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Media Conflict and DEMocratisation

Nicole Stremlau, Gianluca Iazzolino

Communications, power and governance in democratisation conflicts

April 2017

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Executive Summary

This paper explores the role of digital and traditional media in shaping formal and informal leaders' interactions with their own constituencies and a broader audience, by both advancing their messages and narratives and manoeuvring to steer a specific political agenda. It specifically considers the role of power, leadership and strategic communications in both exacerbating and mitigating violent conflict in emerging democracies. By weaving together strands of the political science scholarship on political communication and political settlement, while engaging with concepts of hybrid governance and leadership, we attempt to knit a framework that challenges normative assumptions on institutional communicative practices. By bringing together these disparate strands of scholarship that are rarely in dialogue, we question a characterisation that often contrasts vertical mainstream media with more horizontal and inclusive social media, arguing that a more nuanced view of the political significance of both spaces of communication is required, and one that highlights their interplay and blurs the boundaries between online and offline, and in doing so refocuses on the notion of power, placing it at the centre of analysis, to examine how entrenched relations of patronage can be let unscathed, transformed or even reinforced by networked forms of communication.

Introduction

While governance, political communication and conflict have attracted a great deal of attention in academia, the relationship among these concepts has seldom been explored. In this paper, we seek to fill this gap by looking at the ongoing debate on governance in conflict/post-conflict situations, focusing on democratisation conflicts, defined as "conflicts that are triggered by, or accompany democratic change (or demands for democratic change)" (Voltmer and Kraetzschmar, 2015 p.2). To do so, we engage with the literature that examines how traditional and new media shape the interactions between leaders and the public. In particular, we look at how both formal and informal authorities get their messages and narratives across, steer the political agenda and contribute to either mitigate or exacerbate social and political tensions. The decision to consider, on the one hand, leaders both *de jure* and *de facto*, on the other, old and new media, is a defining element of the approach of this paper, which challenges on the convergence of governance and democracy and on the democratising role of media, both old and new in young democracies. We therefore address concepts of hybrid governance, leadership, democratic transition and networks to question a widespread view that opposes vertical, asymmetric mainstream media to horizontal, symmetric social media.

We draw on examples from (but not exclusively) the countries at the centre of the MeCoDEM project – Serbia, Kenya, Egypt, South Africa – to explore the critical role of media and ICTs in transforming the relationship between leaders and audience and, as a result, the dynamics among political authorities engaged in negotiation in the political arena. It is necessary to ask not only how leaders communicate with their constituents, but also how leaders communicate with each other, and how media are used to by elites as they negotiate power. Moving beyond views of the media either as a mouthpiece of the powerful or as a watchdog of power, we adopt a more nuanced approach that both highlights their interplay and blurs the boundaries between online and offline while bringing back to the centre the notion of power by examining how entrenched relations of patronage can be let unscathed, transformed or even reinforced by networked forms of communication.

This paper opens by examining the notion of democratic leadership and the modes of communication through which it is expressed. The second part introduces the literature that discusses the interplay of political and media systems, moving beyond normative approaches based on the role ascribed to the media in representative and liberal democracies. The third part tackles the concepts of informal authorities, patronage and neopatrimonialism, and the way they provide a lens to examine the functioning of institutions and at spaces of interaction in emerging democracies. This is central for our analysis because in many of the states we are considering in MeCoDEM, 'the government'

has limited authority in certain communities, or territories. On this basis, we then flesh out the notions of hybrid governance and political settlement in order to explain how leaders communicate with each other, negotiate and vie for leverage in the political arena, but at the fringe of democratic institutions. Next, it shifts the attention to the literature on the impact of ICTs, and social media in particular, on forms of mobilisation from below. Finally, the paper concludes by discussing how ICTs are changing the interplay of top-down and bottom-up communication practices, enabling the interweaving and mutual strengthening of patronage and technological networks, and what insights can be drawn for further research.

Leadership and Communication

While the role of leadership has often commanded significant attention from political scientists in the study of democratic governance, it has often been overlooked in the literature focusing on media and conflict. The contemporary debate on the concept of leadership, and charismatic leadership in particular, is often grounded in Weber's theory of charisma. According to Weber's highly influential definition, charisma is:

> a certain quality of an individual personality by virtue of which he is considered extraordinary and treated as endowed with supernatural, superhuman or at least specifically exceptional powers or qualities. These are such as not accessible to the ordinary person, but are regarded as of divine origin or as exemplary and on the basis of them the individual concerned is treated as a leader. . . . What alone is important is how the individual is actually regarded by those subject to charismatic authority by his followers or disciples. (Weber 1947, pp.358–359)

In Weber's view, charismatic leadership is one among three forms of authority, alongside legal and traditional leadership. In general, all three forms of authority share common features: they enable domination in unusual circumstances; they underpin a disruptive/revolutionary message; they are unstable and can fade away as historical circumstances change. However, the notion of charismatic leader, anointed by a transcendent authority and mostly modelled by Weber on the figure of the Biblical prophets (Taylor, 2012; Adair-Toteff, 2014), has continued to dominate studies on religious movements (Hackett, 1998).

The concept has had significant currency in studies of the symbolic of power (Geertz, 1977), particularly in post-colonial societies, where it has been applied within a functional framework, and historicised "to explain the transition from colonial-ruled traditional society to politically independent modern society" (Tucker, 1968, p.372). Elaborating on Weber's

approach to charismatic leadership, Tucker points out that "the charismatic leader is not simply any leader who is idolized and freely followed for his extraordinary leadership qualities, but one who demonstrates such qualities in the process of summoning people to join in a movement for change and in leading such a movement." (ibid., p.737). This suggests that the perception of the charisma of the leader should be constantly reproduced through communicative practices aimed at the mobilisation of the following.

The conditions in which this mobilisation occurs are well summarised by Klaus (2006), as he points that the legitimacy of charisma is based on the convergence of "a need, aspiration, or goal among followers that remained unfulfilled by an existing social order", and "a leader to whom followers would submit based on their belief in his or her possession of charisma—qualities that fulfilled their expectations. Simply stated, charisma emerges most vividly when people in crisis want a leader." There is, therefore, a direct link, in Weber's perspective, between leadership and critical, and potentially conflictive, situations, as charismatic figures rise above the masses as they fulfill a need created by a volatile and unpredictable context.

Given specific 'windows of opportunity', opened up by contingent socio-economic conditions, leaders would emerge, and underpin their influence over the masses, thanks to their mastery of what Bayart often in reference to African cases, (2005 [1996], p.110) defines 'discursive genres', intended as repertoires of both discourses and popular communicative forms that include music and outfits, consolidated through previous interactions. The capacity of the leaders to successfully resort to these repertoires to build consent depends on the communicative strategies that convey their charismatic appeal to their followers. Charisma emanates from the personal attributes of the leader, and thus its appeal derives from its countering the process of routinisation elicited by the increased bureaucratisation of society, with its supposed equalising effect on the relations among citizens (Klaus, 2006). In some respects, this form of charismatic leadership can also be seen as 'neo-populism'. Whereas the form of populism that proliferated across Latin America in the post war period incorporated trade unions into party organisations and the state, the form of populism we are increasingly seeing in parts of Africa is focused on portraying the leader as an outsider, an anti-institutionalism and as one that appeals to the masses for legitimacy (Carbone, 2005).

