ICTs, mobile telephony and politics in Africa: the end of the "communication for development"

paradigm?

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Abstract

The mobile telephone has become an established research subject in many regions of the world.

Government officials and business leaders work equally to devise the best way to take advantage of

what mobile telephony has to offer in Africa. The growing interest in mobile telephony in this part of

the world inspires us to reflect upon the manner in which theory can contribute to better understanding

the growth, use and impact of mobile telephony in Africa according to its relationship with politics.[1] In

this sense, our goal here is two-fold: identify the social and theoretical context in which issues related

to mobile telephony and politics in Africa insert themselves; and to analyze the traditional theories

regarding information and communication technologies (ICTs) in Africa in relation to politics. New

theoretical approaches for thinking about mobile telephony in Africa are also proposed in order to

understand the new paradigms that are at stake in the continent's development.

Keywords*: ICTs – Mobile telephony – Politics – Africa – Development - Communication*

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[1]   The Global Media Journal "Call for Papers" asked that authors engage with the notion of collective action in Africa. From our perspective, politics is the concern of collective action in the sense that Chantal Mouffe, in 1993's *The Return of the Political*, insists that politics cannot be limited to a certain type of institution but is instead conceived of as an inherent dimension of human societies, thus determining our ontological condition (1993, p. 3). Politics is marked by power and antagonism and is rooted in a form of political participation. "By political participation we refer to those legal acts by private citizens that are more or less directly aimed at influencing the selection of government personnel and/or the actions that they take" (Verba, 1978, p. 46). Whereas for Mouffe (1993, p. 6), "(w)hen there is a lack of democratic political struggles with which to identify, their place is taken by other forms of identification, of ethnic, nationalist or religious nature." In our analysis, political participation may occur in an illegal manner, in the sense that no official authorization has been granted to the actions and that politics is not limited to the democratic or non-democratic character of a given country.

An American (and Occidental) Perspective of Communication and Politics in Africa

The relationship between communication and politics in the African context has been essentially addressed through the lens of development. The question of development in particular came out of political and theory-centred spheres following the Second World War (Albertini, 1987) and was an issue born from the observation that the development of one part of the planet was delayed when compared to others. At the end of World War II, the colonized countries of Africa, Latin America and Asia became, overnight, countries that should be developed. Western researchers and international organizations thus approached Africa as a laboratory for analyzing and putting into practice development models.

René Dumont's analysis of Africa thoroughly addresses its history of development and for years was a primary source of reference (1962). In his text, Dumont paints a somber portrait of Africa's future while drawing a parallel between political issues and development issues. Thus, at the risk of vexing them with his observations, Dumont shows that Africans should not believe that political independence is sufficient while continuing to underestimate the importance of economic independence. Addressing the consecutive attainment of independence by multiple countries, Dumont points out that "this victory constitutes but a first step towards development, which is the only way to attain real independence – an economic base – while strictly political independence is simply a precondition" (pp. 8-9). Dumont continues, addressing the privileges granted government functionaries, ministers and elected officials in these newly independent countries, advocating that they should have maintained the federal structure the French had imposed – French Occidental Africa and French Equatorial Africa. The author provides an example: "For ex-French countries, we now have 15 governments, more than 150 ministers, several hundreds of cabinet members, thousands of parliamentarians... All for countries that, when put together, are less populated and infinitely poorer than the former whole" (pp. 64). While the question of development has mobilized agronomists, economists, political scientists and even philosophers, our

work targets policy – development, in other words – and analysis conducted by communications researchers.

According to the first communication specialists in Africa, the ties between politics and development are quite tight. Americans were the first Western communication researchers to be interested in development (sometimes called globalization) in Africa. Starting in 1969, Rogers proposed the examination of innovation diffusion in Africa by analyzing the relationships between the populations and their governments. "One method of bridging the hiatus between rural populations and governing elites in less developed nations is communication research" (Rogers, 1969, pp. 216). Rogers adds that this relationship occurs necessarily through the process of development: "Development is a type of social change in which new ideas are introduced into a social system in order to produce higher per capita incomes and living standards through more modern production methods and improved social organization" (pp. 216). Consequently, for Rogers, one must change human behaviour by communicating new ideas. That said, the *heterophily gap* is greater when the emitter and receptor do not share the same culture in the context of a transfer of technological innovations between developed and less-developed countries. While the mass media may be a source of frustration, change can be brought about through exposure to these mass media (radio) and through interpersonal communication. As with others, Rogers put forward the idea that the mass media and the media system as a whole were essential to efforts to modernize Africa. Lerner (1958) and Sola Pool (1960) were of the view that the mass media (radio and television) were key factors in modernization because of their capacities to induce change in the individuals receiving their content.

