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# Deconstructing and reconfiguring ICTs and Social Change in the Third Millennium. A state of the African Contribution

*On line:*

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Plan

A new configuration of social actors

Toward the refinement of concepts and theories

Conclusion

Bibliography

## *Abstract*

### **Deconstructing and reconfiguring ICTs and Social Change in the 3rd Millennium? the African Contribution**

Africa could appear as a continent left behind in the emergence and development of information and communication technologies. However, research about Africa, from Africa, and for Africa, is increasingly becoming established, through monographic and other contributions, even if they are still too rare, embryonic and not insufficiently cited. This production of knowledge must strive to further assert its visibility. Especially given that, beyond the academic circles, the analyses proposed in the dominant media are characterized by a technological determinism. This horizon is systematically challenged by Information and Communication Sciences, since it dramatically inhibits the understanding of the role played by ICT and social media in social change.

**KEYWORDS:** social media - activist expressivism - Digital Divide - self culture - manipulation - public sphere - agenda setting

## *Résumé*

### **Technologies de l'Information et de la Communication et changement social au troisième millénaire : le temps de la déconstruction et de la reconfiguration scientifiques à partir de l'Afrique ?**

Le continent a pu apparaître laissé pour compte dans le mouvement d'émergence et de développement des techniques d'information et de communication. Cependant, la recherche en Afrique, par l'Afrique, sur l'Afrique, se révèle de plus en plus structurante, au-delà des premières approches monographiques que dépassent déjà certaines contributions, même si ces dernières se présentent encore trop rares, embryonnaires et encore insuffisamment référencées.

Cette production de connaissance doit donc travailler à affirmer davantage sa visibilité. D'autant plus qu'au-delà des cercles académiques, les analyses proposées dans le feu de l'action par les producteurs d'informations médiatiques révèlent un déterminisme technologique largement pourfendu en SIC, qui contrarie dramatiquement la compréhension du rôle joué par les TIC et les médias sociaux dans le changement social.

**MOTS-CLÉS :** médias sociaux – expressivisme militant – fracture numérique – self culture – manipulation – espace public – agenda setting

### *Resumen*

## **Tecnologías de la información y de la comunicación y cambio social en el tercer milenio: ¿La hora de la deconstrucción y de la reconfiguración a partir del ejemplo de la investigación científica africana?**

El continente africano pudo dar la impresión de haber quedado al margen del surgimiento y desarrollo de las tecnologías de la información y de la comunicación. Sin embargo, la investigación en África, para África, por África, está resultando ser cada vez más estructuradora, más allá de las primeras monografías, que ya algunas contribuciones mejoran, a pesar de que estas últimas son todavía demasiado escasas, embrionarias y poco referenciadas. Esta forma de producción del conocimiento debe trabajar para afirmar aún más su visibilidad. Sobre todo, si tenemos en cuenta que, más allá de los círculos académicos, los análisis que proponen los medios de comunicación revelan un determinismo tecnológico, ampliamente rechazado por el campo de las SIC, que trastorna, de forma dramática, la comprensión del papel que desempeñan las TIC y los medios sociales en el cambio social.

**PALABRAS CLAVE:** medios sociales - expresivismo activista - fractura digital - autodidactismo - manipulación - espacio público – agenda setting

*"Focusing on the long term, the historical approach makes it possible to move beyond economic opportunism", Roger Bautier (our translation)*

Until recently, even for certain African researchers (Makosso Kibaya, 2007), the African continent seems to be left behind in the emergence and development of information and communication technologies, wrongly, as we (Cabedoche, 2015) and savvy authors underscore (Benchenna, 2011, Missè, 2014). Because in the process of determining the relationship between Information and Communication technologies (ICTs) and social change, research about Africa, from Africa and for Africa, is increasingly becoming established, and valuable contributions beyond the occasional monograph are growing, now (Alleman, D'Almeida, Miège, Wallon, 2004; Mattelart T. 2009; Benchenna, 2011; de la Brosse, 2013...). Working over a long period of time, with a macro perspective and a claim to the epistemological dimension that was lacking until then (Mattelart T., 2005), all these syntheses are however still too rare, embryonic, insufficiently cited despite their quality and needing now to update. At the same time, high Phd theses and relevant high MA theses in the field of information and communication sciences are indicative of this intellectual effervescence, by their number and by their quality. To complete the perspective, the reference is also essential to many other books and authors, including our many partnerships between Gresec and the african research teams have already enjoyed, as we did to build our own problematization (Cabedoche, 1990 , 2009, 2016 ...). Today, this stimulating production of knowledge is thus able to contribute very largely to the discussion of theories and concepts, which were first introduced or even imposed on African studies.

However, efforts must continue to strengthen the visibility of this stimulating production of knowledge. The need is true between laboratories and research teams within the African continent where knowledge capitalization approaches are still marginal (Miège, 2012, p.10). But this is especially true, since, beyond the academic circles, for example, on the northern Mediterranean shore, contributions are often reduced by actors to reporting the profitability calculations set out in the mainstream media. With the benefit of hindsight, we can see that the analyses generally proposed in the heat of debate by media producers have often embodied versions of technological determinist thinking. This horizon has been strongly criticized by ICS, since it dramatically misunderstands the role played by ICTs and social media for the social change. The journalistic commentaries about the imagined *Facebook revolution*, *Twitter revolution*, *Al Jazeera revolution*, and similar pseudo-phenomena predicted at the beginning of this decade with the impending collapse of several authoritarian regimes in the Arab world, are only the most blatant of such analytic failures and increasing interpretive confusions in public spheres (Touati, 2012; Cabedoche, 2013a).

So, it seems highly appropriate to critically rethink ICTs, for, as Bernard Miège and other authors suggest (Balima S., 2004 ; Béru, Bényélé, 2007:19), they now have a presence in African countries, intertwined with the daily lives of ordinary people. Moreover, the innovative uses to which they are put often far surpass their engineers originally conceived (Balima D, 2004; Barbey, Corroy-Labardens, Kiyindou, 2015; Anaté, Capo-Chichi, Kiyindou, 2015), as it has already been observed for Senegalese fishermen, for example, at the beginning of the millennium (Chéneau-Loquay, 2001; Do Nascimento, 2005:158-161) or later, for Togolese fishermen (Amah, 2015) and south-african farmers too (Dahmani, Ledjou (2012).

As a state of science from Africa, this presentation is first of all the result of a synthesis based on the scientific work presented at the international conference *Communication & Social Change in Africa* (3rd edition), organized in April 2014 in Douala (Cameroon) by the

LACREM (University of Douala) and the GRESEC (University of Grenoble-Alpes). First listed in the international digital scientific journal *Les Enjeux de l'Information et de la Communication* (2014), the main works have subsequently been integrated with our current state of research, first built for a workshop in October 2016, with the *Communication University of China* in Beijing. To further validate the long-standing view of social movements and the role played by social media, references have been added from the extensive related works that we have contributed at various scientific events. These authors, and particularly African authors, will be systematically quoted to add to their visibility. The succession is notable, that we have found stimulating to quote, as well as high Phd theses we have assessed (Zouari, 2005; Ziani, 2007; Fitouri, 2008; Balima D., 2009; Sidiki, 2010; Ntasmé-Mba, 2010; Mbouzako, 2010; Momo, 2011; Dakouré, 2011; Bamba, 2011; Minkala-Ntadi, 2012; Diouf, 2013, Kaboré, 2014; Saïki, 2014; Baddou, 2014; Togo, 2015; Tiao, 2015; Amri, 2015; Ben Jeddou, 2015; Seck Sarr, 2015; Bitond, 2016; Mankandjou, 2016; Heuchou, 2017; Zida, 2018...). We will add the discussions of relevant high MA theses, from African grounds (Missè, 2003; Hizaoui, 2009; de La Brosse, 2009; Blé, 2010; Miéré, 2015...) and already promising themselves.