The charismatic leadership, in Weber's view, dispels the assumption that individuals are equal before the law, an assumption on which representative democracies rest. Interestingly, Bernhard (1999) upends the conclusions of Weber as he discusses the relationship of charismatic leadership and democratisation in relation to democratic transitions in Eastern Europe. He argues indeed that charismatic leaders are not incompatible with democratic institutions whereby charismatic authority is 'routinized' within a

legal framework. Democratic legitimacy can be achieved as charismatic organisations go through "progressive rationalization". The charismatic power is first "subjected to rational-legal constraints" and then the bonds of the charismatic community are "transformed into the reflective consent that underpins democracy" (ibid., p.14). According to this view, therefore, democracy has the potential to reshape the relationship between charismatic leaders and their followers and, when succeeding in avoiding drifts towards authoritarianism, may contribute to the emergence of what Hirschman defines a "responsible leadership" (Price and Stremlau, 2014).

Responsible leaders are able to listen to the grievances of their following and manage expectations, thus contributing to defuse escalating conflicts. As Price and Stremlau point out, "responsible leadership also tolerates and encourages "voice" as another means of being informed of potential crises. "Voice" is a valuable reservoir of intelligence about deep-seated stress or reservoirs for sustained criticism" (ibid., p.206). Drawing from their pre-existing social capital and relying on different modes of interaction, leaders are thus able to capture and bring to the fore these voices. Understanding how ongoing transformations in the media have implications for these modes of interaction is, therefore, a key issue to tease out the changing role of charismatic leaders in governance and conflict resolution. In post-Independence Africa, for instance, the notion of 'charismatic authority' has provided a lens to examine the rise to power of nationalist leaders and parties (Apter, 1955; Ake, 1966, pp.6–13; Zolberg, 1966). However, the case of post-colonial young democracies shows indeed that the encounter of charismatic leadership and democratic institutions does not necessarily entail the subordination of the former to the latter. Instead, rather than being reined in and domesticated by a democratic framework, charismatic figures may be able to seize the party or state machinery for personal aggrandisement and enrichment and, simultaneously, preserve a democratic veneer that commands legitimacy vis-a-vis external actors, such as international partners and donors. South Africa's president Jacob Zuma and Egyptian president, General Abd al-Fattah al-Sisi, are two cases in point, the former by recasting himself as a champion of social justice against growing socio-economic inequalities (Bond, 2011), the latter as a saviour of the state against the looming threat of terrorism (Van de Bilt, 2015). In their rise to power, both Zuma and al-Sisi have proven to be effective communicators, using the media to craft the narratives underpinning their power and, at the same time, preventing others from advancing messages that might threaten their role. In general, there is an ambivalent relationship between democratic government and the media which should be examined against the broader discussion on the nexus of politics and media.

The Politics and Media Nexus

Despite fundamental theoretical divergences, different research approaches to media agree on the view that media systems not only reflect local norms and values, but also interact with politics and culture (de Smaele, 2015). In particular, the relationship of politics and media is informed by local ideas and structures of power that define the degree of independence of the latter from the former and, more broadly, the way they influence one another. Political actors use media to disseminate information, build consent, craft narratives and attack political opponents' agendas and views. They can also restrict media autonomy through laws or by using subtler forms of dissuasion from 'crossing red lines'. At the same time, media can play a key role in setting the political agenda by informing the public debate, therefore contributing to bringing about political and social change. However, the modes of interaction of media and political authority are highly contextual and cannot be reduced to a simple dichotomy as to whether the media are subordinated to the power, thus acting as an instruments of propaganda, or are instead in a position to hold it accountable and play a public service role. The literature on processes of democratisation focuses on both the role of the media in democratic transition and democratisation of the media itself (Hackett and Zhao, 2005; see also Salgado, 2009) but, in so doing, mostly reproduces normative views of the media as "(1) a forum encouraging pluralistic debate about public affairs, (2) a guardian against the abuse of power, and (3) a mobilising agent encouraging public learning and participation in the political process" (Jebril et al., 2013, p.6; see also Norris, 2000). Media freedom is thus largely perceived as both a benchmark of democratic reforms (see McConnell and Becker, 2002) and as a precondition for the proper working of democratic institutions (Berman and Witzner, 1997). By universalising functions ascribed to the media in Western democracies, this approach fails to capture the political economy of media organisations in political settings which, instead, should be understood in their own terms and according to their own logics. The way the media negotiate their relationship with the power is indeed depending on multiple aspects, spanning from the characteristics of the local media economy, which can create a market in which media attention and favours are purchased by political actors, to forms of path dependence in which loyalties or subordination to political authorities, whether informal leaders or apparatchiks from the previous regimes, persists despite formally embracing a democratic framework.

These two aspects are often entangled. For instance, when discussing the political economy of media in Somalia, Stremlau et al. (2015) examine the phenomenon of the paid news, political advertisement and so-called shurur, or 'tokens of gratitude' paid by officers to reporters to cover political events, against a background in which the widespread lack of economic resources and high insecurity makes the reliance on political protection the only way to stay in business (and, often, to stay alive). In post-conflict situations, where the state

is weak or has limited reach, a media system should be understood according to its own logic, rather than the extent to which it compares to normative assumptions about media performance, otherwise important aspects will be overlooked. At the same time, as the example of post-Socialist countries well illustrate, organisational logics of media and journalists' values and practices derived from can be so ingrained in the social milieu and institutional culture to survive the demise of the previous regime (Voltmer and Rownsley, 2009; Rupnik and Zielonka, 2013; Hallin and Mancini, 2013), although the extent to which this affects the trajectories of Eastern European democracies is currently not fully understood. In the case of the Egyptian transition from a regime to another, and through a short-lived democratic lull, El-Issawy (2014) observes that:

> Self-censorship habits are entrenched in the practices of Egyptian journalists, who largely perceive their role as servants of political masters. Even though the debate on reforming media was high on the agenda during the time of the revolution, this subservient perception did not change. Journalists were still struggling to cope with a new environment where they could operate without instructions (p.9)

It is worth noting that the self-censorship of journalists, in Egypt as in other contexts experiencing political instability, not always stems from the fear of political retaliations, but is also "as an expression of their leaning with the "state" against the "terrorists.'"(ibid., p.74). In addition to this, despite freedom of expression being enshrined in the Egyptian constitution, "approximately 35 articles in various laws prescribe penalties for the media, ranging from fines to prison sentences." (ibid., p.21). Moreover, the independence of the press can be curtailed "in war time and general mobilisation" (ibid., p.27), so that the declaration of a state of 'exceptionality' to face alleged threats to the national security can provide the juridical and moral ground for suspending a number of civil liberties, including free expression. Besides explicit forms of censorship, which is a hallmark of authoritarian regimes, it is therefore necessary to take into account how also the interaction of economic and socio-cultural factors risk derailing democratic transition, particularly when the transformation of the media landscape is only seen in terms of liberalisation of the media market. In this case, the concentration of media ownership might converge, and buttress, what Mungiu-Pippidi (2008, p.91) calls the 'oligarchization' of politics, thus actively contributing to the elite capture of the state. Considering the outcomes of the restructuring of the Russian media system following Vladimir Putin's rise to power in 2000, Dunn (2014) observes that an ostensibly diffuse structure of ownership is not at all in contradiction with a centralised scrutiny but, instead, it allows for a tight control disguised as a 'two tier media system', in which outlets subordinated to the Kremlin coexist with others enjoying a certain degree of autonomy. This system was akin to the Italian *lottizzazione*, an informal arrangement devised in the 1970s to allow the then major political parties, the Christian Democracy (DC), the Socialist Party (PSI) and the