For Mytton (1983), the disintegration of colonial empires coincided with the major development of mass communication in Africa. Nevertheless, he analyzes the links between communication and social and political change: "Communication is a process in which information is transmitted, received and analyzed and finally, accepted or rejected. People make rational decisions based on learning and experience after assessing the significance of any new information they receive" (pp. 9-10).

Recognizing that the mass media are under-developed in Africa in comparison to the rest of the world, with a poor level of print media readership, weak radio transmission capability and a complete lack of television in certain countries, Mytton further believes "that poverty impedes the expansion of transport and commerce, two factors that are central to the promotion of communication" (pp. 13).

As we have seen, early American research overlooked the political in Africa, or had a tendency to analyze it from the perspective of development and to see in development a way to "catch up" to the West in the sense that societies progress through different stages, from traditional society to the era of mass consumption (Rostow, 1963). That said, much other Western research came to adopt a more critical perspective, such as Schiller's work which revealed the imperialist intentions of the American media model through a "marriage of the economic and the electronic" (1969, p. 5). Mattelart's work aimed, above all, to criticize the ideological logics at work in the international media industry system. Both researchers well identified the role of the economy in communication. As with researchers adhering to a globalization approach, they tended to ignore the political dimension of communication. The post-independence context and the Cold War sufficiently explain the lack of Western researchers' interest in politics – Mouffe's *democratic political struggles* – in Africa.

An African perspective on communication and politics in Africa

Independence in the majority of African countries was won through conflicts and claims and most of these newly independent countries were young democracies. Without entering into the details of precolonial African political history, it is worth pointing out that democratic political organizing "was probably the default in African states for close to two thousand years" (Diop, 1960, pp. 53). Amouzou (2009) also concluded that "(d)emocracy is not a foreign sort of politics in Africa" (pp. 21). Elsewhere, Senghor proposed that the idea of participation understood as "the fundamental expression of democracy that wants each group, each individual member in the community to be able to express themselves: the right to take part in every decision, something that cannot help but to be a positive

affair" is nothing new in Africa (as cited in Amouzou, 2009, p. 21).

That said, the early years of independence rapidly put an end to democratic ideals. In the space of 10 years, 1960-1970, the African continent experienced multiple *coups d'etats* which resulted in military dictatorships or single-party regimes in Algeria, Benin, Burundi, Central African Republic, Congo, Ghana, Libya, Mali, Nigeria, Uganda, Sudan, Togo,[2] and Zaire. In the decade that followed, the number of *coups d'etats* only increased and other names were added to this long list of undemocratic countries. In this context, it was very difficult for African researchers to address political issues as they risked prison or death.

As in the case of their American colleagues, rather than directly confront political questions, African researchers instead turned their gaze to development. Some African authors were supportive of development even if they were sceptical of the ways in which it was being carried out. For example, Kodjo (1985) proposes granting a greater place to education while holding school directors responsible:

> The application of the continent's potential is not possible without a level of education that conditions every industrial revolution and, for what concerns us chiefly, development. Africans must also avoid falling into the increasingly present trap, into which some of them tend to fall, of rejecting development. (1985, pp.69)

Nevertheless, other authors more critical than Kodjo do not hesitate advocating for the disconnection of Africa (Amin, 1986), and the responsibility of Africans for their own problems (Diakaté, 1988; Kabou, 1991; Dussey, 2008). Indeed, the critical posture of African researchers was associated with the lived experience of the continent.