Most of these events reinforced established issues, such as the social autonomy that irrigates the early work of Sociology and uses (Charon, 1987, Jouët, 2000). They welcomed too proposals to challenge prevailing ideas and theoretical tools used to analyze, for example, the problems of the *information industries* of Africa, and also to better understand social appropriation of information and communication technologies from the point of view of *cultural diversity* in Africa, including social media. In this text, *Social media* usually refers to everything that interacts, gives a *social presence* (Heaton, Millette, Proulx, 2011, p. 4 ; Proulx, 2011); *social networks* only refers to a social link between people (Dupin, 2010: 91).

The first observation emerging from these syntheses already reveals new configurations between social actors. We turn to these now, as Simon Ngono has noted in parallel for mainstream media: for example, with the irruption in the radio debates - as a "crossroads medium" rather than televised (Capitant, 2008) of the "non expert expression" or in the Tv debates too (Ngono, 2017b), it becomes necessary with the author to deconstruct and reconsider this category of analysis of the public expression, for Africa too (Ngono, 2017a), as it is ever done for Europe (Fromentin, Wojcik, 2008).

## A NEW CONFIGURATION OF SOCIAL ACTORS

### Web 2.0 as a sphere for unprecedented interaction

The Douala symposium of 2014 was in fact not the first one to pursue this route. In early at the start of the new millennium, Dominique Cardon described an expansion in the participation in public discussion in Europe by the Internet. The author reminds us that, even if this move should not be overestimated, a new openness to public expression seems to be emerging for the benefit of non-professional actors. This happens thanks to self-publication sites, to so-called alternative media, and to the development of what is, by comment and consent, generally - and somewhat lazily - called: the journalistic and political "blogosphere" (Cardon, 2008 and 2009). What we are seeing is the "virtual space constituting this new social network of exchanges" (Mathien, 2007, pp. 161-162)..

The symposium in Douala thus confirmed what other authors had already experienced in Africa (Zouari, 2011; Kra, 2013a; Toa, 2013 ; Ghosn, Lahouij, 2013: 346) and elsewhere as had already been pointed out (Rieffel, 2005): the affordances of information and communication technologies, and not least their use by citizens themselves, open up an

additional sphere for interactions between heterogeneous populations, who were usually limited in their public expression. Included in an authoritarian context (Chouikha, 2009; Lecomte, 2013a).

This applies even to citizens (as Senegalese or Togolese fishermen already mentioned) who are illiterate or experiencing downward mobility, many of whom who are becoming innovative in their use of mobile phones, demonstrating "*l'art de la ruse*" i.e. trickery skills, as Michel Foucault would have called it, (Do Nascimento, 2005; Kanga, 2006; Compaore, 2014): they are able to develop new relationships to space and time (Ramos Pasquati, 2011) and even to contribute to the transparency of elections as it has already been observed in Mali (Coulibaly, 2000), Senegal (Chéneau-Loquay, 2011), Togo, Burkina Faso and DRC (Sonhaye, 2017). Significantly, this development also includes women, whose new blog practices (Ben Salem, 2013 ; Najar, 2013 et 2014) or as filmmakers (Cabedoche, 2012; Ellerson, 2015; Jedlowski, 2015) socially embody both short-term political protest and long-term patterns of culture and communication mediations, as it was observed for RSA, Rwanda, Zimbabwe, Tanzania, Kenya, Senegal, Burkina Faso, Ghana, Nigeria, Cameroon, Liberia, Sierra Leone, Ethiopia... (Noble-Bart, 2003; Kerrou, Najar, 2009; Ben Salem, 2013; Angé, 2014). Even migrant populations are a part of this societal evolution: thanks to the anonymity of online publications, ICTs now offer them the opportunity to air their migratory difficulties and failures, previously often hidden in their positive reports on paper letters they sent to their families (Goulet, 2014). Much better than the mainstream media had done before, it proves that "digital media reveal the complex articulation between public and private spheres", whose interpenetration had already been conceptualized in the 1980s by Paul Beaud (Beaud, 1986: 115).

This applies in particular to young people, for whom Internet quickly emerged as a tool of social belonging, or even of social learning, in terms of uses and practices (Amri, Vacaflor, 2010; Ghosn, Lahouij, 2016: 343; Akregbou Boua, 2014). The Internet has also become a powerful lever for collective protests (Cahen, Pommerolle, Tall, 2015), which could now be freed from the fears of heavy-handed regimes running on empty, and further multiplied via networking connections to other groups and sites (Dahmen-Jarrin, 2014). Social networks such as *Facebook*, *Twitter*, *Linkedin* or *Hi5* and open fora in social media that welcome these users today, allow a cumulative transmission of resources. These resources turn into a collective capital between virtual communities, configuring new "grammars of resistance", from Jean-Guy Moreau's term (Moreau, 1967: 65) Achille Mbembe uses for Africa (Mbembe, 2000). In some places in Africa, the expressions of various forms of activism, including what in France is called the "*expressivisme militant*" (Allard and Blondeau, 2007: 19), has quickly generated a level amateur-expertise competent in sharing information *via* social media: MMS, *bluetooth*, profiles under *Twitter*, transfers from *USB* keys and memory cards, and so forth (Dahmen-Jarrin, 2011). This dynamic universe of speech in interpersonal spheres, a priori free from any ideological pressure as blogs are supposed to be, demonstrates that "the construction of one's own identity proceeds from attributed communication action with others" (Amri, Vacaflor, 2010; Angé, 2014).

These multiple uses reinforce the growing collective idea that now, power belongs to everyone. In Africa, finally seduced, institutional actors and stakeholders finally persuaded of its utility, soon found themselves on the net, alongside all the individual voices. These included political stakeholders, who were first frightened to see the "politicization" of the Internet, now promoting their developmental interests and ideals *via* this media (N'tambwe Tshimbulu, 2009) and responding to the challenges of globalization (Lodombé, 2011) or with digital citizen resources fighting terrorism (Toa, 2017), health scourges (Bahi Aghi, 2003; Ntsamé-Mba, 2010, Mbouzako, 2010), mutilating cultural practices (Diouf, 2013); or

promoting themselves in election campaigns (Palé, 2017). They also include responsible administrators for public services, still quietly committed to facilitate the relationship with the citizens, as observed from Morocco to RSA (Benchenna, 2010; Maube, 2012 ; Saïki, 2014), quality of public services (Togo, 2015) and local governance (Kra, 2013b ; Gokra Dja, 2013) as it has already been experienced in Latin America (Carillo, Katz, 2006). There are even other kinds of actors, such as non-profit making organisations, who promote multimedia tools, to get first a visibility, before any acknowledgement, as it is in Republic of Mauritius [Kwok Choon, Proulx, 2011 : 87), to develop the opportunities of fair trade between North and South, for example in Madagascar (Randrianasolo-Rakotobe, 2012) and sometimes just to obtain funds from international development agencies in return as it was observed in Burkina Faso (Dakouré, 2011). They are also managers of profit making organizations, who are looking, *off shore*, for cost-effective promotional media (Do Nacimento, 2005: 158; Mezhouda, 2012; Kemayou, 2014), and *in shore*, for methods for optimizing intercultural resources (Miere Pelage, Zlitni, 2004; Touati, 2012: 17). Since the second half of the twentieth century, *neo-institutionalist* theorists of organizations (Ely, Thomas, 1996; Rosenzweig, 1998) have been promoting this *glocal culture* in the "new spirit of capitalism", an ideological trajectory that has been strongly contested by radical authors of the *French pragmatic sociology* (Boltanski, Chiapello, 1999). And now, in a similar vein, we see the major telecommunication companies in Africa, for example *Orange*, or major digital communication companies, for example Microsoft (Bonjawo, 2002) putting pressure on their collaborators, to increase their own mobility and to enhance their capacities for networks, including on line networks, in order that they become effective community managers (Baddou, 2014), as they have done before in other parts of the world as required to be an actor in the *liquid modernity* (Bauman, 2000). And this ideological management system contaminates other companies, in Africa where foreign network and hardware industries are dominating (Zida, 2018: 228) as well as in Asia after Europe and USA (Cabedoche, 2014). More broadly around the world and in all the sectors of the world of labour, we have witnessed similar processes in regard to mainstream media journalists (Deslandes, 2008), themselves experimenting via the web to establish a new kind of relationship with citizens ("journalisme de relation"), for example in Cameroon, Tunisia, Zimbabwe (Madiba Oloko, 2011; Denieul, 2013 ; Chingwaramusee, Sabao, 2017) and to expand their audience, as it was observed in Mozambique (Mare, 2014). In parallel, major companies are working now against them, to build an internal culture elevating employees as the most trusted source of news to the front line when defending a brand in trouble: when mainstream media become "harder then ever to manage", that supports an internal army of brand-supporting ambassadors ready to be deployed on line in good times and bad, as for example communication consultant Rob Shimmin predicts for next years (Shinning, 2017) and like the directly circumventing developed by US *Tweet-President* Donald J. Trump (Dall'Orso, Lucas, Wicky, 2017).