Communist Party (PCI), to share control of the three TV channels of the state broadcaster RAI (DC secured control of RAI 1, PSI of RAI 2 and PCI of RAI 3) by supporting journalists aligned with each party's line at the head of each channels and able to give to the media agenda a well recognisable political direction (Gomez and Travaglio, 2004). This form of shared control remained in place as commercial TVs (and the ambitious media tycoon and subsequent Prime Minister, Silvio Berlusconi) made their foray in the Italian media system during the 1980s, and continued to project a veneer of pluralism and checks and balance. The ultimate goal of the control of the state over the media is the monopoly of narratives upon which the leadership grounds its political and moral claims to rule. Again, this was particularly evident in the Soviet Union, which "presented a clear, coherent, and distinct media model in line with its general political, economic, and ideological model" (de Smaele, 2010).

The Role of Political Ideology

Central to understanding leadership, and the relationship between leadership (whether populist or charismatic) and government communications, is the role of ideology and how it shapes the actions, goals and motivations of leaders. Political ideologies also suggest the boundaries of possible action and reforms. They are symbolic-cognitive frames that, intertwined with the symbols, language and discourse, give form to power relations and politics (Panizza, 2004). In a way, they become laws and policies providing the scope and priorities of what must be done in conflict-affected situations. And communications laws and policies are also created in such a way to reinforce certain ideas- to elevate some and marginalise others.

Understanding ideas, particularly the political ideas that have shaped the thinking of the governments, political parties and leaders we focus on, primarily comes through analysing texts such as political speeches, the publications of academics and politicians, party media, laws, curriculum and educational materials, and discourses embedded within them, sometimes subtly while other times more overt. In a way, this is also an exercise in archaeology, to understand the present approach to political communications one must also look back to the literature, experiences, and individuals that shaped the political ideologies of those in power.

There is often an incorrect assumption, that because it is difficult to access conflict parties it is difficult to study them and understand their calculations. Media is one important inroad to accessing such views. Across our case studies conflict parties, government actors, or opposition political parties with armed wings, often had sophisticated media and propaganda strategies that were refined over decades. This can be seen as an important precursor to contemporary government communications. Umkhonto we Sizwe, the armed wing of the

African National Congress (ANC) in South Africa ran Radio Freedom from the 1970s to the 1990s, which is credited as being the oldest nationalist radio. Broadcasting from neighbouring countries, Radio Freedom was instrumental in rallying South Africans and informing them of the struggle. Across Southern Africa, liberation groups protesting white rule had similar stations – the South West Africa People's Organizations of Namibia (SWAPO) broadcasted Voice of Namibia, the Zimbabwe African People's Union (ZAPU) launched Voice of the Revolution and other guerrilla groups across Southern Africa including in Angola and Mozambique all had similar stations. Radio stations were also complemented with newsletters, newspapers and other communications initiatives, such as mobile theatre groups, to convince war weary populations to join a struggle. What these different actors have in common was the capacity to use the media to craft and communicate strategic narratives with the goal of mobilising support. Miskimmon et al. (2014) define strategic narratives as:

> representations of a sequence of events and identities, a communicative tool through which political actors – usually elites – attempt to give determined meaning to past, present and future in order to achieve political objectives. Critically, strategic narratives integrate interests and goals – they articulate end states and suggest how to get there. (p.5)

As Frederiksson and Pallas (2016) point out, strategic narratives are strongly contextual, in the sense that they are "redefined and reformulated–more or less deliberately—in relation to rules, norms, and ideas permeating different contexts" (p.153).

These radio stations often transitioned directly into the state broadcaster or the leaders of these armed struggles often had prominent roles in the liberation governments, running government communications. In South Africa, Zwelakhe Sisulu, son of the well-known liberation leader Walter Sisulu, and a leading journalist for ANC publications during the struggle and Radio Freedom, the ANC's station that broadcasted from neighboring countries, was appointed as the first head of the South African Broadcast Corporation (SABC) after apartheid. Further north in Ethiopia, Amare Aregawi, the head of the TPLF clandestine radio, shaped the Ethiopian Television and later the Ethiopian News Agency during the transition in 1991, before leaving to launch one of the first private papers, *The Reporter*.

In the case of Somaliland, the insurgency radio, Radio Halgan, almost directly transitioned to be the new government broadcaster, Radio Hargeisa, with the head of Radio Halgan as the first director. Similar appointments to leading media positions were made across the continent as part of post-war, or post-insurgency, transitions, from Namibia and Zimbabwe to Rwanda and Uganda (Stremlau and Gagliardone, 2014).

The past experiences, and the philosophical inspirations some of these groups have drawn on, from Mao's theory of liberation struggle and guerrilla war to Marxist-Leninism,

inevitably continue to shape and influence contemporary world-views and to some extent, provide inspiration and guidance, even if the political ideas have seemingly fallen out of fashion. Understanding the ideological roots of contemporary conflicts, how these ideas manifested themselves, is central to diagnosing how their legacy has continued to influence current political thinking, policies and institutional development. The current conflicts are, after all, often rooted in these larger more historical conflicts.

Patronage, Neopatrimonialism and Communication

The use of democracy to reproduce, and reinforce, pre-existing relations of domination is at the centre of the discussion on the concepts of patronage and neo-patrimonialism. Here the emphasis on the irrational nature of the charisma of the leader gives way to a more down-to-earth reflection on the way proof of leadership (and governing powers more broadly) is given by being able of forging alliances through the distribution of favours and the creation of personal obligations. This aspect highlights the importance of communicative practices and spaces and technologies of communication that enable both horizontal and vertical communication, and both to facilitate the coordination among members of the same network and for funnelling demands and grievances to political leaders. This entails a further question: Are political leaders able and keen to listen? And what happens when the channels of communication funnelling these voices are hijacked by the same actors that are supposed to be challenged?

The work of Chabal and Daloz (1999) has mostly revolved around the idea of patronage to explain how African politics works. They use patron networks as a key to explain the hurdles to fully develop representative institutions in Africa. Their view, aligned with a broader criminalisation perspective on African politics (Bayart et al., 1999), is based on the observation that leaders' legitimacy derives not from the capacity to contribute to the public good in an impersonal manner, but rather from their personal connections. In such a context, 'veranda politics' is central. As Emmanuel Terray has argued, and has later been picked up by Bruce Berman in reference to Kenya, there are informal spaces, e.g. the veranda, that are more central to politics and political decision making than the more formal places. Terray contrasted veranda politics with air-conditioning politics in reference to the more formal, bureaucratic spaces that are more visible to international actors and reflect the kinds of western Weberian institutions one might expect to see in a country on a assumed 'democratisation path'. The veranda is where serious business occurs, decisions are communicated and trusted messages are spread (Berman & Lonsdale, 1992).