Political movements and mobilizations have a long history. With the end of the Cold War, however, sub-Saharan Africa's citizens' movements began in 1988, following those of Latin America and Eastern Europe. In the majority of francophone African countries, serious demonstrations for democracy began in 1989 following the fall of the Berlin Wall and the end of the Cold War. That year, General Mathieu Kérékou, president of the Popular Republic of Benin, officially decreed the end of

single-party rule. This was the result of a coming together of several factors. As demonstrated by Banegas (1995), "(a) more conjunctural factor, one that was financial, served to catalyse this structural crisis of the Kérékou regime" (para.8). In effect, when he carried out his *coup d'etat* in 1972, Kérékou became the centre of state power and gave his country a Marxist-Leninist orientation. Due to the chosen economic orientations, Benin had serious financial difficulties like most communist countries. In 1988, Benin was bankrupt, the country's three banks had no capital, civil servants had accumulated several months of owed salary, and the public treasury had ceased to make payments. That said, Banegas (1995) insists that it was the publication of articles in the independent newspaper *Tam Tam Express* that "would have a significant importance in the mobilization of Beninese and foreign actors in favour of change" (para.8.) This wind of change of which Benin was the precursor in francophone Africa, led many researchers to directly address the issue of politics in Africa. One example is Dussey's provocative book *L'Afrique malade de ses hommes politiques* (2008). For Dussey, "the current debate and analysis around development and peace in Africa is made up of essential and urgent issues" (pp. 12). Addressing independence, he proposes that "these gains of independence do not serve to reinforce national unity nor to engage Africa on a path of viable long-term economic development" (pp. 19).

While the majority of African communications authors have adopted a macro perspective, they have primarily oriented their research around development by making links between the media and development. Ahadé (2000) best illustrates this through describing the position of community media in francophone West Africa: "Generally speaking, to promote communication in Africa also means giving the remote, marginalized, rural communities the means to participate in national development through knowledge and information" (pp. 61). He adds that "for more than 20 years after the independence of African countries in the 1960s, West African governments continued communicating in a vertical and authoritative manner to the rural areas (80% of inhabitants) through the monopoly of State media" (pp. 62). Generally speaking, the majority of community media in Africa were created by somewhat competing interests – the local and the international (Wanyeki, 2000; Karikari, 2000). On a diachronic

level, analysis was levelled at the role of State media and community media, as well as ICTs. Okigbo (1987) summarizes the situation nicely: "African communication scholars have at one time or another conducted research in folk or traditional media, rural communication, media use among urban poor, agricultural tourism, political communication and press history" (pp. 27).

The advent of ICTs has displaced the established orientation of analysis: a local dynamic uniquely organized around national development assisted by foreign aid, it has now come to examine the capacity of African countries to follow the rhythm of technological change. Reflecting upon the challenges associated with the Internet in Africa, Sonaike (2004) maintained that the digital divide was one of the principle ICT issues on the continent. He insisted that telecommunications infrastructures were inadequate in addition to other factors limiting the expansion of internet use: the high cost of data equipment and data transmission, poor bandwidth quality, and localized use of the Internet in large cities. For Sonaike, "the expansion of the internet, and of telecommunications in general in Africa, should be based on strategies that combine the satisfaction of basic needs and the development of ICT (pp. 51). He aims to respond to the needs of agriculture, education, health and informational infrastructure. As in the case of Kodjo, Sonaike believes in the important role of African governments in the development of informational infrastructure. With democratization processes in Africa, traditional ICT issues have been added into African researchers' discussions on the role of the Internet, social media or mobile telephony in collective action (ongoing struggles for democracy). While much research has been done concerning the Maghreb (Dahmani, 2007; Kubler, 2011; Douai, 2012, 2013) and in anglophone Africa (Ekine, 2010; Wasserman, 2011; Janse van Rensburg, 2012), rare are the studies conducted in this domain in francophone Africa.

Be they American or African researchers, the links between politics and the appeal to technology remain complex. Must we accept development as a matter of politics? Are communication tools the solution for Africa? Neither the responses of academic researchers nor of international organizations are uniform.

ICTs and mobile telephony in Africa: the perspective of international organizations

As Jally notes: (t)echnology has been at the heart of human progress since earliest times…. *Homo sapiens* – the "wise man" – …. made tools of stone, bone and antler as well as necklaces for adornment, and drew symbolic art on walls – technology in the service of ideas and communication. (as cited in the United Nations Development Programme [UNDP] 2001, p. 27)

It is from this perspective that we can understand the politics of an organization such as the UNDP for whom:

> Many technologies are tools of human development that enable people to increase their
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> incomes, live longer, be healthier, enjoy a better standard of living, participate more in
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> their   communities, and lead more creative lives…. Technology is like education – it
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> enables people to lift themselves out of poverty. (UNDP, 2001, p. 27)

The discourse of the UNDP thus presents technology as a tool and a positive means of application that has an effect on poverty. For the UNDP, technical innovation influences human development in two ways: firstly, it increases human potential; secondly, "technology is a means to human development because of its impact on economic growth through the productivity gains it generates" (UNDP, 2001, p. 28).