All of them are working in the same progressive spirit, if we consider the recent enthusiasm over the increasing numbers of actors in Africa, even UN advisors (Ngouem, 2007) to information and communication technologies, which may promote governance, transparency, reliance – i.e. the new "digital citizenship" (Stein, 2007), as *monitoral citizenship*, as *consumer citizenship* and as *liquid citizenship as well* (Wokcik, 2014) – and may also facilitate performance, efficiency, independence – i.e. the "genuine development" (Loukou, 2011). According to this sociotechnical configuration of social change, elected representatives, political institutions, civil organizations, media actors, political activists, citizens, microentrepreneurs for example in Tanzania or in Rwanda (Duncombe, Heeks, 2002; Jaensson, Rutashobya, 2004; Donner, 2006)... are perceived as working together both as producers and subjects of information that is distributed on Internet social networks. All

of them could similarly even reconfigure established norms and boundaries on the basis of the *High Frequency Politics*, i.e. the viral flow of information related to the new attributes and feedback of the media sphere (Dahmen-Jarrin, 2014). Beyond informational functions, social media must be analysed as organizing mechanisms because they may reflect larger organizational schemes. For example, for every user, Twitter streams represent crosscutting networking mechanisms in a protest ecology, they embed and are embedded in various kinds of gatekeeping processes, and they reflect changing dynamics in the ecology over time (Bennet, Segerberg, 2011).

However, could we speak in terms of a reduction of the digital divide in Africa? That step had not been taken in Douala.

### **A new reading of the *digital divide***

Arguably, from now on African virtual communities surfing with digital tools within the public sphere and taking a part in the production and sharing of social media information can attain more precision in their communication about the whole range of lived experiences. Thus, there is now an amassing of social capital that was previously denied to many lowest socio-economic groups. For example, future African migrants on Canada are more effectively enabled by the increased co-construction of their own migratory imagination; the virtual community with its flows of communication makes accessible perceptions that pre-empt and reduce potential misunderstandings (Goulet, 2014).

However, what the scientific debates have mostly confirmed is that socio-economic inequalities always influence the capacities, the initiatives, and even the media representations of individuals, in regard to their use of the ICTs. Some research contributions presented in Douala (Compaoré, 2014; Barber, 2014) or others (Kahi Oulaï, 2017), counter in particular the overly optimistic diffusionist hypothesis often used to frame discussions about the reduction of the *digital divide* and too easily adopted by a majority of African leaders (Loum, 2008: 92), fascinated like international organizations (Benchenna, 2006; Ledjou, 2012) and their experts (Mignot-Lefèbvre, 1994) and advisors (Ngouem, 2007), or even scholars (Loukou, 2011), as well, without taking into account the balance of power and domination. These contributions follow similar paths used by critics such as van Dijk and van Deursen in their analyses about other regions of the world (Van Dijk, Van Deursen, 2010) and adhere to the established scientific standards research we now can observe in research about Africa (Missè, 2014; Alzouma, 2014; Miéré, 2016).

Of course, as Josiane Jouët wrote, the quantitative approach is still relevant for its macrosocial dimension to analyse uses (on condition that it is based on a theoretical construction and integrates the variables of contextualization that allow to re-classify uses in the the plurality of social practices): "*the statistical framework makes it possible to highlight the phenomena of social segmentation, the weight of socio-demographic variables ...*" (Jouët, 2000: 514). It take onto account too non-uses, what ever is the reason (Boutet-Dieyé, Trémembert, 2008, Keline, Massou, Morelli, 2010). This question of non-use is still a major reality in Africa (Dahmani, Ledjou, 2011) especially in rural areas, for example in Benin (Amessinou, 2017) or in enclaved areas (Aubin, Agbobli, 2014) unlike rural areas (Bafao, 1987). The approach remains relevant for more in-deaph analysis, regarding the access of girls to South African rural areas in (Dlodlo, 2009) or secondary school teachers in Ivory Coast (Mankandjou, 2016). Furthermore, costs associated with using the Internet, limited access to computers and smartphones and unreliable electricity hinder online participation, considering the daily power outage in Africa, as it was analysed in Kenya (Forte, Schoenebeck, Wyche, 2013).



But from Europe, for example Dominique Boullier warned research not only to work with static and statistical generalizations to report on processes, as the appropriation of technics (Boullier, 1997). In fact, as many authors have clearly stated from Europe, the understanding of meaning requires a closer dialogue between quantitative approach and qualitative approach (Claisse, Vergnaud, 1985, Licoppe, Smoreda, 1998, 2000, Jouët, 2000 ...). Thus, for the entire African continent, without dismissing the issue of access, the gap would widen, this time among users, in terms of skills. This indicates that we should not too much oppose uses and non-uses, as recommended by authors (Martin, Von Pape, 2010). In fact, even if the question of non-use is momentarily set aside, the gap nonetheless will widen among users when framed by the concept of *structural use*. In not limiting the meaning of the concept of “digital divide” to the certainties of diffusionism (Chéneau-Loquay, 2003; Kiyindou, 2009a: 17), as was the case at the beginning of the twenty-first century, *i.e.* to a bipolar societal split between information haves and have-nots (Warschauer, 2004:10), this notion can today be used to point to the pattern of gaps that appear when specific segments of the population – usually the more privileged ones – utilize the Internet systematically and effectively over longer periods of time for instrumental purposes, while use it more casually and sporadically, such as for entertainment (Benchenna, 2011: 62). Apart from the quantitative data that confirms real consumerist outbreaks over certain media technologies in Africa (Ekine, 2010) but without providing any relevant interpretation of what it means (Kemayou, 2014), the *digital divide*, sometimes renamed now *civic divide* (Jouët, Rébillard, 2014), no longer reflects only the social inequalities between continents, between countries, and even between regions and urban or rural environments within a single country, for example in Cameroon (Kemayou, 2014). It must be viewed as an active element in the actual reproduction of these social inequalities, as in Mozambique (Archambault, Machikou Ghaméni, 2010). For example, with information becoming overly abundant – indeed, bloated – accessible and free from the websites, blogs, discussion forums, digital social networks, and so on, a paradox emerges. Unaware users are positioned so that they often cannot evaluate the quality and value of that information before he/she actually experiments with it, and this sometimes can have dramatic consequences, as has been demonstrated by many unsuccessful and unfortunate applications for emigration (Goulet, 2015). The positive affordances of social media are real for those groups within African populations who are in a position to take advantage of the availability of developed and digitally transmitted knowledge, and who can settle in well with the new cultural economy; they are thus in a process of establishing themselves in the new socio-technical landscape. However, these competent actors are first students, even professors and researchers from the academic world, or artists (Daim-Allah, 2017), that is good deal of cultural, even social and / or economic capital (Miège, 2014), in a more favorable urban context than other cities (Tremblay, Tremblay, 2006). For others, the majority who are less competent users, the constraints still remain numerous; the obstacles are technical, institutional and ideological, but the origins of these constraints can be understood in terms that are also political (Lecomte, 2013a; Kemayou, 2014), even cultural and social (Perrot, 2014). Finally, the ability to influence, thanks to social media, for example to organize a social movement, also depends on factors outside the use, such as the existence of a politically acceptable leadership not to erode the credibility and the support of external donors, and intermediary organizations that can provide complementary inputs of finance, skills, knowledge and other resources as it has been observed for a divided society such as South Africa (Mkhabela, 2017) and for microentrepreneurs in Botswana (Duncombe, Heeks, 2002). Josiane Jouët similarly noted in Europe that the mediation of technology, alone, is not enough to create social link: it is resourceful in pre-built social networks, or it is activated by the interplay of official moderators or digital networks leaders *de facto* (Jouët, 2000, 506). Conversely, for example,