Patronage relationships can lead to what Dupuy (2006), drawing from Weber, defines a 'prebendary state', in which "those who hold state power live off politics" (p.28) directly through bribes or rent-seeking. However, they can also be embedded within a democratic

framework, thus turning into a neopatrimonial system. Bratton and van de Walle (1994) point out that:

> As with classic patrimonialism, the right to rule is ascribed to a person rather than to an office. In contemporary neopatrimonialism, relationships of loyalty and dependency pervade a formal political and administrative system and leaders occupy bureaucratic offices less to perform public service than to acquire personal wealth and status. The distinction between private and public interests is purposely blurred. The essence of neopatrimonialism is the award by public officials of personal favours, both within the state . . . and in society . . . (p.458)

In order to remark the difference with patronage, Bach (2011) clarifies that:

> neopatrimonialism in Africa is still classically viewed as the outcome of a confusion between office and officeholder within a state endowed, at least formally, with modern institutions and bureaucratic procedures. The introduction of 'neo' as a prefix also means that neopatrimonialism is freed from the historical configurations with which patrimonialism had been associated by Weber (p.277).

Examining the rise of 'gatekeeping politics' in South Africa, Beresford (2015) criticises the "teleological fatalism" derived from Chabal and Daloz's criminalisation perspective of African politics and, instead, observes that:

> most African countries today resemble a hybrid form of political system in which 'significant elements' of patron–client politics 'survive and thrive today without decisively undermining democratic processes or development. (p.227)

This is not to deny the importance of informal patron-client networks in Africa, but it is rather a call to enquire how, and under which circumstances, this way of doing politics may yield different results regarding the functioning of the state, the provision of services to the citizens and, more broadly, mechanisms that allow clients to hold their patrons accountable. although labels such as patrimonialism, prebendalism and neopatrimonialism have proven particularly popular in African studies, they have been applied also to the study of polities only recently embracing liberal democracy.

Discussing the wave of popular protests that lead to the demise of Milosevic's regime in Serbia in Serbia, Vladisavljević (2016) observes the transformation of "a populist competitive authoritarian regime (...) into an exclusive personalist rulership with neo-patrimonial features." (44) Drawing on Levitsky and Way (2010), he elaborates on the concept of "competitive authoritarianism", a political system featuring "an 'inherent tension' because the democratic procedures it involves produce 'arenas of contestation' within which

opposition actors may legally confront authoritarian rulers" (p.20). The literature suggests that competitive authoritarian systems are more volatile than democracies and are often followed by democracy (Brownlee, 2009: 516; Roessler and Howard, 2009, p.119–122). In the specific case of Serbia, the one-party system had increasingly morphed into a neo-patrimonial system based on the charisma of the leader, employing cronyism to take personal control of the party and of the whole political apparatus.

In her ethnography of Egyptian informal networks, for instance, Elyachar explores the meaning of what she calls 'phatic labour', aimed at the production of communicative channels through which reputation is built and information flows, thus creating a "social infrastructure on which other projects oriented around the pursuit of profit could be constructed" (Elyachar, 2010, p.453). Assessing microfinance initiatives for women in Cairo, she argues that the motives behind the cultivation of these channels go beyond the "empowerment framework" regulating the implementation of the programmes and shifted between a social and a monetary scale of value (*ibid.*). At the centre of this phatic labour, Elyachar recognises the critical role of the *waasta*, a broker of social relations that acts as a conduit to vertical networks, bridging deprived Egyptian women and political elite. The concept of *waasta* has been extensively investigated in informal economies, particularly in the Middle East. The term stands for both the person acting as intermediary and the connections to which she may grant access (Cunningham and Sarayrah, 1993). Although *waasta* is often conflated in Western scholarship with nepotism or corruption (Bellow, 2004), the concept refers to a principle that articulates loyalty and access to power (Mann, 2014). In her study of informal networks in Cairo, for instance, Singermann (1995) argues that, by increasing the coordination, these networks create a convergence of interests among members. Drawing from her work, Elyachar (2010) suggests that the *waasta* is central in performing the 'phatic labor' by facilitating the opening of "communicative channels" that can potentially transmit not only language but all kinds of semiotic meaning and economic value" (p.453).

While media is often regarded as potentially disrupting or breaking patronage networks (e.g. much is often made about its potential impact to reduce corruption and hold governments to account) (Brunetti & Weder, 2003; Coronel, 2010; Norris, 2004), and there is a rich literature on media and corruption, including the politics of 'brown envelopes' (Lodamo and Skjerdal, 2009; Nwabueze, 2010) where journalist ethics are challenged by payments and favours by those in power, there is far less research on how patronage networks shape the structure and dynamics of the media from within. This issue is becoming far more pressing as it is becoming increasingly apparent that the 'horizontal' or supposedly democratisating and levelling effects of social media are just as malleable to power as

traditional media (Gagliardone, 2015). Emerging research is demonstrating how public authorities, for example, are increasingly using radio call in shows to advance their interests by changing the overall structure of the programming, while attempting to maintain the apparent character of the media as open. This may be achieved through dedicated lines for particular political parties that are regularly given preference or through paid callers that are commissioned to skew the debate or conversation (Brisset-Foucault, 2016; Nunoo, 2016). In some cases, patronage networks are so inbuilt into the system, it suggests the need for an entirely different way of conceptualising the media system that runs according to its own logic, rules and norms. Somalia is an example of such an environment where, almost completely devoid of central government, the media, and ICTs, have flourished and expanded developing unique roles and funding patterns (Stremlau et al., 2015; Stremlau et al., 2015 (2)). Patronage, and the many possible manifestations, must be taken seriously as a key aspect of government communications suggesting that the structure of the system, or what is sometimes below the formal state structures and may not always be spoken, is a crucial way of setting the boundaries of communication and privileging certain messages and speakers.

Hybrid governance and political authorities

Ahead of examining how media and ICTs shape the relationship between authorities and citizens, and the implications in terms of accountability and conflict resolution and transformation, it is necessary to tackle the debate on governance and leadership.

We focus on the term 'hybrid governance' but we note that it is used in two different ways. Both are relevant for MeCoDEM and for the study of government communications albeit in different ways. The first use of 'hybrid governance' is more common and focuses on political transitions- typically from authoritarian or less democratic to more democratic, or 'good governance' (Diamond, 2002; Levitsky & Way, 2010; Rocha Menocal et al., 2008). The second use of the term is more common in African studies literature and refers to the blending of the state, the informal and the formal and the intersections between a variety of governance actors or 'public authorities' (Kelsall, 2008; Meagher et al., 2014).