Thus, the UNDP only sees advantages in the ICTs that might permit for economic and social development. However, a certain dialectic emerges between human development and technological progress in that human development itself may lead to technological development. According to this logic, the UNDP attempts to explain:

> What is new and different about information and communications technology as a means
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> for eradicating poverty in the 21st century? First, it is a pervasive input to almost all
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> human activities: it has possibilities for use in an almost range of locations and purposes.
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> Second, information and communications technology breaks barriers to human

development in at least three ways not possible before: *breaking barriers to knowledge,*

breaking barriers toparticipation, breaking barriers to economic opportunities. (UNDP,

2001, p. 35-36)

According to the UNDP, technology has the capacity to directly affect the participation of

populations in the management of their countries. The World Bank has elaborated on this approach in

terms of ICT use by developing countries within the framework of their InfoDev program:

Three factors motivate developing country decision-makers to improve e-readiness and

promote the adoption of ICT in their countries. First, ICT promises enormous benefits as

part of the solution to economic and social problems. Second, countries face the threat of

being left further behind if they do not address the growing digital divides both between

and within countries. Third, international leaders, foreign donors, and lending agencies

are integrating ICT into development and aid programs. ICT is a key weapon in the war

against world poverty. When used properly, it offers a tremendous potential to empower

people in developing countries to overcome development obstacles; to address the most

important social problems they face; andto strengthen communities, democratic

institutions, a free press, and local economies. (World Bank 2001, p. 6)

According to the World Bank, ICTs are a solution to economic and social problems and their

discourse seems to affirm that a willingness to introduce ICTs into developing countries results

in an increased awareness of the advantages of ICTs for development. This awareness follows

from decisions taken by international leaders (otherwise known as political leaders), foreign

donors, and funding agencies. Within the World Bank itself exists the World Bank Group's

Global Information and Communication Technologies Department (GICT) which "plays an

important role in the development and promotion of ICT access in developing countries".[2]

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[2]   http://info.worldbank.org/ict; Retrieved on September 2006.

Created in 2000, this department provides governments, private businesses and community organizations with the capital and expertise necessary to take advantage of ICTs to reduce poverty and strengthen development. UNESCO and the ITU share the World Bank and UNDP's optimistic view of ICTs for development.

The position of international organizations on ICTs relates above all to development issues, with a nod to politics, and constitutes a logical progression of the position of international communication researchers who specialize in the role of the media and ICTs in Africa. For Williams, Mayer and Minges (2001), ICTs have been a remarkable success in Africa. Thus, availability, mobile telephone quality of service and coverage, low price, rapid evolution and reforms in the sector give telecommunications a unique place in Africa's infrastructure. Despite success (access, price, quality, infrastructure, institutions and market reforms), decision-makers remain confronted by a number of challenges such as the continued expansion of mobile networks and their related costs and the question of bandwidth.

Williams, Mayer and Minges (2001) have further noted that "the mobile penetration rate increased from less than 1 percent of the population in 1998 to almost one-third by 2008 – and since then has continued to increase" (p. 3). 1998 was thus the beginning of the telecommunications revolution in Africa. Williams, Mayer and Minges add, "By 2008, the last year for which comprehensive data are available, 263 million subscribers (fixed and mobile) were found in sub-Saharan Africa, equivalent to 32% of the population" (p. 3).. At the same time, the cost of mobile communications decreased constantly across the continent. Williams, Mayer and Minges further state:

> As previously stated, access to telecommunications services has increased dramatically. Between 1998 and 2008, 247 million mobile subscribers joined the networks, bringing the total number of telephone subscribers (fixed and mobile) to 263 million. This increase in the number of subscribers raised mobile penetration rates from 0.6% to 32% (figure

2.1). (pp. 26-27).