in the countryside, as the Internet increasingly becomes regarded as the default communication medium, the most disadvantaged and vulnerable people becomes progressively disadvantaged, first in relative and then in absolute terms, until the moment a 'digital vicious cycle' is found (Warren, 2007).

Since the 80's, some African authors had already understood, when the dominant theories and UN pushed the continent to accelerate the transfer of technologies. Therefore, facts would evolve very slowly, since the 70s when Joseph Ki-Zerbo evoked the "*mandarinal enjoyment*" of this small intelligentsia, which often only dialogue for itself, "*at a respectable distance from an African reality over which they have no control*" (Dumolin, 2001: 88). So, the same recommendation remains: without political and local strategic will; without concerted efforts; without efforts of education, information and training (Ki-Zerbo, 1990) to develop endogenous capacities by integrating "local compromises" (Alzouma, 2011-2012) as it has already been observed in Europe from the *theory of conventions* (Boullier, 1997), Africa will never really bring social change to populations (Boafo, 1987). According to human development indicators (HDIs) and UNDP (Azoulay, 2002: 63), it has even been proposed to organize a "proportional adaptation" as a means of insuring its own survival for disadvantaged population, instead of enduring the actual "delegation of use" they are enduring (Cishahayo, Kamga, 2013).

### **Self-culture as a product of digital interaction, contested by dominant actors**

The works presented in Douala 2014 emphasize, for instance, the strategies of structurally well-organized and calculating actors who reinvest in social media - technical support, and content too - and by doing so, develop capacities for propagandistic processes. For example, in Cameroon, recourse to SMS by informed powers-that-be widens the panoply of technical devices for election campaigns (Atenga, Wangué, 2014); as noted above, Obama's presidential election campaign in 2008 opened a new stage in political communication in this regard (Cabedoche, 2010), just before President Trump develops the intensive use of tweets against "fake news media", "the enemy of American people" NBC News, ABC, CBS and CNN. In still another example, the massive investment in television of a particularly expressive and elaborated discourse of evangelists is re-broadcast on every platform of Web 2.0, and thus appears as deriving from grassroots social interactions. This confirms the centrality of ICTs in the development of a supposedly "spontaneous theology", a major phenomenon of the transformations at work on the African daily life (Teko Tédongmo, Nsoe Minsongui, 2014; Damome, 2014). Sophisticated practices can even be expressly criminal, e.g. the chat scam on networks and social media, whose victims are occasional users, for example in Ivory Coast, Benin, Ghana (N'Guessan, 2013; Ouassa Kouaro, Tasso Boni, 2014; Perrot, 2014). In this area, as in the case of the protection of authors and privacy, national law can be a protection, for example in Cameroon (Atenga, Wangué, 2014; Teko Tédongmo, Nsoe Minsongui, 2014). But for example, in Nigeria, it was observed that the privacy framework is inadequate as there are not specific privacy provisions (Akpojivi, 2017). And in Namibia, researchers observe a reluctance to adopt an Access to Information legislation (Heuva, 2017). Even international law (Saerens, 2015; Henky, 2017) still fail to offer an effective regulation (Ouassa Kouaro, Tasso Boni, 2014; Perrot, 2014), that could protect local actors (Kane, 2008: 91), in a context largely crushed by neo-liberal ideology (Saerens, 2014). This relative powerlessness of the legal system logically invites a call for multidisciplinary research response (Laulan, 2006b; Amouzou, 2009; Vitorino Pereira, 2012), when the structured relations between social actors encompasses, for example, magico-occult practices in Ghana (Perrot, 2014) and communicational practices in Ivory Coast (Bogui, 2017).

Moreover, from the point of view of users, the choice of a particular technical device does not reflect a purely individual disposition, independent of the framework set by dominant actors, what Sonia Livingstone calls *affordance* (Livingstone, 2008). Indeed, such choices of mobile phones and other electronic gadgets are shaped by what is made available and by the promotional discourses of advertising, branding and so on prevalent in the mass media. From Abidjan, Sylvain Akregbou Boua shows us how, in building customer loyalty, the interlocking strategies implemented by Cameroonian telephone operators induce, in part, the constitution of virtual communities. To subscribe to a technical network via a mobile telephone, it is implied, is to purchase a place in an already constituted network of social relations (Akregbou Boua, 2014) – and to be exposed to the unbridled quest for profitability from operators, for example by call centers (Bodiong, Témadjo, 2014). Research analysis of *Facebook* pages, by far the most widely used social network in Cameroon, of MTN and *Orange* fan communities, reveals blatant deficits in terms of users' ability to focus attention; such deficiencies signal serious inadequacies in the mode and ethics of interaction. On the one hand, some network operators are not very attentive to the expectations of Internet users. On the other hand, among these targeted groups, some people boast about being significant online figures, having been seduced by an invitation to create content. In fact, however, because they do this with a minimal mastery of multimedia, they thereafter reduce their community activity to mere clicks, selecting a category such as *I like*, or *Share*. Or, they simply think that they are actors, just because they have visited the site (Kemayo, 2014). The persistence of these inequalities calls now for the privatization of ICTs to be included in the indicators for measuring the multidimensional poverty that still prevails, for example in Madagascar, where the poorest of the poorest do not know how to profit from more competitive price policies: package, cheap prepaid cards ... (Ballet, Daka Rajaona, 2011). Such observations invite too researchers to critically confront established analyses that proceed from the contexts of atomization of mass culture manifested by small expressive digital forms (Allard, 2005). Analyses such as these lack critical distance and miss important analytic themes like *self-culture*, *expressive individualization*, *neo-modernity*, even *high modernity*, within virtual communities.

The impact of these prevalent beliefs and perspectives deflect our attention away from the opacity at work here, in the sense of an almost occult exploitation of the opportunities for the interconnection of objects, by dominants of contemporary economy. As some contemporary authors from both Africa and France point out, an exponential quantification and commodification of life is being enacted, supported by the ever more totalizing power of computational data processing systems, coupled with data-gathering sensors that are in turn linked to the software that drives them (Sadin, 2015). A paradox can be observed here, one that the Ivorian researcher Kahi calls an *opaque transparency*: on the one hand, the detailed history of users' interaction with these devices is gathered and analysed, resulting in Big Data that makes the users highly transparent, while on the other hand, users have so little access to other data, consolidating the opacity of managers of digital sites (Kahi, 2017). In this sense, Serge Proulx speaks of a "capitalist capture" of data, leading to a permanent organizational monitoring of users (Proulx 2013: 135) and, as analysed by Michel Foucault, to a "soft integration of social control" (Kwok Choon, Proulx, 2011), that Armand Mattelart too had already discerned (Mattelart, A., 2008).

However, the contradictions of the hegemonic discourses remain tenacious: the citizen is portrayed as king, in a community that is supposedly comprised of equals, a view that researchers have been challenging for years (Flichy, 2010), and within which organizations would suddenly appear to open themselves up to information sharing and democratic governance. These perspective have long been the focus of critique (Granjon, 2001).