In the first context, the political science literature primarily focuses on the contribution of media to democratic institution building in countries emerging from authoritarian regimes and transitioning towards a more participatory model of governance. While democratisation refers to 'a complex, long term, dynamic, and open-ended process; it consists of progress towards a more rule-based, more consensual and more participatory type of politics' (Whitehead, 2002, p.27), consolidating democracies involves the participation of different actors, including the media, to create checks and balances that make democracies secure (Schedler, 1998). Fukuyama points out that the link between democracy and governance is

not straightforward but it reflects one among other interpretations of the concept, and specifically the extent to which a government needs to be democratic or not, governance, after all is primarily focused on a government's ability to make and enforce laws, deliver justice and security. To briefly return to the issue of patronage and neopatrimonialism mentioned above, Beekers and Van Gool (2012) observe that:

> the challenges to good governance reform around the developing world are related to longer histories of political practice, often characterized by the appropriation of power as a personal asset and by the clientelist redistribution of wealth and official positions. Interestingly, such political practices expose their own, indigenous, understandings of what 'governing well' entails. (p.4)

This leads to consider governance as a patchwork, or the outcome of an ongoing negotiation among heterogeneous actors, engaged in communicating with each other and with their own constituencies – or, in other words, a hybrid. Discussing hybrid political orders, Clements (2008) suggests that they are 'characterized by a contradictory and dialectic co-existence of forms of socio-political organization that have their roots in both non-state indigenous social structures and introduced state and societal structures' (p.13). Hybrid forms of governance often characterise phases of democratic transition featuring both old and new regime institutions (Shin, 1994).

The discussion on 'good governance' gained centre-stage in policy-making and development circles in the 1990s, as a response to the failure of aid policies inspired by the withdrawal of the state and the opening to the free market that had characterised the aid paradigm during the previous decade. It also reflected part of the broader democratisation paradigm of that period, setting in place the economic and political frameworks that would increasingly be part of western-driven norms. Good governance debates, and the role of media and government communication as part of these reforms, have certainly been central in the four emerging democracies at the core of MeCoDEM, but they have also developed in different ways. For instance, in Serbia, the need to address the structural weakness of what Pavlović and Antonić (2007) labelled an "under-consolidated democracy" has driven a discussion on how to secure a balanced relation among the branches of the state against a background in which the executive power exerts greater influence than the judiciary and the legislative power (Ejdus, 2010, p.7). In post-Apartheid South Africa, the inexorable withdrawal of the state has stirred a debate on the unequal speed of social and economic reforms, with the former lagging behind the latter (Bassett and Clarke, 2000), while in Egypt the reflection on governance has recently revolved around the subordination of the civil authority to the army (Bhuiyan, 2015; Mietzner, 2014). Eventually, in Kenya, the focus has mostly been on devolution and local governance (Cheeseman et al., 2016; Hope, 2014).

"Bringing the state back in' (Evans et al., 1985) became the new dominant paradigm in international development and "good government and, later, good governance, came to be seen as the necessary preconditions for social and economic development" (Beekers and Van Gool, 2012, p.2). Such a perspective suggests the centrality of government communications including reform of state broadcasters or official communications channels. While much of the focus has been on supporting the development of a 'free media' to hold government to account, or as part of broader civil society initiatives, there has been some pushback around state broadcasting reforms. James Deane, for example, has recently argued for an urgent rethinking about the role of state broadcasters to encourage discussion and dialogue in conflict states. Moving away from the current focus on horizontal, digitally enabled networks which he sees as being over emphasised, Deane argues for a return to more vertical communications which can have a key role in nationbuilding (Deane, 2015). As state institutions were again invested of a central role in catering to the needs of their citizens, good governance "became both a *conditionality* for receiving bilateral and multilateral aid, as well as an *objective* of development assistance in itself (*ibid.*).

Despite a widespread agreement on the importance of the concept, the meaning of good governance remains contested, due to its prescriptive approach. Widely used is the World Bank's (WB) definition of the concept, characterised by 'a well-functioning and accountable core public sector' (World Bank 2000, p.5) pursuing an economic growth and poverty-reduction agenda. But it also has been seen as putting too much emphasis on formal state institutions. Critics such as Weiss (2000, p.804), Santiso (2001) and Hyden et al. (2004) have underlined the technocratic nature of the WB's definition, and other development bodies, such as United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), have moved towards a view of governance that emphasises the significance of processes of participation in which those politically and economically marginalised have the opportunity to have their voices heard (UNDP 1997). This view of governance thus includes not only the bureaucratic apparatus of the state and elected officials, but also private and civil society actors (Rosenau 1992, p.4, Bøås 1998, p.120) and more closely starts to resemble the concept of 'hybrid governance' we will describe below. However, it is worth noting that this approach still tends to focus on the formal civil society groups or formal channels for citizens to express voice.

This second approach to hybrid governance moves away from a normative definition of the concept towards actual practices and models of provision of services and management of conflicts that are rooted in specific settings and reflect different modes of engagement with the public. Moreover, the coexistence of multiple political orders, some of which are embedded in the socio-cultural fabric, is more likely to ensure a more efficient

delivery of services at a local level. Some of the most important work on this topic has been carried out by the Overseas Development Institutes (ODI) Africa Power and Politics (APP) programme. In many respects, the research of APP has responded directly to the failures of the good governance programme and has sought to bring to the centre of analysis a more realistic understanding of power, accountability and social morality that have been important drivers of governance. Central to this is understanding how political or development reforms in conflict situations can 'work with the grain' or build upon the existing frameworks, views and practices of accountability and governance (Bagayoko et al., 2016; Kelsall, 2012). Taking into account this broader perspective of governance, and indeed, loci of power that provides services such as justice and security, encourages a broader approach to 'government communication'. As reflected in the increasingly inclusive scope of WP6, we have urged country teams to consider 'public authorities' rather than simply members of government. We have also sought to stress the importance of multiple spaces of communication where governance and power might be exercised- from religious meetings to community gatherings.

As Hoehne (2013) points out, in reference for the need for a more grounded understanding of governance "more importance should be accorded to customary/traditional and other not democratically legitimated institutions" (p.199), as these institutions can both enjoy greater legitimacy and have a more in-depth knowledge of local dynamics. This is not to say that understanding hybridity in political orders is simply to include the informal and formal, Hoehne warns about the limits of hybrid political orders, suggesting that "the relationship between states and traditional/customary authorities is not necessarily harmonious (but) it can be characterized by substitution, complementarity and incompatibility, with the latter leading to conflicts." (p.200). Therefore, of particular importance are the modes and the political spaces in which the symbolic and the material resources of the state at the centre of the political game, or, to use an expression by Alex De Waal (2015) that we will discuss later, of the political marketplace. Hagmann and Pleclard (2012) use the notion of "negotiation arena" to overcome conventional dichotomies, such as the one between state and society, or differentiate between the local–national–international levels. Instead:

> Negotiation arenas structure social actors' scope by conditioning—but not pre-determining—their inclusion in or exclusion from negotiation processes. Negotiation arenas have spatial, social and temporal dimensions—where are they situated? Who has access? Over what time period do they occur? — Which need to be traced empirically on a case by case basis. Within these arenas statehood is negotiated in more or less formalized and routinized ways. (p.550)