Figure 2.1   Telecommunications Subscribers, Sub-Saharan Africa, 1998–2008
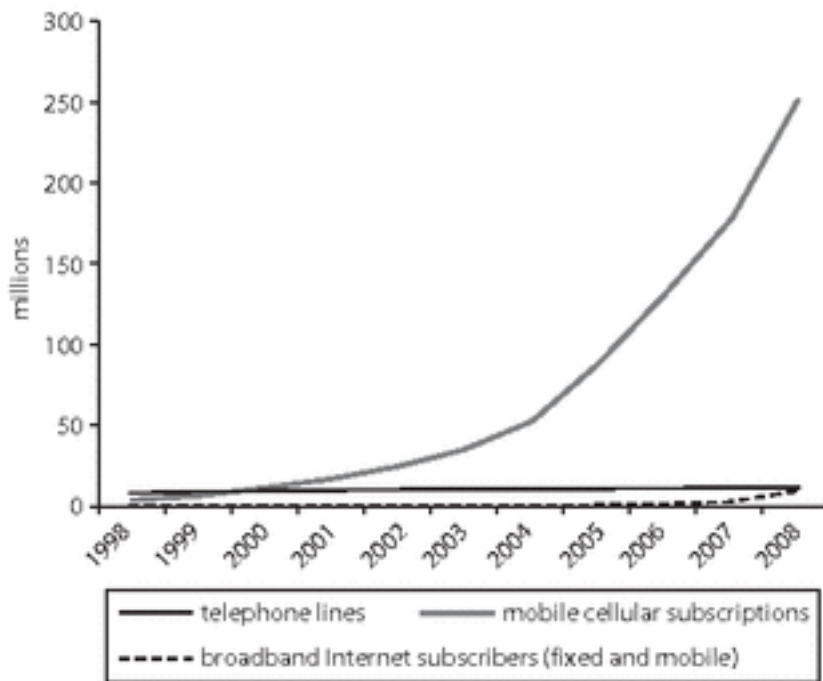
Sources: ITU 2010, Wireless Intelligence, World Bank Development Data Platform.

Despite encouraging signs, the authors of this World Bank study make two series of

recommendations: 1) continue reforms through liberalization and regulation; 2) create incentives for

operators seeking to respond to constantly evolving policy (i.e. high-speed transmission). The posture

adopted by these authors reflects the oft-repeated position of international organizations and

researchers caught up in technological determinism. The theories on communication in Africa are

constant: communication media (radio, television, Internet) are tools for the development of African

societies, even if they are modified over time.

The next section will look at analytical approaches that allow us to examine traditional theories

concerning ICTs in Africa while taking into account the political question.

The Mobile Model: The End of a "Communication for Development" in Africa Paradigm?

Now that we have established the social and theoretical context, we'll turn our analytical gaze to the

traditional theories related to communication for development while proposing theoretical approaches that may help to integrate the political dimension associated with ICTs. In particular, we are concerned with the relationship between mobile telephony and politics in Africa. Before making these proposals, though, we'll examine the nature of the uses of these ICTs and the epistemological positioning they favour.

Uses of ICTs and Mobile Telephony

With the democratization processes of African countries at the beginning of the 1990s, political participation practices were transformed with the use of contemporary communication tools. For example, during the 2000 Senegalese presidential election – referred to as the "first changeover" – when challenger Abdoulaye Wade defeated incumbent Abdou Diouf, journalists used mobile telephones to announce the polling results live in order to avoid electoral fraud.

Another telling example of the new roles played by ICTs is an incident from 2010 during a political demonstration in Togo. Romuald Létondot, a French soldier and adviser to the Togolese army's Chief of Staff, verbally abused a journalist in the following manner: "Erase that photo please, or it'll be me who takes it away…. Do you want me to smash your camera or what?" After the journalist refused to erase a photo of the French officer, the officer's abuse escalated: "Put it the hell away. Do you know who I am? I'm the adviser to the Chief of Staff of the army. Do you want me to call the RCGP[3] to put a little order up in here?" Pointing a finger at Togolese photojournalist Noel Kokou Tadegnon, then a correspondent for Reuters TV and filming the scene, he said "You, put that away." Tadegnon also refused to be censored. Faced with the controversy posed by the situation, Lieutenant-Colonel Létondot was recalled to Paris by the French Minister of Defence and jailed for six days. If it were not for the existence of the smartphones and camera that enabled the scene to be filmed and then circulated on the

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[3]   The RCGP is the Régiment commando de la garde prrésidentielle and protects the Togolese head of state.

Internet – on Togolese sites and ultimately on YouTube[4] – and the controversy that followed, this French officer's threats, contrary to the democratic norms of his country, would have gone unnoticed.