However, a pendulum effect *via* scientific corrections should not be encouraged to prompt an opposite reading where, in the end, exposed to manipulation, both in social media and in the mainstream media, this same citizen would systematically bear the brunt of more structured and organized domination.

### **The inadequacy of *manipulation* as analytic category**

The "conspiracy" readings, which the Internet, as any other medium, would allow at the same time as the digital world receives the denunciations with abundance, only continue a tradition of so-called "conspiracy theories": e.g. *Illuminatis* infiltrating the governments with the Freemasons to dominate the world, early denounced at the end of the eighteenth century (Robison, 1798); humanoid reptilians who would pilot a secret governance of the world through the elites, institutions and financial system, whose representatives on earth would be nostalgic Nazis, or ... Tony Blair, Barack Obama, Elizabeth II, Alan Greenspan ... (Bronner, 2003, 2013); Rosswell event where the crushing of an unidentified probe in New Mexico regularly gives free rein to develop the idea of a conspiracy between the United States and extraterrestrials, born from the ultramediatized repetition of second-hand accounts (Lagrange 1996; Moore, Saler, Ziegler, 1997). On the web posting, since the beginning of the millennium, any serious event is systematically accompanied by a rumor building the alternative with the official version, necessarily denounced as a lie of state, or a manipulation of powerful people. So, the idea is gradually building of a "big brother", holding the destinies of the planet in its nets. Beyond psychologizing explanations, which analyze the conspiracy faculty as an "illusionary pattern perception" (De Inocencio, Douglas, Van Prooijen, 2017), Pierre Musso had already denounced the theoretical vacuity of this technocratic "retiology", i.e. a contemporary ideology of the network, a "dilapidation of the reticular symbolism", that reduces practices to reified imagery and representations to major narratives (Musso, 2003, pp 108-120).

The category "manipulation" was widely exploited during the twentieth century by many practitioners of communication, in a general context that justified the fear of totalitarianism and political fanaticism. "Embracing the masses without their being aware of this" was already the reading of the mechanisms of the group spirit, defined by Edward Bernays in 1928 (Bernays, 1928). 70 years later, Philippe Breton also denounced "la parole manipulée" (*the manipulated word*), as a part of a central strategy, working to reduce the ability of the audience to discuss and resist what the message offers, in its dual cognitive and affective form (Breton, 1997). As François-Bernard Huyghe observes, most of these theories assumes a totally passive, isolated recipient, who is unable to resist, and who is exposed without any contact with critical resources (Huyghe, 2010).

This criticism was first directed against the theorists of the *modernization school*. Based on *diffusionism* and *behaviorism*, they thought that with a broad convergence of discourses, modern media could have a decisive power to conform behaviors needed to the development of countries whose economic development is lagging behind. Then, critical theorists call into questions Daniel Lerner and Wilbur Schramm's ideological motivations for development, deliberately confusing correlational links and causal links, to support the White House's primary anti-communist operation (Missè, 2014). But events did not prove them right (Mody, 1991: 22), calling for more attention to the audience (McQuail, 1991). However, Karl Popper had already warned: plots exist. But it is rare that they succeed, because social life cannot be reduced to a showdown between opposing groups. It is part of a more or less rigid framework of institutions and customs, each causing a multitude of unexpected reactions. In this case, the author defined the vocation of social sciences and humanities, precisely in this rigorous analysis of reactions, "as far as possible" (Popper,

1945 and 1979, pp. 67-68). Despite this, even today, pioneers of these deterministic approaches still inspire certain contemporary readings of social networks (Ba, 1996b), sometimes called "African theories" (Gokra Dja, 2013).

The theme of a global manipulation had a second life with the *Dependency School*. From its theoretical basis, the pioneers had called for an "African revolution" (Fanon, 1964), working to demystify key experiences of contemporary liberalism in Africa, e.g. the "Ivorian miracle", with Samir Amin, (Amin, 1967). Herbert Schiller formalized a famous theory of cultural imperialism, in line with the seminal works of cultural industry theory. "The concept of cultural imperialism today best describes the sum of the processes by which a society is brought into the modern world system and how its dominating stratum is attracted, pressured, forced, and sometimes bribed into shaping social institutions to correspond to, or even promote, the values and structures of the dominating centre of the system. The public media are the foremost example of operating enterprises that are used in the penetrative process. For penetration on a significant scale the media themselves must be captured by the dominating/penetrating power. This occurs largely through the commercialization of broadcasting." (Schiller, 1976, pp. 9-10).

This thesis takes root in Africa, where, following the pan-African claim developed by Cheikh Anta Diop (Diop, 1954), Kwame Nkrumah (Nkrumah, 1963), Joseph Ki-Zerbo (Ki-Zerbo, 1972) ..., and more recently by Marc-Louis Ropivia (Ropivia, 1994), Daniel Bach (Bach 1999) ..., it is still a question of undertaking the reevaluation of one's own culture and history, against "the barrage of myths" Ki-Zerbo had denounced (Pajot, 2007). The decolonization of the history so requested had logically opened the way for the decolonization of the media (Bourges, 1976). The demand for a New World of Information and Communication Order (NWICO) had thus been structured since the Non-Aligned Conference in Alger 1973, against the ethnocentric cultural crushing, for example "from the sky" with satellite television, without really taking into account the opportunity of new coproduction options (Duteil, 1992, Ba, 1996a). The stagnation of the reference to the NWICO has not deterred perilous intellectual exercises, of comparing crushed African cultures and "Western culture" (Amouzou, 2009). But systematizing the critique of manipulation on a planetary scale, like the previous ones, these analyzes have similarly tended to forget the concrete and conflictual experiences of social groups in their relation to the spectacle. For Africa, this confusion had been added to the radical interpretation of Negritude, as a revenge, however legitimate in itself for the reconstruction, against the dehumanized portrait of the colonized people, as analyzed by the Tunisian psychiatrist Albert Memmi (Memmi, 1957). Thus, this distended conceptual patchwork had sometimes provoked, on the one hand, confinement in racist analyzes of manipulation by the "White Power"; on the other hand, the inversion of stigmas, logically called by this "junk ethnology" (Lacorne, 2001). The diasporic communitarisms (Chaumont, 2001), the Islamist negationists (Lewis, Martinez-Gros, Roy, Valensi, 2003), or other promoters of "genuine" African spirituality had thus nourished their pamphlet against "*the ideas of the white man, inventor of capitalist imperialism and religious imperialism*", as the Malian writer Fakoly still analyzes (Fakoly 2006: 93). Some fifty years ago, some academic works could still fight, against the "manipulations of the White Power", insisting for example on the links between the segregationist regimes of Southern Africa and the "white nations of the world" rich, northerner " (Ansprenger 1970: 29). Analysis of northern media from Africa then accompanied these unilateral readings, e.g. Sylvain Bemba, calling for a decolonization of information (Bourges, 1976). Elsewhere, in the aftermath of decolonization until the end of the 1980s, the pioneers of African documentary filmmaking and production had thus

systematically analyzed any North-South partnership, within this deterministic reading grid of a manipulation of the image (Fronty, Kifouani, 2015).

Within the Information and Communication Sciences, Armand and Michèle Mattelart early pointed out how many heads of state and government of the Third World had been able to use the critical reference to manipulations authorized by the international information order "like a leap forward not to deal with demanding and dangerous national politics, arguing the priority of the international plan. The inflamed defense of a new economic order and a new information order, is often a happy masquerade, in order not to do the internal social change" (Mattelart, Mattelart, Delcourt, 1984, 22). Criticism of the manipulative order was approved only as a collective and unidimensional one. If not, it should be considered as counterproductive, even threatening for the unity of the struggle, as we have already noted for critical documentary cinema of the 1970s in sub-Saharan Africa (Cabedoche, 2015). Even today, the theory of conspiracy persists in some authors, who intend to confuse together, pell-mell, members of the G8, heads of state of the South and the Western press, working in secret to plan, control and guide the affairs of the world. Somalia is the very model of the "conspiracy" against Africa (Diangitukwa, 2010).

