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NEW AFRICAN COMMUNICATION ENVIRONMENT

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NEW (?) AFRICAN COMMUNICATION ENVIRONMENT. A CONTRIBUTION TO THE STUDY OF COMMUNICATION AND AFRICA

CARMEN CAFFAREL SERRA | JOSÉ CARLOS SENDÍN GUTIÉRREZ
carmen.caffarel@urjc.es | josecarlos.sendin@urjc.es

School of Communication
Rey Juan Carlos University

For the editors of this special issue is a particular cause for hope and joy to present the set of selected papers now published in the journal **index.Comunicación**, among those authors who responded to the call for papers launched in February 2013, under the title *New (?) African communication environment*.

As indicated in the notice, the idea of the publication was to provide a platform to exchange ideas and to discuss the role the media could play in the process of building democratic societies in Africa; as well as to provide a space for critical media studies, emphasizing the concept of popular culture for a broader and richer understanding of African public spheres. The set of articles published now are intended to contribute significantly to shed some light on how traditional and new media, along with alternative forms of media can play a key role on the continent.

This is a project born at the heart of the UNESCO Chair in Communication Research and Africa, <http://www.unescoafricom.es/>, promoted at the Rey Juan Carlos University. The Chair focuses on advanced research on communication processes and social change, with a special interest in African societies. To do this, the Chair tries to foster high-level research and scholarship in communication and development communication, with the specific look on Africa. This is a strategic move that aims to stimulate research in the field of communication as well as the improvement in African indigenous development processes, through the promotion of freedom of expression and, ultimately, building inclusive and responsible societies.

The Chair is a very young project, started mid 2012. But in this short period of existence and despite working in a very restrictive (economically) environment, resulting in cuts to research budgets, is weaving national and international partnerships and implementing several projects, that sooner or later, will begin to translate and realize the ambitious goals it faces.

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We recognize that many of the questions that we raised then as themes to include in the monograph remain unanswered. This is not strange since it was not the intention of the editors to find out all the answers to such a complex issue, while multifaceted, as it is the role of communication environment, especially the media, on the African continent. However, the articles included, as will be related below, contribute to the reflection on both the role of traditional media and the new digital media and social networks in some countries on the continent. In addition, some contributions exceed previous expectations of the editors as they focus on the most prevailing and thorny issues, such as the role of China through the media on the continent, the role of social networks in the presidential elections in Kenya, or the representation and projection of the African diaspora through the media.

On the other hand, the objectives of the call silvered a major challenge, as it is to diagnose and expose the vast and complex communication landscape throughout a continent. Perhaps the emphasis on the analysis of new media turned out on hiding the significance of traditional forms of communication that pioneering authors as Frank Uboajah, Afred Opubor, Joseph Ascroft, had the insight to focus on and to value the multiple ways of understanding and practicing communication South of the Sahara. Even though the new media may have a key role in social transformation in many societies South of the Sahara, probably they resume, through new devices, already known practices, such as the discussion groups on the streets, evangelical and prophetic club churches and even less recognizable forms of information distribution such as DVDs and audio tapes. All these formats remain valuable instruments through which normal people get information they want and set their opinions.

The articles included in this special issue are the result of the research and personal views of the authors and, as it is reasonable, do not necessarily reflect the opinions or views of the editors, nor the journal **index.Comunicación**. Editors paid particular attention to the language of the original presentation, in order to allow greater access to and dissemination of the ideas raised here. Therefore all contributions appear in English and also, depending on author's nationalities and desire, also in Spanish and Portuguese.

Then we tried to order the different items thematically. First, those that deals with some dimension of Africa and communication. These are items that claim to show an overview of a particular aspect of the African communication environment, be it the role and penetration of China in Africa; the implementation and the challenges presented by new information technologies and their use; or the centrality role of media literacy.

In the article *China and African Internet: Perspectives from Kenya and Ethiopia*, Iginio Gagliardone discusses and addresses the current role of China in Africa. First, he contextualizes the presence of China in Africa since 1950. First Sino-African contacts resulted in aid provision and attempts to reach not only the elite, but the general public as well. The author sets out the concerns that have been expressed by the negative role that China could have in the media sector in Africa, resulted in the rise of authoritarianism and to the detriment of the West's efforts to promote openness and freedom of expression. However, the author warns us that no study has demonstrated the above thesis to date and, therefore, more empirical evidence is needed to fully understand the nature, scope and implications of China's new role in African media.

The cases of Kenya and Ethiopia, in which the author developed his field work, helps to exemplify different models for the development and use of the Internet, as well as the role that China is playing, that the author identified under different names: the partner role, the paradigm role or the persuasive role, in both countries. These countries represent opposing models of Internet access management. As such, Kenya represents openness and competitiveness; while Ethiopia, a centralized control from the government. Finally, the author compares the general elections results in both countries and how the post-election violence was used as argument for opposing models of Internet promotion. Thus, they are scenarios in which China continues to play a key role to be followed and carefully studied in the future.