In the Ivory Coast, ICTs are used in local governance (Kra, 2013). The goal is to make intelligent uses of ICTs accessible to local governments in order to facilitate good governance. In this context, good governance is defined as "the availability and application of mechanisms and resources that allow for efficiently addressing and resolving challenges posed in a society that must govern itself, manage its own development and thus augment its well-being" (Kra, 2013, p. 85).

A 2012 study (Portland Communication) on the use of Twitter in Africa identified 11.5 million geo-located tweets originating primarily in the following countries: South Africa, Kenya, Nigeria, Egypt, Morocco, Algeria, Rwanda, Tunisia, Mali, Cameroon, Sudan, Angola, Namibia, Niger, Burkina Faso, Ethopia, Libya, Central African Republic, Gabon and Ghana. While more than 5 million of these tweets originated in South Africa during the three months analyzed, only 2 150 came from Ghana, last on the list. These twenty countries represent 70% of the population of Africa and 88% of Internet users on the continent. Twitter is seen mainly as a tool for social conversation (81%) and an important source of information (68%). Fifty five percent of African Twitter users use it as a primary source of information about politics. Far from generalizing these results, Portland Communication's study puts them in perspective.

Alzouma (2008) provides statistics illustrating technological development in Africa:
Niger, for example, had only 6.33 per 100 mobile telephone subscribers in 2007, 0.07 computers per 100 inhabitants in 2005, 0.17 fixed phone lines per 100 inhabitants in 2005, and 0.28 Internet users per 100 inhabitants in 2006. The Ivory Coast, a country considered relatively "developed" in the West African sub-region, had only 1.41 fixed phone lines per 100 inhabitants in 2006, 36.60 mobile telephone subscribers per 100 inhabitants in 2007, 1.78

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[4]   At the time, it had been viewed 120,000 times. Today, it has surpassed 775,000 views.

computers per 100 inhabitants in 2005, and 1.63 Internet users per 100 inhabitants in 2006. The numbers for South Africa, the most developed country in Africa, are 87.08 mobile telephone subscribers per 100 inhabitants in 2007, 8.36 computers per 100 inhabitants in 2005 and 8.16 Internet users per 100 inhabitants in 2007. (para. 27)

On the topic of mobile telephony, a report by Ericsson (2014) shows that "by the end of 2014 it is forecast that there will be over 635 million subscriptions in Sub-Saharan Africa. This is predicted to rise to 930 million by the end of 2019" (p.2). It seems that the absence of ICTs in Africa is the norm rather than the exception. Analysis of the links between social action (politics) and mobile telephony comes from the upper middle-class, specifically political actors, journalists, intellectuals, etc. Given this reality, does communication research on Africa need to break away from its habitual framework, from communication for development? To better respond to this question, the next section presents our epistemological perspective as well as theoretical approaches for thinking about mobile telephony in Africa.

Epistemological perspective

The theoretical issues of mobile telephone use in Africa demand that we consider the inherent contradictions of the theoretical object and its translation into everyday life. At the same time, it is crucial that we distance ourselves from the simple response of technological determinism.

Theory-based thought has a fundamental reflexive requirement. Morin (1978), for one, advocates for complexity and notes the uncertain game of complexity: "This is that very game of order and disorder, of permanent disorganization and permanent reorganization, of information and 'noise', of entropy and growth, but pushed to the higher degree of complication, opening, and incertitude than we currently know" (p. 216). For him, one must avoid reductionist / one-dimensional / techno-economic thought. In a certain way, Morin's posture reflects the approach adopted when faced with the complexity of mobile telephony in Africa. He thus demands that we

accept that a situation is not easy to understand, that different tensions affect a given situation, and that issues of power are clearly at work.

Working from this theoretical base, we look to Foucault's analyses of the relationships between knowledge "according to which rules a discursive practice may form groups of objects, sets of expressions, conceptual games series of theoretical choices" (Foucault, 1969, p. 237) and power as there is no "power relation without resistance, no escape without flight, without eventual return" (Foucault, 1982, p. 1061). The required symbiosis of knowledge and power creates what Foucault termed a "regime of truth". "Truth is circularly linked to systems of power that produce and support it, and to the effects of power that it infers and redirects" (Foucault, 1977, p. 160) and it is very difficult to think about mobile telephony in Africa without addressing the complexity of its context and issues of power. The new social and economic systems appear to favour the emergence of a new form of power called "informational power". "Without a doubt, information has always had something fundamental to do with power. But the new technological conditions that have recently arisen represent elements favouring the mastering and expression of this kind of power" (Thépaut, 2002, p.1).