Thus, the paradigm of a global manipulation has been maintained. But in the same time, because they don't recognize themselves within the dogma, the singularities from Africa are now more assertive, they assert themselves on screen (Fronty, Kifouani, 2015). Thus, documentary filmmakers gives more and more place to the individual "I" together with the social "Us", beyond the anti-imperialist claim (Diallo, 2015, chapter 3).

For more and more authors today, the objective is not to minimize the multiple complicities of the former colonizing countries and United States to counteract the inclinations for social change, even this needs to support the worst African dictatorships and the often deleterious action of major financial institutions (IMF, World Bank). But they consider dangerous this "conspiracy thesis": it is becoming a business for those who have an interest in it, on the bitterness and energy of the despair of the poorest, as analysed by the Malian Moussa Konaté (Konaté, 2010, first chapter, "The white conspiracy thesis "). Questioning now critical theories in communication for social change from an epistemological and socio-political critical approach, Missè Missè tackles now such an "intellectual bungling". Claimed by the cameroones author, the distancing is required from the *theories of development* as well as against the Manicheism of critical, speculative, and unverifiable explanation of underdevelopment exclusively by foreign domination and manipulation (Missè, 2014). The confusion is classic for the ideological discourse, which systemic analysts have already dissected (Easton, 1974): the explanation is not necessarily false, but with the linguistic figure of *false causality*, it is unverifiable because the generality of the subject and the confusion between correlation and causality (Reboul, 1970). These beautiful theoretical constructions could not integrate, *Audiences and Reception* not to collapse (Balima S., 2000, 229). But to remind this role is not making a clean sweep and falling back into the naivety of those who overestimate the capacity of audiences for dissonance, and forget the constraint imposed by the dominant industries of culture and communication, as Ien Ang (Ang, 1985) was accused of doing (Mattelart T., 2002, p. 40). But as Missè warns, "beyond the dance of the words," we need to reassess communication mediations, and bring measure in a field still largely dominated by the loss of meaning (Missè, 2014).

Thus combining various options of Audiences and reception studies and taking into account the global processes of domination, authors from the 1980s already reveal the relative immunity of populations of the lower classes or traditional cultures to the attempts of ideological inculcation by mass-media, despite their exposure and apparent availability to these messages. In Algeria e.g., some works have very early modified the simplistic readings

of media manipulation, by reintroducing different variables like of location, sex and socio-professional categories to understand the Audiences (Chevaldonné, 1981). In the sense of *beyond* and not *after*, and to break with linear, binary, chromatic and sequential readings of history, *postcolonial studies* also suggest we go beyond the great narrative colonial paradigm, which would see power relations only based on global western domination and manipulation, i.e. North on the South, "Whites" on "other colored people". These reconfiguration are mainly initiated by Indian intellectuals (Chakrabarty, 2000) and they are progressively taken into account in francophone research. In Africa, they already inspire those who analyze the way in which identity groups are done and undone, according to the logic of the moment in the fundamentally unstable world (Collignon, 2007), away from any general theory of "conspiracy".

Sometimes resulting from these conceptual reconfigurations, the well-informed scientific works on social networks helped us both to redraw the simplistic cartographies of "manipulation", and to take into account the attempts to strategically recuperate political capital, even within protest movements, as *Al Jazeera* does in Maghreb countries (Amri, 2015) and to recompose international dominations (Le Crosnier, 2009).

In that spirit, Douala 2014's proposals discourage any conspiracy theories that would assign to ICTs an exclusively manipulative role, the situation can only be recognized as ambivalent. Although the power relations between internet providers and users are unequal, ICTs as social media can also nonetheless be utilized as creative resources for individuals, as tools for social integration, as instruments for promoting economic activities, as instruments for the recomposition of family balance, (Compaoré, 2014), and for collective, supports and even accelerators for social change.

In addition, a more detailed sociology of uses reveals that in Cameroon, for example, a majority of actors – individuals and organizations – make use of double subscriptions to several competing access providers, because of gaps in network coverage and differentials in the tariffs. Others not least among the less privileged are well aware of the business strategies of dominant telephone operators on *Facebook* (Atanga, Wemgue, 2014) and tend to avoid networks and social media altogether, to protect themselves (Kemayou, 2014). Elsewhere, while migrant populations are particularly vulnerable to *phishers*, cybercriminals, and other swindlers, some also know perfectly well how to find assistance from official government websites, from which their own e-mail messages constitute a cumulative transmission of collective cognitive resources and an *a priori* effective reaction (Goulet, 2014) with protective law uses, for example in Zimbabwe (Chikakano, Mhiripiri, 2017). Finally, if the presidential SMS can flatter the fringe of a targeted population, it can also provokes skepticism, even alienating a majority of the population (Atanga, Wemgue, 2014). In Tunisia, as elsewhere, sites exist to fight rumors and offer clues to verify or deny them (Ghosn, Lahouij, 2013: 352).

Even if *manipulation* does exist, considering the intentionality of social actors in terms of misuse of interests and information (Ghosn, Laouij, 2013) and incitement to hatred (Marques, Vieira, 2017), the warning is now clear and systematic, in Africa as in other sites for the elaboration of scientific tools: mobilizing the term as a central category of analysis risks losing sight of the negotiation skills of the targeted populations in their decoding work (Hall, 1994) and reduces the complexity of the factors explaining the relationship between *symbolic labor professionals* and their activities, as already mentioned for ourselves (Alemanno Parrini, Cabedoche, 2011).

Beyond the category of manipulation, such observations and conclusions invite us to rethink prevailing concepts; thanks to such findings we are able to go beyond mere descriptive

approaches. If further proof were still needed, we can note that these findings dissuade us from lazy recourse to all-encompassing theories that claim to explain everything, as well as from simple perspectives of linearity that claim to predict everything. As Missè Missè argues for, this supposes a return to the critical foundations of the social sciences of communication, after they have failed "in the transfer, *hic and nun* [here and now], of utilitarian concepts that they have been too well endowed" (Missè, 2009), when the United States and Western Europe were self-established as "the legitimate and exclusive owners of the formulation of problems and solutions of social management in third countries" (Missè, 2014).

## TOWARDS THE REFINEMENT OF CONCEPTS AND THEORIES

As Maya Velmuradova observed in Douala 2014, ultimately, the social integration of ICTs as a means of accompanying social change appears to depend foremost on the multiple representations and variable imaginaries of their end-users; this holds true in the global North as well as in the South (Velmuradova, 2014). The success of any ICT project is less influenced by their technical and administrative control than by the cultural codes, social representations and categories of thought that predominate in the environment where these ICTs are invested (Teko Tédongmo, Nsoe Minsongui, 2014). This is underscored by Serge Proulx in his use of the notion "appropriation" (Giroux, Millerand, Proulx, 2001; Proulx, 2008).

Therefore, the works presented in Douala in 2014 reinforce a conviction that gradually has gained support, one that explicitly positioned itself against quickly formulated affirmations at the beginning of the millennium. At the time, Robert Putnam, for example, still could declare that ICTs were in a sense fostering a decline in social connections (Putnam, 1999). Authors such Pierre Merckle began to initiate an alternative hypothesis of a transformation where ICTs could enhance, and a relocation of public speaking, rather than weaken, social bonds (François, Neveu, 1999: 22; Licoppe, 2009; Mercklé, 2004: 38-52). In concert, Josiane Jouët speaks only in terms of a shake-up of the traditional structures of belonging and a crisis of institutions: "*this culture of subjectivity [...] does not exclude the search for new social links [..., it] goes with a quest for new forms of otherness, concrete mobilisations and networks of conviviality*" (Jouët, 2000: 494-495).