In An approach to media education in Africa, Juan Francisco Torregrosa presents an overview of the situation of media education in the international context with a special look to Africa. The article connects with the concept of media education proposed by UNESCO in 1979 and, on the basis of the undisputed power that media have on society, he suggests the importance of incorporating media education on the official programs of education: media History, how media should be used, how media should be evaluated from the point of view of creativity, as well as studying the social consequences of media, modes of perception, and how media may encourage the active participation of citizens.

Media education is more complex in so far as media become more complex, and the emergence of the Internet, together with the new horizontal ways of communicating. The author makes a brief review of different education experiences around the world, calling attention to Latin America where these initiatives have been developed intensely and have achieved great popular acceptance. In the case of Africa, the author is aware of the dramatic differences for media education, and also among African countries. Notwithstanding these differences, Internet penetration and therefore the emergence of

social networks and the expansion of Web 2.0 have been a major change both on citizen's participation and the comprehensive use of the media. But the author warns us not to magnify this development, because Internet penetration is still very low.

Also this low Internet penetration trend is looked at in the article by Antonio García Jiménez and Alberto González Pascual, titled *Internet and Africa: From digital divide to digital hope. Networks, freedom and communication*. This is a mainly descriptive overview approach to African digital context from the current data in different regions of the continent.

Despite very low in numbers access to the Internet, comparatively, has increased significantly since 2006, when the Internet penetration rate was 2.6%, and in 2010 it had reached 10.9% of the population. These figures become more significant if possible, to explain the great digital divide that exists between one country and another, if we consider the data for Burundi, Central African Republic, Ethiopia and Liberia among others, where the penetration of Internet is below 1%.

The authors then describe the policies that are being implemented to enhance the technological infrastructure from two different and complementary aspects: improvements in infrastructure, and industry regulation. They do so by reviewing several specific experiences, such as the EASSy case or the incipient penetration by the private sector into the infrastructure technology information networks in those countries which changed from the monopoly on the telecoms, characterized by a great cost of broadband, to the liberalization of the sector. The authors focus on the analysis of specific countries such as Uganda and Zambia.

In a second section we have placed those contributions more specific or thematic, addressing original research, such as the role of social networks in channeling political violence in Kenya, the media representation of electoral candidates in Tanzania, or the contribution which closes this block which focuses, also from the media perspective, in the work of foreign correspondents in Africa.

In *The ethnic hate speech was networked: What political discussions on social media reveal about the 2013 general elections in Kenya*, Jacinta Mwendu Maweu presents an analysis of the social networks Twitter and Facebook as channels of political turmoil and racial hatred during the last elections in Kenya, in March 2013. The author questions the fact that social networks may become tools for the generation of alternative public spheres in contrast to those produced by traditional media. At the same time, she challenges social networks as spaces free from ethnic based attacks, such as the outbreak of ethnic violence in the last elections in 2007, which left more than 1,500 dead. Thus, she advances the idea that social networks played a more negative role in the transmission of ethnic hatred during

the last elections in 2013 than traditional media, for which there is greater control and quality standards enforcement.

The author draws attention to the fact that, although social networks are effective in representing increasing political participation, this participation does not necessarily translate into political empowerment, which is considered key to the success of any democratic system. Having analyzed the content of tweets and political post before and after March, 2013 general elections, she concludes that this social network sites served more to shake and burn the souls of the contenders, always following ethnic patterns, than becoming an effective tool to build alternative public spheres of deliberation.

Article *Candidate representation and media biases in Tanzania*, by Kaanaeli Bariki Kaale, presents the context of the political economy of the media in Tanzania, where the privatization process has marked the last two decades of democracy in the country. The main effects of this trend are noted in the change of focus applied by journalists' coverage over well known members of the government, together with the reduction in the diversity of news and political coverage. The author notes that these trends reflect mainly the interests of media shareholders, and also affects the visibility of political candidates, which is detrimental to a fair and equitable representation in the electoral process.

After conducting a quantitative and qualitative analysis on news from six major newspapers written in Swahili, during the presidential elections in Tanzania in 2010, results highlights important shortcomings in the election coverage by the media analyzed, and the appearance of bias and unequal representation of candidates. Finally, the most important finding lies in the convergence found between the type of election coverage by newspapers and voting results.

Paulo Nuno Vicente in *Foreign correspondence from Sub-Saharan Africa: An evolving communicational paradigm shift*, first noted that an important part of our everyday knowledge about Sub-Saharan Africa comes from the work of international journalists. However, he highlights the lack of academic research on the work of these professionals, who have a huge responsibility as imaginary setters of the distant "Other". This research aims, in part, at overcoming this gap through conducting interviews with international journalists in 41 African countries, combined with semi-structured interviews with professionals in three African countries.