This complexity of power and its relationships are present in the work of a number of other authors. Alzouma (2008) notes the proliferation of mobile telephony in Africa and analyses its effects according to techno-utopist and techno-pessimistic positions. Contesting the numerous analyses (Norbrook, 2008; Donner, 2006; Acker, 2008; Kelly, 2004) that have emphasized the revolution made possible by ICTs that "themselves are capable of solving all the problems that the African people have been confronted by" (Alzouma, 2008, p. 10). Alzouma also states that the digital divide is still present and that "the highly praised entry of Africa into the information society does not rely on mobile telephony penetration statistics that themselves are marked by a great disparity between countries" (p. 28). He poses two questions relevant to our discussion: "Is the mobile phone alone enough to develop this continent? And, more importantly, how might the

penetration rates of this technical object, isolated from all the other factors which remain quite low, accomplish this miracle?" (p. 31).

For Kamga and Cishahayo (2010), the debate over ICTs and development should be analyzed according to a different framework, that of proportional technologies, "fitting practices, born within a given context and consistent with other established useful practices of the context" (p. 9) that rely on the presumption that social change comes about through change in practices. For these authors, "the cellular industry developed largely due to the phenomenon of "mobile booths", which, although being marginal to the formal economy, enjoy great vitality" (p. 4). The phenomenon of mobile booths evolved with the ability to transfer money on a mobile phone without having to use financial institutions and the booths were no longer used to make phone calls but to make money transfers by phone. Due to the high level of illiteracy in Africa, the use of technologies has produced a "delegation of use" whereby a third party intervenes in commercial and interpersonal relations. It seems that the perspectives proposed by Kamga and Cishahayo are quite distant from the consideration of mobile telephony, or ICTs in general, as generators of collective action. We find instead the mobile phone as a means of ensuring its own survival.

New theoretical approaches for thinking about mobile telephony in Africa

In this article, we consciously approach mobile telephony in the context of human and social development. As Azoulay (2002) has noted:

human development indicators (HDIs) aim to respond, according to the UNDP, to three essential possibilities that offer each individual the chance to develop his or her capacities and human potentials: long duration of life and good health, acquiring skills and knowledge, having access to resources necessary to live in decent conditions". In other words, "the HDIs measure the level to which a country finds itself according to three essential human

development criteria: longevity, instruction, living conditions. (p. 63).

Therefore, an accounting for the basic elements of HDIs creates a path towards the growth that Rostow (1963) proposed some time ago while analyzing economic models of societies. "Considering the level of economic development, we can say that all societies are going through one of the following phases: traditional society, the preconditions to development, development, progression towards maturity, mass consumption" (p. 13). That said, one might ask if mobile phone use relates to the three factors put forward as HDIs. For many researchers, the alarming statistics demonstrate the failure of development results in Africa. According to the 1996 UNDP report on human development: "in Sub-Saharan Africa primary enrolment ratios fell off over the 1980s, declining by 37-50% in 17 countries" (pp. 22-23). In addition, life expectancy remained at an average of 51 years in sub-Saharan Africa compared to 70 years in Asia and Latin America and remains far from the HDI goal. That said, results since 1996 have been encouraging:

The world's average HDI increased 18% between 1990-2010 (41 percent since 1970), reflecting large improvements in life expectancy, school enrolment, literacy and income. Almost all countries benefited. Of the 135 countries in our sample for 1970-2010 (with 92% of the world's people), only three had a lower HDI in 2010 than in 1970. (UNDP, 2011, p. 23).

Development mega-projects will reinforce development in African countries: a future bridge between Kinshasa and Brazzaville to improve the circulation of people and goods; a hydroelectric dam on the Congo River that should provide all of central Africa with electricity; the construction of a gas pipeline between Algeria and Nigeria; the construction of the Lamu bridge in Kenya. We can thus generally claim, like the UNDP, that life is better in Africa and that consequently development is spreading. However, is mobile telephony responsible for these positive changes? Beyond the view of numbers and projects, the situation is more complex.