Hagmann and Plecard oppose the negotiation arena to the negotiation table, where statehood is discussed in formal terms and by actors recognised as legitimate according to principles of representative democracy. On the contrary, the negotiation arena is a broader space where a variety of actors weight in their pre-existing resources and prestige and vie for a greater share of power and influence within the state. De Waal (2015) recognises in this arena the features of a marketplace in which elected and unelected authorities can display their adroitness at buying loyalties, not last by using the threat of violence as leverage, and at extracting economic resources from foreign donors. In the political marketplace, leaders weight in their influence over their own following and invest their patronage networks in the construction of new linkages. The literature on political settlement takes stock of the competition of different powerful actors (at political, economic and security level) to shape formal institutions and, although its main focus is on aid policies, which is beyond the scope of this paper, it, however, provides a useful framework to make sense of informal and heterogeneous power arrangements (North et al., 2009; Bell, 2015). This approach addresses mostly the interaction among elites, and the way they negotiate power. This negotiation often occurs behind closed door, but ICTs have increasingly reshaped the boundaries of the arena, allowing the leader to constantly keep his base updated on the ongoing process but, at the same time, exposing him to greater scrutiny from his constituency. Although the focus of the political settlement is on communication among leaders, for the purpose of WP6 we also need to ask how the negotiation spills over and becomes object of discussion between the leaders and his followers. The media have thus a central role, as they allow to build pressure on authorities, for instance through campaigns (Rao, 2013), or how media are controlled by powerful political actors to increase their leverage during the negotiations. This is not unproblematic. How Deane (2015) points out:

> Any debate about the role of media in governance is likely to be contested and divided into arguments around effectiveness (does supporting the media lead to improved governance outcomes?) and values (is supporting the media inherently associated with a normative, democratic, "Western" framework?). This contestation makes it especially difficult for media issues to be properly integrated into governance strategies. (p.265)

An example is offered by South Africa's transition from apartheid to democracy, during which the country's ruling elite coalesced "around a political axis capable of constructing and managing a new national consensus" (Marais, 2001, p.85; see also Berger, 2002)). The outcome of this reconfiguration, however, was a black economic empowerment that benefited only a small black elite (Marais, 2001). In considering how the political settlement that followed the end of white minority rule took shape during the 1990s, it is necessary to take

into account the changing media landscape. During that decade, an emerging middle class increased its control over media previously owned by large corporations as an economic investment but also to buttress its still fledgling privileged position of privilege (Tomaselli, 2004). As a result, the growing black ownership of South African media reproduced the pre-existing class-based social structure, which rests at the core of many of the country's ongoing conflicts, including the service delivery protests. This had a critical importance in shaping the transition phase as it influenced the way South Africans made sense of the changes their society was undergoing. The media played both a 'witness' and a 'reifying role' simultaneously bringing to the fore the transformations taking place in South Africa and producing a consistent narrative, made of images and information, of these changes (see also McConnell and Becker, 2002, p.9).

New media and the re-making of government communication and publics

The current transformation of the media landscape, particularly with the momentous diffusion of digital media, has reshaped the practices and the channels through which political leaders and publics engage with each other. ICTs innovations have further expanded the possibilities for citizens to access information, debate political issues and eventually mobilise (SIDA, 2009; Kreutz, 2010; Obadare; 2006; Naidoo, 2010) and for political authorities to get their messages and narratives across. However, most literature tends to draw a sharp line between communication from below and from above. The significance of communication for civil society organisations engaged in democratisation struggles has been thoroughly examined in WP5, while the specific role of new media in allowing greater coordination and scaling up mobilisations will be object of analysis in WP7. However, as we tackle the specific issue of how governments, and governing bodies in a broader sense, use ICTs and social media to communicate in democratisation conflicts, two caveats are in order: 1) although the literature on popular protests and democratisation emphasises the importance of civil society organisations in coordinating protests, there is evidence of a critical role of traditional structures of power and leaders in acting as catalyst of collective action. It would be therefore useful to quickly dwell on cases of political mobilisation in which political and established authorities were able to occupy an intermediary position between protesters and governments in order to steer the protest and further their agenda; 2) digital media increase the possibility of interaction between political actors and citizens, and yet most scholarship on government's communication and media seems concerned mainly with how governments speak (Bickford, 1996) but not much with how government listen. This dimension deserves to be explored beyond the rigid formal/informal dichotomy, but considering instead the linkages between these domains and the variety of communicative and discursive practices that occur between publics and authorities.

Traditional leaders, new media, current protests

As discussed in the WP5 literature review, the adoption of ICTs has had an impact on aadvocacy, awareness, research, mobilisation and protest, dramatically changing the strategies of civil society organisations and expanding their scope of action (see also Bagalawis, 2001; Kreutz, 2010). However, other studies have contextualised the impact of ICTs and social media in particular, looking at how they were embedded in pre-existing networks. Consider form instance People Power II, the series of demonstrations which took place in the Philippines in 2001 to oust then President Jose Estrada. The event has drawn large attention among scholars, hailed, in the words of Castells et al. (2005) "the first occasion in human history when the mobile phone played an instrumental role in removing the head of the government of a nation-state" (p.266) (see also Bagalawis, 2001; Salterio, 2001; Magapal and Nario-Galace, 2003; Liu and Gastardo-Conaco, 2011; Fukuoka, 2015). Significantly, while this event kindled the imagination of Western political scientists keen to see a potential for greater political participation, local analysts, such as Rafael (2003), remarked that the ousting of Estrada did not bring about a revolutionary change but, instead, paved the way to the rise of power to another member of the elite, the daughter of a former president, able to catalyse the Messianic expectations of the crowd. Moreover, these expectations did spread as text messages through mobile networks, and yet, they gain momentum only as they were amplified by channels of communication emanating from well-established and powerful institutions, above all the radio of the highly influential Catholic Church (ibid., p.15). Despite the argument suggested by this evidence, most studies on new forms of political communication have continued to stress the disintermediating role of ICTs, often within a broader reflection on civil society and activism. The 2008 Iranian post-electoral unrests were framed as a powerful example of the capacity of the crowd to harness Twitter to get organised and bypass the restrictions imposed by an authoritarian regime. However, as Yahyanejad and Gheytanchi (2012) point out, also during the so-called Green Revolution the main opposition candidates, Hosein Musavi and Mehdi Karrubi, had an active role in creating and fostering, ahead of the elections, a pool of online activists who drove the street protests. Discussing North Africa's 2011 uprisings, with a particular focus on Egypt, Rennick (2013) for example, challenges views that placed much emphasis on the role of ICTs in the protests that put an end to the regime of President Hosni Mubarak. She argues instead that:

> during the pre-mobilisation phase, social media allowed for the enlarging of the public sphere to new non-political actors, and permitted the sharing of grievances and the emergence of broad and resonant personal frames. During the collective action phase, mobilisation was able to occur thanks to frame alignment: a strategic process undertaken by activists to build collective understanding of the movement's struggle, to clearly spell out its objectives, and to motivate people to action. In the case of the Egyptian revolution, this process

> of frame alignment was based on the cultural norm of social justice. In addition, mobilisation was successful thanks to the emergence of hybrid organisational structures that relied on a cross between social media-based entrepreneurial networks and more traditional social movement organisations. (p.157).

These examples brings to the fore the importance of hybrid institutional arrangements in shaping spaces of interaction and contestation and are consistent with the general argument on which the broader scholarship on popular protests and ICTs, and on the Arab Spring in particular, agrees: despite the critical role to coalesce opinions around political issues played by online media, such as blogs in Egypt (Lynch, 2007; Nawawi and Khamis, 2014), there is not strong enough evidence to suggest that social media are a direct cause of revolutions (Anderson, 2011; Papic and Noonan, 2011; Aday et al., 2012; Dajani, 2012). Moreover, this literature sheds light on the relationship of ephemeral mobilisations and established organisations revolving around charismatic leaders. The adoption of a broad repertoire of media (word-to-mouth, internet, mobile phones, radios) to express grievances and call for social change enables the expansion of a space of debate and participation. As the Egyptian case mentioned above seems to suggest, this engagement does not emerge in a vacuum but, rather, it builds upon pre-existing structures of power.