The author concludes from the results of his work that, despite the negative predictions about the future of international correspondents, the situation is not that bad. He also noticed significant changes resulting from the new nature of digital communications, as well as new working routines allowed by online media. However, job insecurity, he admits, remains on freelance professionals.

In the third section it is addressed a topic of concern to our researchers: the opposite side, the experiences and insights from the African diaspora in Europe. Thus, authors introduce us how afrodescents are represented by the media; how African northerners migration projects are build up through the images of Western television; the collective work of African diasporic citizens projected through photography; the representation of the African diaspora in Portugal; and, finally, a learning platform for media literacy addressed to the Senegalese community living in Madrid.

In *Encountering otherness. Depth of Field: A collective approach to Africa*, Rosario Jiménez makes an approach to African postcolonial photography, through the work of the Nigerian group DOF (Depth of Field). She shows how photography can break the edges of the continent while at the same time, challenging the identity that the West has used to build "the African" from a colonial perspective.

The photos of this new generation of photographers working in the diaspora are inserted into the global postmodern art dialogue break with the prevailing ethnocentrism in the arts. The author claims the importance of this perspective, as it serves to legitimize practices that challenge not only the circle of the art system, but also the social construction of an imaginary that still prevails in the Western world. In addition, a significant part of these photographers' training was undertaken in the West, so this case may also help explain art migratory flows and their meanings.

Analysis of DOF 's photographs together with addressing the issue of the "Other", allows the debate on the relevance of the entry of Africa in a globalized world, which help distribute their art works, while offshoring of its territory. The author concludes that the images of this group, its aesthetics and style, show that African photography is entering the global art system. Although it could be argued that instead of creating their own identity traits, they lose their identity in the process, the fact is that no culture has developed in isolation. Only through mixing with other cultures and through hybridization, author points out, cultures may survive for centuries.

Also interesting is the article by Lucía Benítez, *Migration myths and imaginaries in the reception of television in Morocco* in which she addresses an issue as relevant as the symbolic representation of the first world by the Moroccan media, especially television, and how they construct the symbolic imagery call for migration towards Europe.

Benítez departs from the term "media landscapes" (Appadurai 2001), defined as the production and dissemination of imaginary worlds that increase the differences between the center and the periphery. Based on the combination of

information and imaginary it is recreated the specific subjectivity that drives migration projects. The author highlights the contradiction between the control exercised by the state against migrations flows, while at the same time, especially in television, it is offered an appealing symbolic imagery that persists beyond borders. This imaginary is reinforced in face-to-face interactions. So "the South sees himself in the eyes of the North" (Gubern 2000).

Audiovisual culture provides images and appealing proposals which turned into mythical and therefore makes more bearable, more livable the everyday. Migration myths generate symbolic domain that favor a vision of other possible worlds, which results reinforced, especially by the fact of the prestige accorded to migrants and their families for the sake of being in Europe, because they have traveled.

Benítez looks at the various authors who analyze the audiovisual media discourse in the context of globalization, as a source of myth creation, but also subject to the "power" of business groups, understanding power, as Castells points out, as the ability to influence others through asymmetrical relations to further their own interests or values. It is this power, this ability to influence, which promotes the mainstream (Chomsky, Ramonet).

The author introduces a case study: TV reception in Morocco through the social and personal discourse of migration protagonists. Therefore, the image of a rich north, of characters who live the prestige of having been there, and returning on vacation narrating the dream fulfilled, all contributes to forging a migrant imaginary reinforced by interacting with real subjects returning.

Lucía Benítez highlights the transition from imaginary Spain, conceived firstly as a transit place to other European countries, but then as a place of destination, due to the exemplary democratic transition (a reference Moroccan population intends to imitate), and to the achievement of a society based on economic welfare and consumption.

For the analysis of the reception of television in Morocco the author has developed field work during two years in the major cities of Morocco and also in rural areas. Therefore, the quality of life of the dominant is associated with the West, an association reinforced by social interactions in a desire to "confirmation", and in the case of returning migrants a "demonstration" effect through the car (which becomes the symbolic item of personal success), or the gifts they bring back, or the clothing they wear. The image of democracy and modernity in Spain started to be confronted in recent years by preventive messages on irregular migration flows, which reflects the hardening of immigration policies, especially in the European Union, together with the economic crisis and lack of jobs.

The article *Racial equality activism in Brazil, communication via networks and Internet: Afropress news agency*, by Leslie Sedrez and Denise Cogo have two different parts. In the first one, the authors provide an interesting historical account of the emergence of black social movements in Brazil claiming the struggle to obtain "citizenship" of African descents. Starting from the context of Africans in Brazil in the time of slavery to the present, where social movements are invigorated with the use of information technologies that gives visibility to this struggle, the authors offers us an overview culminating with the recent approval by the Brazilian government of the Statute of Racial Equality and the adoption of public policies which allow the black population to access higher education. It is more relevant since this population group, according to the last census in 2010, surpasses for the first time the white population.