Today Douala 2014 affirms this perception of the digital public sphere, which is not locked into any uniform approach.

### **More refined renderings of *public sphere***

From the very beginning of the millennium, working on the relationship between television, internet, citizenship and public sphere, Peter Dahlgren stressed that *public sphere* is characterized by a tension between a unitary model and a plural model. The proposal is perfectly appropriate for the analysis of African societies, when the Swedish researcher advocated a dynamic and plural conception of public sphere, driven by the interaction between a dominant public sphere and multiple, opposing and alternative public spheres, in order not to "marginalize and suppress the diversity of complex societies" (Dahlgren, 2000: 167; Dahlgren, 2005). Early works in the 70's already proposed to look below the surface and reject the usual Jacobin conceptual frameworks, in analyzing the distribution of powers within the national framework of African societies. It is indeed necessary to distinguish the powers tactics and strategies of the actors, depending on whether they are mobilized at the Center or at the Periphery of the political national system. Christian Coulon observed that on the African continent, modes of production of politics and power are being set up, without



the organization of societies by a central State (Coulon, 1972). But it was not until the 90s that research developed from African researchers on the theme *public sphere and media*. Then, research first followed the analytical frameworks developed in Europe and proceeded by analogy (Mamdani, 2004), leading to the "complexe du tailleur" (tailor's complex) when Africa was accused not to be able to adapt to the models. (Capitant, 2008). At the turn of the 3rd millennium, scientific works gained independence, to better take into account the grounds. For example, André Tchoupie observes that the institutionalization of deliberations in the public sphere within the Bamileke chieftaincies of western Cameroon is constantly dragged by a very strong dynamics of mixing cultures and reinvention. Constituted on the basis of specific affinities, for example between members of secret societies (*Nkem*), this immense variety of traditional circles of deliberation works in the sense of a constant re-adaptation to the demands of a particularly unstable environment. It constitutes particular public spheres, that the analyzes of the rational global public sphere do not reflect (Tchoupie, 2006). Building upon this work, authors who criticise normativism thus recommend to take into consideration culture, subjectivity, belief, as relevant categories to analyse the communication for social change (Missè, 2009). Still others reject global grids to analyse the relationship between media and their publics, because these tools are unable in grasping the phenomenon of community radios in Africa, due to their Eurocentrism (Capitant, 2008).

Enlarged with supra and inter-state relations, Georges Balandier's analysis in the mid-twentieth century regarded the democratic co-construction as a dynamic operating both *within and without* (Balandier, 1955). The perspective is now considered as relevant for the analysis of multipartite Africa since the 90s, by authors (Missè, 2002, Vittin, 2002). The ability of diasporas, as *connected migrants* (Diminescu, 2005 and 2010), to share information, stories, images, videos and to develop distance projects via digital media, lead to the argument of an emergence of *diasporic public spheres* (Goulet, 2015), already mentioned by other authors (Égré, 2002; Beru, Biyele, 2007; Nedelcu, 2009). Positioning is not overwhelming, within diasporic actors whose practices are heterogeneous, between "identity withdrawal", "diasporic bipolarity" and "cosmopolitanism" (Najar, 2011) and whose interests can become more and more fragmented with the huge internal conflicts and tensions (Seck Sarr, 2015 ; Heuchou, 2017) that the scale of contemporary migratory phenomena reactivates, between South and North in the very heart of Africa (Alioua, 2005). However, members of diasporas have already been able to perceive themselves as major actors of social change, thanks to online protests and other activities (Marcotte, 2001), particularly observable during peak interactions (Najar, 2011), that they have been able to carry to the very depths of their native territory, with the complementary contribution of their own family ties (Cabedoche, 2013a).

However, the hypothesis of the emergence of these societal public spheres cannot be limited to digital opportunities, as it was observed around the newsstand in Yaoundé and Douala, Cameroon (Bitond, 2011) or with speeches of "Sorbonne, grins, agoras and parliaments" of Ivorian informal public spheres (N'Guessan, 2016), and with radio adversarial debates in Cameroon (Ngono, 2017a) and Uganda (Mwesige, 2011), for example. Already from the 90's and 20's, this hypothesis led the research in Africa to re-appropriate and reconfigure european concepts, such as *Civil society* (Ebolo, 1999; Etemadi, 2000; Agbobli, Ben Nablia, Lafrance, 2006), *Strategic action* and *Media Public sphere* (Madiba Oloko, 2007), *Politic participation and Collective action* (Banegas, 1995; Agbobli, Fusaro, 2015). Thus, researchers combined the pioneering work in Europe (Habermas, 1962, Mouffe, 2005 ...) and a history from the African *palaver* tradition (Bidima, 1993). With different success in Gabon, Togo, or Congo Brazzaville, this includes the contemporary version, imposed by the

opposition movements (Gueye, 2009), of *Sovereign National Conferences* in francophone African countries, Gabon, Togo, Brazzaville Congo and particularly in Benin as a *model* (Eboussi Boulaga, 2009) in contrast to the controversial Cameroon's Tripartite Conference (Atenga, 2007).

But the revision of concepts can be more radical, concerning communicational approaches. This is the case of *Development*, for example, too much ideologically connotated (Cabedoche, 2016b) even if it is used for the actions of the national states in their *Communication for development* (Iboulido, 2001) and legitimated by international UN organizations (Mezzalama, 1994). First, the word *Development* affects researchers. Originally based on the messianic and diffusionist belief that communication devices will generalize the appropriation of technical innovations, dominated by productivism, enrolled in a time-scale short, and putting the mass media at the center of any modernization process (Missè, 2009), *Development* is increasingly rejected, as a nominalist and simplistic term (Kabou, 1991; Latouche, 2001, 2004, 2006; Lafrance, 2006). The term does not allow the questioning of the incoherence, the contradictions, the gaps of the promoted public policies. Their communication is unidirectional, disconnected from the social, reduced to a "panoply of techniques", part of an asymmetrical relationship. Without any respect to the freedom of population, it does not imagine that it is important, first, to build confidence (Missè, 2009 and 2014). As a result, the very reference to the term *model* is problematic: it needs to be systematically revisited, according to the renewal of social logics and practices already existing within the populations directly concerned.

On the contrary, to speak of *Communication for Social Change* means a holistic and resolutely dialogical approach. It integrates the historicity and the specificity of the companies invested, in terms of *uses*, *social acceptability* and *appropriation* by the populations involved. Thus, the expression rehabilitates the long time, mediation as a sense sharing. At the same time, it avoids the tendency of the synecdoche, when a part refers to the whole. Because the fact that that communication is implemented in all social life does not allow us to conclude that everything is communication: we can not reflect social complexity from communication alone (Miège, Tremblay, 1998). In that respect, *Communication for social change* reintroduces uncertainty about the performance of the mobilized social management tools and devices, if we consider that social logics can also be constructed in response to the innovation, itself (Missè, 2009 and 2014).

Similarly, now, it seems wrong to analyse the African mutations, which can be – or not - accelerated by the digital social media, as a shift from one type of society to another one, definitively and in a linear way.

The same error, underlined by Miss Missé (Missè, 2014), had been ever made by thinkers of *modernization* theory, sixty years ago. Thus, Wilbur Schramm had promoted the mass media at the center of a process that accelerate social transformations and Daniel Lerner as promoters to supplies the knowledge and fosters the attitudes and behaviors needed by a social formation to enter into a new transitional phase towards modernization. Frederick Frey and Lucian Pye had expanded this vocation to all the technical supports and dimensions of communication (Frey, Pye, 1963), in accordance with the Pentagon's recommendations, here again to accompany the transition towards modernization, i.e. the US model, for the US interests (UN, 1998, Mattelart A., 1002). Then, the disappointments that followed the promises have completely destabilized the paradigm of *modernization* and the model of media as the agent of the transition to development, without ever having taken into consideration power structures, social relationships and very power dynamics of a social body. The analysis seems to be perfectly heard, now. However, some fifteen, twenty years ago, editorialists, and even some scholars, some of them still contaminated by diffusionism

(Ba, 1996b), use to speak without distance in term of *democratic transition* (Eboussi Boulaga, 1997) or *democratic gestation* (Coulibaly, 2004), for example, when a so-called independent private press appeared in the 90's on the African continent, even with a state aid (Frère, 2000).