Participation: the making of publics and the politics of listening

The rise of social media is ostensibly providing new opportunities and spaces for governments to listen to and engage their publics. The communication literature offers some of the conceptual tools to examine how social media are inducing changes in the field of political public relations, intended as "the management process by which an organization or individual actor for political purposes, through purposeful communication and action, seeks to influence and to establish, build, and maintain beneficial relationships and reputations with its key publics to help support its mission and achieve its goals" (Strömbäck and Kiousis, 2011, p.8). Stieglitz and Dang-Xuan (2012) develop an analytical framework to examine the relationship between social media and political communication; Park et al. (2015), for instance, analyse the effect of Twitter, a micro-blogging platform, on public trust, while Chang and Kanan (2008) and Dorris (2008) examine the adoption of social media for reaching out to citizens, disseminating information to the public and sharing information across government agencies. Studies on crisis communication and disaster response pay a greater attention to the interactive character of social media, which enables rapid exchange of information among different actors (Schultz et al., 2011; Yates and Paquette, 2011). Other online spaces, such as blogs, have been branded as "sophisticated listening post of modern democracy" (Coleman, 2005), although the argument that "blogs lower the threshold of entry to the global debate for traditionally unheard or marginalised voices" is highly questionable (ibid. p.277).

However, as mentioned above, the interactive potential of digital media strongly depends on the context of embeddedness and on the leader's capacity to create an maintain avenues of participation open. A case in point is offered by Omanga's (2015) study on a Kenyan chief using twitter for community policing, thus expanding the deliberative structure of the *baraza*, a widespread Eastern African grassroots institution, into a digital, networked space of participation and dialogue between authorities and citizens. Social media are also hybridising more established loci of media interaction, such as radio programs, in which listeners are invited to call-in and express their opinion on a variety of current issues (Stremlau et al., 2015), However, despite the apparent openness of these spaces of discussion, the real extent and degree of participation remains problematic. In his ethnography of two Kenyan radio stations, for instance, Gagliardone (2015) debunks assumptions of a linear relationship between participation and good governance and argues instead that the interplay of heterogeneous actors, networks and languages can reinforce some voices and silence others, thus entrenching pre-existing inequalities. Far from allowing symmetric relations, these spaces of interaction can turn into showcases of individual charisma.

As ICTs have blurred the boundary between mass and interpersonal communication, the way information circulates and persuasion is exerted throughout social networks has substantially changed. The charisma-building function of mass media such as television and radio for political and religious leaders has been largely explored in different contexts. For instance, in Indonesia Hughes-Freeland (2007) examines the relationship of charisma and celebrity by focusing on the mediatisation of the repertoire of the symbols of power. Discussing 'charismatic' authority in the Great Lakes region of Eastern-Central Africa, Vokes (2007) examines the usage of radio broadcast to both recruit proselytes and consolidate leaders' influence, but also the different forms of 'consumption' of radio programs in Uganda and Rwanda. Particularly relevant is the work of Schultz on Muslim preachers and radio broadcast in West Africa (Schultz, 2013, 2014, 2015) and on the public presence of female radio preachers in Mali (2012). More recently, she has provided a detailed account of the construction of charismatic appeal among Muslim clerics in Mali, narrowing the focus on the role their responsible leadership played in easing social tensions in the aftermath of the 2012 military coup (Schulz, 2015). Schulz (2012) also discusses the figure of as Ousmane Madani Haïdara, a Malian Muslim preacher and social media star who has cultivate her popularity as a charismatic leader on Facebook and Twitter. Similarly, ICTs have also blurred the distinctions between 'audience' and 'publics'. Understanding under which circumstances, and in which ways, an audience turns into a public entails a reflection on the notion of political participation, thus questioning what it means to participate in politics, and what it means for

leaders to listen to their 'public(s)'. Mostly discussed in the media and cultural studies literature, the concept of audience has proved increasingly significant to examine how the changing 'mediascape' (Appadurai, 1996) is reshaping state-citizens interactions, an issue at the core of the reflection on the procedures and the purposes of democracy. Livingstone (2005) focuses on the convergences and tensions between the notions of audience and public, drawing from Habermas' study on the evolution of a "public sphere" (1989) in which citizens could rationally and critically debate issues of common interest. Historically cultivated in venues such as cafes and in the press, the public sphere was regarded as the locus in which the bourgeoisie could form and exchange opinions, a precondition for political action aimed at both mobilisation and institutional change. For this reason, the notion of public sphere features at the centre of a substantial literature on the transformations brought about by the mass media on the relationship between government institutions and citizens, and on how the boom of corporate media has impacted on this link (Garnham, 1992; Hallin, 1994).

Habermas' conceptualisation of the public sphere is aligned to the liberal-pluralist view of media as watchdog of the government, privately-owned so to stay independent from the political power, informing a "market-place of ideas" resting on material infrastructures for spreading information and opinion. Kunreuther (2006), for instance, focuses on the role of Rumpum Connection, a radio program in which Nepalese in the homeland and abroad communicate with each other, shaping the very idea of Nepalese diaspora and forging a transnational public sphere, as "Nepali subjects in Kathmandu reaching out toward the diaspora and ostensibly bringing those voices of diasporic Nepalis back" (p.331). However, Curran (2000) questions the truly 'public' nature of the public sphere, arguing instead that it referred to an elitist clique of privileged citizens able to reach consensus in order to affect government's decisions. This argument can be extended to the role of private-owned media in democratic transitions, opening questions on whether members of the elite controlling the media may hide vested interests behind the purported mission to enforce political accountability through watchdog journalism.

In African studies, for instance, the normative implications of Habermas' 'public sphere' are viewed sceptically through a post-colonial lens (Mamdani, 1996). For Ekeh (1975), the colonial experience has bequeathed African society two publics, a primordial and a civil public. While the latter emerges in the interaction with state institutions, the former is based on traditional, mainly ethnic, associations and occupies the political space by providing services and support to citizens left behind by the state. Other scholars have elaborated on the notion of public in Africa building on Ekeh's reflection, avoiding Habermas' elitist view of the public sphere by looking at the popular culture as the space in which publics (in the plural form) engage with politics (Barber, 1987; Ellis 1989; Spitulnick 2002; Willems, 2012).

Livingston, echoing Dahlgren (2003), suggests to 'see beyond the formal political system', calling for investigating practices and institutions that do not fall squarely within conventional political categories. In general, the discussion on democratic engagement is often informed by normative assumptions on how and where political actors and citizens should communicate with each other. For instance, writing on the media-democracy relationship in Southern Africa, Berger (2002) reminds that "many writers (but not enough) have sounded warnings about lifting concepts like media and democracy from western conditions and applying them unthinkingly to Africa" (21). Moreover, by distinguishing democratic institutions and practices through which people participate in decision-making processes, he argues that performing democratic functions can blur the boundary between institutional political arenas and family and community spaces. This is a crucial question in the discussions on democratisation, and one that should be adapted to a changing technological ecosystem and different socio-cultural contexts.

