ICT4D initiatives are implicated in the reproduction of these immanent [structural] conditions' (ibid., p. 208).

This perspective resonates well with our own experiences. The ordinary Zambian and South African, not to mention those living in DRC, see no visible effect on their own economic situation. Even Botswana, despite the state's wealth and its grand plans to initiate a turn towards a knowledge economy (Carmody, 2013), has not succeeded. As Storm-Mathisen and Helle-Valle's chapter demonstrates, Botswana shows no clear signs of changing its economy from depending on mineral resources to a diversified economy.

Lastly, we need also to consider the other big area of potential for the large institutions – namely the possibility for increased efficiency in bureaucratic institutions. It seems that within this area a lot more has happened. The ICT-ification of administration and politics seems to have come a long way, although there is uneven development and a huge gap between plans and reports on the one hand and reality on the other. These sectors are much more responsive to imminent initiatives

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as they depend to a lesser extent on global inequality structures. Still, as Storm-Mathisen and Helle-Valle in Chapter 2 and Scheidermann in Chapter 4 demonstrate, the implementation of digital systems, and their effects, often suffers from structural and competence-related hindrances (Botswana) and a class- and race-divided society (South Africa), which complicates the cooperation between state agencies and ordinary citizens.

To return to the initial research question about the relationship between new media and development in Africa: we cannot give a clear and simple answer. Not because we haven't done our job as researchers (although we would have been able to open up a lot more black boxes if we had more funding and more time). The reasons are many. For one, and most importantly, the field Africa + media + development is so immensely complex and heterogeneous that an answer simply cannot be given. What happens in Kenya is very different from what happens in DR Congo – for many reasons, linked to history, wealth, governance and so on – not to mention Egypt or Mauritius. Secondly, our theoretical perspective precludes from the very beginning the possibility of arriving at one answer. Different people live different lives in different ways, leading to media playing different roles in different socialities. In fact, media is not one thing. By that we do not mean that there are different ICTs and different devices and platforms, but that since media play such different roles in different settings it is highly questionable even to give these technology-linked practices a common term (see also Slater, 2013, p. 18).

Nonetheless, we believe that asking these impossible questions is the right thing to do. Although we have no possibility of giving definitive answers, we still do important things. First, we focus our research on an issue that no one doubts is extremely important. Although we cannot know exactly how new media and development in Africa are connected, we know that there is some connection – if for no other reason than the fact that new media (i.e. mobile phones) have become a ubiquitous part of almost all African sociality. Thus, it cannot be of no importance. Secondly, although we can never reach the finishing line in this race for understanding – also because the field itself is rapidly changing – it is the collective effort of researchers from different parts of the world, from different academic perspectives and with different research questions (related to media and development) that will give us an ever better understanding of this extremely important arena in which people, technologies and places meet and make new things happen.

This book is our contribution to this vast narrative.

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Notes

1. Many claim, however, that this conclusion was at best a half-truth. As Morten Jerven writes, 'The marked improvement we see in the GDP time studies in the mid-1990s was driven by … adding the informal sector and the service sector to the old estimates' (Jerven, 2005, pp. 112–13). Still, most economists still claim that there has been a marked economic growth in most of Africa in the last two decades, a view that is expressed in numerous publications from the World Bank.
2. The IDI index is built from measures on variables in three sub-indexes: ICT access, ICT use and ICT skills, https://www.itu.int/en/ITU-D/Statistics/Pages/publications/misr2018.aspx (last accessed 7 October 2019).
3. The African average IDI value in 2017 was only 2.64 points, compared to the global average of 5.11. Mauritius was the only African country that ranked in

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the upper half of the global IDI distribution (global rank 72, value 5.88), while the majority of African countries fell into the lowest. Among the countries we look at here, South Africa ranked third in the region (global rank 92), Botswana fifth (global rank 105), Zambia seventeenth (global rank 146) and DR Congo thirty-third (global rank 171). Furthermore, among these only Mauritius and Zambia have recently been climbing on the index. In more concrete terms, while 61 per cent of households in Mauritius have access to computers, the comparable figures are 28 per cent in Botswana, 24 per cent in South Africa, 8 per cent in Zambia and merely 2.7 per cent in DR Congo. And whereas more than half of the population in Mauritius and South Africa are internet users and 39 per cent in Botswana, only 25.5 per cent are so in Zambia and as few as 6 per cent in DRC.

4. The NRI index consists of variables in four sub-indexes: environment, readiness, usage and impact (economic and social). In terms of socio-economic impact of ICTs, Mauritius again performs best (rank 67, value 3.7) followed by South Africa (rank 93, value 3.4), Botswana (rank 108, value 3.1) and Zambia (rank 113, value 3.0), whereas there are no available data on DR Congo (WEF, 2016, p. 20).
5. A quick word on terminology. ICT, media, new media, social media, digital media, electronic media … . As we say in Norway: a loved child has many names. Our stance is that sticking to one term reflects a misconceived precision. Tendentially, ICT points to the material and technological aspect while media focus on content. However, they are sometimes used interchangeably (e.g. Vokes, 2018a) as one often has both the material and the content in mind. As to 'social', 'digital' and 'new', we use the terms that we find most relevant. Thus, in highlighting the dialogical quality of a mediated communication it is natural to use 'social media', and when pointing to the vastness and speed of communication 'digital' is a more fitting word. The 'new' prefix is used when the contrast between the media landscape before and after the advent of mobile phones and the internet is the main issue.
6. We here use ICT4D as a cover term for various media or communication for development approaches including M4D and ComDev.
7. However, even if placing people centre stage has been the conventional methodological strategy, the analytical approach varied a lot more (e.g. structuralism and functionalism that placed society, not persons, in the centre of attention). All this being said, the sensible approach should of course be to look at both artefacts and persons, and focus on the interactions between them. Bruno Latour (2005), who insists that the two – as actants and actors respectively – must be analytically symmetrical, brings this to its logical end-point.
8. '… The social has never explained anything: the social has to be explained instead' (Latour, 2005, p. 97); '… society is the consequence of associations and not their cause. … [The] social is not a place, a thing, a domain, or a kind of stuff but a provisional movement of new associations' (ibid., p. 238).
9. Comaroff and Comaroff (2012, pp. 12ff) highlight the productive aspect of the view 'from the South': that the position from the underbelly of capitalism and hegemony holds the potential for new, creative perspectives (cf. also Nyamnjoh and Brudvig, 2016). By letting the voices of ordinary Africans play a significant part in our research, we believe that other, new perspectives can emerge.

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10. For the outcome of this process – which was crafted by web designer Niels Theissen – go to www.letlhakeng.com.
11. This fact well illustrates the problems associated with the tendency of some to essentialise 'indigenous knowledge' (cf., e.g., Denzin et al., 2008). As in all socialities, people are differently positioned, have different concerns and life trajectories, and hence also have different 'knowledges' – however local they are.
12. See Vokes (2018b) for similar, yet different mechanisms associated with funerals in Uganda.

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