For Aker and Mbiti (2010, p. 9), mobile telephony has contributed to new possibilities on the

continent. They point out five potential mechanisms by which mobile telephones may provide economic benefit to consumers and producers in sub-Saharan Africa: 1) Mobile phones can improve access to and the use of information; 2) This increase in communication should improve the productive efficiency of businesses; 3) Mobile telephones create new jobs to respond to the demand of services that reply on them; 4) Mobile phones can facilitate communication between social networks; 5) The basic applications on mobile telephones and the development projects in development such as M-development, have the potential to facilitate the distribution of financial, agricultural, sanitary and educational services.

Levels of analysis required to think about mobile telephony in Africa

The suggested lines of analysis touch necessarily on the analysis of the different analytical levels that mobile telephony aims to address in Africa.

First, the micro level suggests an individual usage of the mobile phone according to the needs of users, recalling the mobile phone as a form of functionalism. In this way, the mobile phone permits individuals to escape from their conditions of poverty and facilitates the maintenance of communication between the individual and her environment. Here we turn away from individual Internet access to consider group interest: family, friends, close ones.

The second level of analysis required for thinking about mobile telephony in Africa is the meso level which includes informal and improvised areas. These non-institutional areas influence the institution (the State) that attempts, through the imposition of taxes, to regulate individual practices. In this sense, businesses like MTN (Ivory Coast) and M-Peza (in Kenya) have reduced fees considerably, leading to a subsequent decrease in revenue for the individuals who were operating mobile telephone booths. Chéneau-Loquay (2008) proposes that the question of ICTs in Africa is the result of a "paradoxical modernization" connected to the importance of the informal economy. The usage of ICTs in Africa is an urban phenomenon and the socioeconomic level

should be taken into account. Chéneau-Loquay further states "the informal" constitutes a dominant mode of socioeconomic functioning in sub-Saharan African countries. It ensures essential functions in employment, production, revenue distribution, satisfaction of needs, youth education, cultural exchanges and more (p. 110). From the importation of products to itinerant trade, a wide series of cultural activities is created around the mobile phone and allows young Africans to fight against poverty: mobile telephone sales and repairs, pre-paid card sales, electrical recharging services.

Finally, at the macro level, Africa remains an underdeveloped continent where development remains an objective to be attained. In such a context, there is room to ask the question: How did the mobile phone become a development tool? One hypothesis relies on the fact that the lucrative micro or meso activities do not change the lives of mobile phone users. Why, on a continent with a billion people, will the mobile phone solve what communication for development has been unable to do in 50 years? Alzouma (2008) notes that the "oft-noted changes have not affected the place of Africa in international economic relations, it is still seen as a 'production' market for developed countries" (para. 38). Kiyindou (2012) shares this position: "The experience of countries in the South shows, unfortunately, that the investments in high-technology industries have more often brought about by a technical and financial dependence on the West" (p. 31). This dependence of Africa in terms of hardware and software was earlier revealed by Boafo (1987) who denounced the systematic importation of technological products. In effect, the inventiveness of Africans was recuperated in mobile banking and mobile transfer businesses. Even if human capital is the primary source of a country's wealth, Reich (1993) has shown that "money, technology, information, and products break down borders with a rapidness and ease that is without precedent" (p. 17). He believes in a new business/network that spreads across the globe and is without nationality. The main problem has to do with the location of profits and Reich is of the mind that businesses take care of, above all, the interests of shareholders rather

than citizens of the country where they operate. In this sense, we can deduce that if the micro, and possibly macro, levels help Africans to fight poverty, it is not certain that the macro level responds to the interests of African users in their fight against poverty. To the contrary, the macro level suggests that mobile telephony responds primarily to the interests of mobile network operators whose headquarters are in France, South Africa and elsewhere.

Conclusion

The relation between mobile telephony and politics in Africa originates in a triple logic: the ideology of the technical, the dimension of power, as well as an insertion into the international system. This triple logic seems to divest itself of an excessive simplification based on a binary analysis: the mobile phone reflects the inventiveness of Africans (for those most optimistic) vs. the mobile phone reflects manipulation of which Africans are victim. This triple logic also demands that we step away from the classic vision of domination: yes, Africans are dominated through mobile telephony but no, this domination does not impede their innovation and their ability to propose transactional models in formal or informal contexts. The relation between technology and politics demands that we rethink communication theory in Africa by refusing to neglect the development issues that merit a more in-depth analysis than they are usually given.

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