Also in the article is performed a historical review of the media, from the emergence of a black press that starts with newspapers-murals of the early leaders of the resistance, going after in the early decades of the last century with the newspapers, then radio and later with black television. Up to date with the Internet space appropriation. Today we face, authors point out, a new scenario of communicative practices that are explained by the convergence and complementarity in the use of information technology and communications: websites, blogs, newspapers and online newsletters, digital radios, social networks like Twitter or Facebook which combine to construct discourses about Brazilian black movement.

In the second part of their work, the authors introduce a case study: the experience of Afropress, a news agency created in 2004 whose main objective was to promote ethnic diversity and the fight against racism. They describe its creation, professional routines, and its monitor and denounce role, through the case of Januarius Alves de Santana, a worker at Sao Paulo University who was brutally attacked in the parking of a mall for being a black. They show how the complaint through Afropress agency resulted in large media coverage by traditional media, and subsequent conviction of the attackers in a judgment.

Bruno Carriço and Lydia Marôpo's article *Media and identity: Africanness in Portugal*, deals with the construction of African identity, especially in Luso-African youth and their relationship with the media.

The work is structured in three parts. The first one points to the recognition of African identity in the Portuguese media space, a very late phenomenon because we have to wait until the 90's to perceive a certain visibility of Africans in the media. The lateness of this phenomenon is explained as a result of Portuguese society isolation throughout the great period of dictatorship, even though the first Cape Verdeans arrived in the second half of the sixties, reinforced with other immigrants from African Lusophone countries. Africans represent nearly

one hundred thousand living in Portugal in 2012, which makes them a community worth to be analyzed from the communication studies perspective.

Departing from the "Africanness represented" perspective, the authors explore in the second part of their work the construction of identities by media discourse, and depend mainly on the relationship of the media with the markets, the internal organization of media institutions and the role assumed by the media in the representation of identities, as pointed out elsewhere by Cariço and Sampedro.

The author's research review has focused mainly on the analysis of media content; analysis that suggest a strong connotation between African migration, marginality and crime, especially in the analysis of press and television. When Portugal became part of the European Union an immigration flow from Eastern Europe started which resulted in an unifying media discourse of "immigrant", without further clarification on nationalities. Therefore, immigrants had no longer a nationality in the media discourse. Nevertheless, the newly created Communications Regulatory Authority in 2006 establishes stricter criteria in media coverage of minorities and, slight changes appeared in the news treatment of immigrants and minorities, although with significant differences among different Portuguese media.

In the third part of the article and from the perspective of media consumption the authors look at what they call the media re-Africanization, through the study of the second generations: young Africans living in Portugal and Portuguese by birth. While at the beginning integration problems became diluted (Machado 2008), later on high rates of unemployment and the economic crisis added to the young Afro inherent challenges, such as recurring aspects of identity, ethnic dimension and class. In this study authors followed Padhilla work of 2011, in which he concludes that young people do not intend to take the African culture of their ancestors, but to create a new culture of being African, a culture full of miscegenation, hybridity and youth consciousness.

The article ends with an interesting overview of the main research works addressing the issue of identity building and reconstruction by the media, together with its reception by young Africans living in Portugal (Carvalho 2006, Coelho 2009, Marôpo 2013, Rosa 2011, among others).

Finally, *E-learning platform for Senegalese immigrant community focused on media literacy*, by David García Martul and Guillermina Álvarez Franco closes this presentation. The authors introduce research results from a project funded by the Spanish Agency for International Cooperation and Development in collaboration with the University Cheikh Anta Diop in Senegal, whose aim was to design a learning platform for media literacy addressed to the Senegalese community

living in Madrid. The first part of the paper describes the characteristics of Senegalese immigration in Spain, identifying sociocultural traits that define this group, which helped implement a media literacy program through a virtual platform. Field work was carried out in Madrid, particularly in the multicultural district of Lavapiés, in cooperation with the House of Senegal which allowed conducting subsequent surveys and interviews among its members.

In the results section, authors highlight the importance of iconography in the interpretation of reality, acquiring knowledge and the ideological representation of the status of Senegalese immigrants in an environment that alienates them. They designed an educational platform where, instead of using written text, recognizable icons were introduced following particular semantics of Senegalese people, which also enables to generate a feedback in the communication process between members of Senegalese community, regardless of where they are. Authors point to the value-added services offered by the platform, that encourage interaction among Senegalese, and therefore becomes an usable and friendly tool to project and build their cultural identity.

All contributions presented here represent different voices, from a broad point of view, being at the same time informed views of the various ways in which communication processes are understood, both on the African continent, and outside it.