It is worth pointing out that a comparison has been drawn between the *samizdat*, independent Soviet-era dissident publications (see Pearce and Kendzior, 2012) and the internet, whose diffusion has presented authoritarian regimes with new challenges. Indeed, whether responding to dissent with crackdowns or allowing critical voices within certain limits was a dilemma that Shirky (2007) has explored with reference to East Germany in 1989, where "if the state didn't react, the documentation would serve as evidence that the protesting was safe. If the state did react, then the documentation of the crackdown could be used to spur an international outcry." (p.164)

Consequently, forms of "networked authoritarianism" have emerged, in which "an authoritarian regime embraces and adjusts to the inevitable changes brought by digital communications" (MacKinnon, 2011, p. 33). Examining online dissent in Azerbaijan, Pearce and Kendzior (2012) argue that "networked authoritarianism is manifest in political tactics that create selective social openings to create a semblance of transparency but in fact monitor and stifle dissent" (p.287; see also Baogang and Warren, 2011). According to Deibert and Rohozinski (2010), networked authoritarianism, practiced through "effective counter information campaigns that overwhelm, discredit, or demoralize opponents" (p.27), is the newest form of political control of digital media, following direct censorship and filtering and the use of laws to regulate acceptable contents. Cases of networked authoritarianism should therefore be a caveat against assumptions on the linear correlation of online engagement and democratic participation. We need to ask instead whether ICTs, as they overlap, interweave or reshape networks through which leaders circulate information and mobilise their followers, reproduce or challenge pre-existing power relations.

Yet, as Dobson (2012) points out, 'good listening' can help achieve democratic objectives by "enhancing legitimacy, helping to deal with deep disagreements, improving understanding and increasing empowerment." Gerodimos (2006) emphasises the impact of innovation on "access, engagement (incorporating education, motivation and trust), meaningful deliberation and a link between civic input and public policy output" (p.26).

Benhabib (1992) argues that the government's legitimacy derives from the preservation of this space of political participation in which the state can be held accountable. In African contexts, this function is often performed outside political spaces such as neighbourhood and religious gatherings, or in media that provide opportunities for interaction with leaders. This is the case, for instance, of radio call-in programmes, in which the audience can directly interact with political representatives (Thornborrow and Fitzgerald, 2013). Although this mode of interaction is a far cry from being a tool of accountability and transparency according to normative ideas of these concepts, it has the potential to expand avenues of participation, allow members of the audience to exchange views and enable some limited form of control (Stremlau et al., 2015). ICTs have further reshaped the modes of interaction between leaders and their followers, as make possible to keep avenues of participation open by establishing a direct communication channel with political authorities. It is worth reminding here that we refer here to both formal and informal leaders and to the way they communicate with citizens, but also how they listen and are influenced in return.

Conclusion: Between Digital and Neo-Patrimonial Networks

When bringing together the different strands and arguments in this paper, a final aspect to consider relates to the transformations induced by the integration of ICTs in neo-patrimonial networks. These transformations ought to be appraised against the background of the democratisation processes and the hybrid regimes mentioned above. Reflecting on the impact of ICTs on the political marketplace in the Horn of Africa, De Waal (2015) observes that:

> Better information and communication helps subordinate actors, but only in certain ways. Specifically, it helps them as individuals in the political marketplace Transactions are easier and cheaper. The deals they get are better. It follows that participation in the marketplace is more attractive. These technologies have not assisted the kind of detailed lengthy planning that undergirds sustained political struggles. Information technologies may democratize the political marketplace, but they will not transform it (p.208).

Keeping communication channels open between the leader and his base makes possible to include other actors in the negotiation. At the same time, the coordination of collective actions from above via mobile phones and other ICTs and the possibility to stay in

touch with his clients provides the leader engaged in the negotiation arena with an opportunity to display his clout over their following and his capacity to resort to violence if necessary to increase his political leverage. The level of violence can thus be calibrated to fit a bargaining strategy. This approach offers a key to examine phenomena of political violence that would be otherwise labelled as expressions of tribalism. An example is the wave of unrests that swept Kenya in the aftermath of the December 2007 elections, when violence pitted the constituencies of the main candidates (Mueller, 2011; Sommerville, 2011; Markussen, 2011).

Exploring the interaction of rumours and political agenda in the context of the 2008 political violence in Kenya, Osborn (2008) points out that:

> it is the technologies of communication that have given rumour its particular potency in more recent years in Kenya. Where rumours were once local, taking time to percolate outwards and onwards to a broader, national audience, the use of high-tech communication, such as mobile phones, email, internet websites and weblogs, has transformed the pace and range of rumour (p.316).

The ensuing investigation launched by the prosecutors of the International Criminal Court has argued that indeed the political violence that unfolded along ethnic lines was coordinated from above and indicted six high authorities, including current Kenyan President Uhuru Kenyatta (whose charges were subsequently dropped) and current vice president William Ruto (Lynch and Zgonec-Rožej, 2013). According to the prosecutors, in that situation the suspected of crimes against humanity were responsible of having fuelled hatred and actively encouraged their supporters to commit acts of violence – violence that resulted, according to conservative estimates, in the killing of 800 people and on the displacement of almost 180,000 (BBC, 2008). On the one hand, mobile communication was used to funnel the grievances of the constituencies to their political leaders through the intermediation of local authorities, the nodes of well-established neo-patrimonial networks; on the other, it was used to convey to drive disruptive actions that, in a very inflammatory context, were meant to raise the stakes and maximise the gain in the bargain, for the winning leader, with the promise of a trickle-down effect on its followers. The case of Kenya seems to suggest that ICTs may not only play a role in democratising the political arena, increasing the accountability of the leaders to his supporters, but also buttress neo-patrimonial links, thus entrenching pre-existing power relations. Further research, however, is necessary to understand how the embeddedness of ICTs in traditional networks is reconfigurated according to local peculiarities and how this affects processes of democratisation.

By bringing together research that is seldom in dialogue, this paper has challenged normative approaches to government communication, conflict and democratisation by

questioning a rigid formal/informal bifurcation of both governance and media and suggesting instead the need to take into account hybrid arrangements of governing structures, involving leaders with heterogeneous and, in some case, conflicting agendas. It has also underscored that government communication is a two-way process by pointing out that the key of good governance lies not only in a leader's ability to effectively communicate with his following by virtue of his charisma or his mastery of the political game, but also in his capacity to keep channels of communication open, including listening. ICTs have further expanded the possibility of timely interactions. The other side in young democracies, though, is that the interpersonal relations entertained by political leaders with their followers might be the ossified structure of neo-patrimonial networks cloaked in the comforting, and appealing to Western donors, language of democracy. As emerges from this literature review, despite conjuring notions of public sphere and open participation, the widespread adoption of digital media, and social media in particular, presents problematic aspects that might contribute to reproducing relations of subordination reverse democratic transitions. Further research is required, in the four MeCoDEM countries and beyond, to understand the factors shaping democratic trajectories at a local level and whether media, old and new, are a tool for countering authoritarian drifts, or merely a mirror of pre-existing inequalities and networks.

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