But recognizing in one hand how uncertain was the evolution of influence relations between state television and private television, for example in sub-Saharan Africa (Dioh, 2007), or in the other hand, the procrastination of "digital democracy" (Dahmani, 2007), or the illusion of the famous "transition", for example in Cameroon (Mehler, 1997), a "renewal without renewal" (Éboko, 1999), other authors very quickly prefer to speak of a "transit democracy" (Tcheuyap, 2014), as a sort of "never-ending transition" (Eboussi Boulaga, 1997), or a "cosmetic democracy" (Nyamjoh, 2002), an "authoritarian decompression" (Machikou Ngameni, 2010), "an "authoritarian decomposition" (Atenga, 2007), or even a "post-monopolism" (Ngono, 2017b). All these critical reflections reintroduce too uncertainty, very quickly recognized as fundamentally linked to democratic transitions (Banegas, 1003). Even the "Beninese model" has been widely criticized (Eboussi Boulaga, 1997: 70). They reiterate the obligation of humility as recommended by experienced researchers (Jouët, 1992) considering the communication phenomena for development.

And it is true that in the field, the famous "democratic transition" may as well be just an avatar of the reciprocal assimilation process of the elites since independence (Bayart, Mbembe, Toulabor, 1992) as the emergence new social segments, as in Benin (Banegas, 1993). This is reflected in the abundance of typologies proposed, depending in the one hand on the rhythms, degrees and intensities of the processes involved; on the other hand, on actors, resources and strategies that are deployed during these same processes. All these works to essentialize the trajectories and to objectify the differences are finally constantly rediscussed. The evolution on the ground of various situations is now qualified as an "unequal political fluidity" (Banegas, 1993). The same reassessment is observed about rankings with the criterion "level of democracy", to which some international economic magazines use to refer (Taffo Nemboue, 2017). The conclusive hesitations are significant of this uncertainty, oscillating between *continuity, reform, rupture, regression, authoritarian restoration....*

Other terminological promises, such as *growth, democracy, equity, progress, good governance, cultural diversity...* can thus today be considered as a similar word hypostasis, i.e. as just a totem references because their ambiguity, without any scientific relevance, if not evaluated in their process and the chain of their historical mutations (Missè, 2014).

For these critical propositions, analysis of the role of media in so fluid societies follow the same conceptual revisions, far from the too narrow functionalist visions. Some authors thus use the term *liminality*, dear to anthropologists Viktor Turner (Lerner, 1967) or Arnold Van Gennep, (Van Gennep, 1909, 49). The reference is indeed already mobilized in Africa to designate the margin, the openness, the capacity to separate or to connect *inside* and *outside* and the probationary test which accompanies it, before an eventual integration – or not - of any external element. It is the case with the institution of both conservative and subversive rites of passage, e.g. for Yakas in DRC (Devisch, 1986 ), or Merina ethnic group in Madagascar (Centlivres, 2000). *Liminality* now makes possible to analyze the role of the media: in a liminal symbolic inversion period, the mainstream media are themselves at the crossroads of several absolutely uncertain options: in the one hand working in a double ongoing ritual process of deconstruction-reconstruction or norms, and in the other hand still under the double pressure of a heavy tradition and ambiguous political situations (Coman, 1992 and 2008).

Thus, this Critical questioning extends, of course, to social media, when, as it was previously for the mass media, the abstract reason, which sets them as factors of the emancipation of peoples, operate outside the field of the real and disjointed experience of people. From the 70s, Charles Tilly had already proposed to consider social networks as "changing, contingent, constructed" (Tilly, 1978). Then, this warning led authors to reconceptualize, for example to analyze the 1989-1992 mobilizations in Benin and Togo, from the hypothesis of *plasticity* and *fluidity* (Banegas, 1993).

Later, in the same direction, Peter Dahlgren had also foreseen the euphoria that would surround digital devices, including social media, treating them as miracle tools, as a principle: even if they offer real possibilities for civic interactions, they do not automatically promise any quick installation of democracy (Dahlgren, 2013), nor more they do not guarantee freedom, as other authors observe (Yoon, 2017). Recently, Evgeny Morozov recalls, on the one hand, the repressive uses of social media in Arab countries, whose contested authoritative powers had very quickly mobilized to maintain their domination, and on the other hand, the ephemerality, superficiality, versatility and diversity of political awareness that other uses of social media could cause (Morozov, 2011).

Therefore, the study of social media needs keep in its sights this mature perspective, which is regularly recommended by Marc Lynch, Director of the *Institute for Middle East Studies* at the *Elliott School of International Affairs* at George Washington University:

*The real impact of political blogging is still likely to lie in the longer term impact on the individuals themselves, as they develop new political competencies and expectations and relationships. The impact of the new media technologies will likely be best measured in terms of the emergence of such new kinds of citizens and networks over the next decades, not in terms of institutional political changes over months or years.* (Lynch, 2006 and 2009).

Some authors have already observed this admonishment in studying African spheres of development (Zouari, 2011). Their analyses appear much more nuanced, connected to the broader theme of complex social change.

### **Reconsidering the efficacy of social media for social change**

Thus, the Douala conference has become part of this research tradition in information and communication sciences, one that is adamantly resistant to any determinism, whether technological or social (Jouet, 1987, pp. 158 and 1993) and to any linearized reading of social change, whose latest model would necessarily work through social media. For example, as well as other countries such as Libya where the tribal communication system in the Warfalla tribes had proved to be more effective than Internet, in Ivory Coast the appearance of new forms of sociability, accelerated by the spread of technical devices of social media, has not yet displaced traditional community life of the population, particularly rural areas. (Akregbou Boua, 2014).

Similarly, as it was already demonstrated at the end of the 20th century for societies in the global North, the advent of ICTs did not replace the previous technologies among the corporate dominant actors, as it is observed, for example in Burkina Faso (Balima D., 2014). These actors had sought to establish irreducible discursive boundaries just waiting for the moment of being able to control the new modes of expression (Miège, 1996: 145 and 2007: 117). As privileged media for so-called "*alternative*" social expression, SMSs can also become media for a presidential communication, what Isabelle Pailliarth critically calls an *event democracy*, (Pailliarth, 2000) Brownlee an *institutional set* (Brownlee, 2007), Thomas Atanga an *authoritarian decomposition* (Atanga, 2007) and Nadine Makoussi Ngoméni an

*authoritarian decompression* (Machikou Ngaméni, 2010). Such a simulacrum, which focuses only on the visibility of the provision of a digital medium and not on the effectiveness of the interaction, functions, in authoritarian contexts, as the prolongation of other forms of symbolic violence utilized by the powers-that-be (Atanga, Wengue, 2014). State media can also take advantage of the digital transition, appearing, under pressure from private corporate media actors rather than social media users, to open up to political pluralism and introduce a truly public conception of public service in Burkina Faso or Cameroon. But in order not to fall into a reductionist technological determinism, questions must be raised about their real will to respect the basic principles of pluralism (Balima D., 2014; Ngono, 2017a).

Also, it would be erroneous to think that, from the point of view of subordinate media users, social media are gradually replacing mainstream media, which are somehow rejected because their *extraneity*. With this concept, since Algeria, Lotfi Madani describes the feeling of non-identity and the experience of a lack of recognition on the part of local populations, evoked by the contents of national mass media, who are pliant in the hands of central power holders. (Madani, 2002), or whose language of expression is offered as an instrument of discrimination, as in Madagascar (Raharinirina Rabaovololona, 2013), sub-Saharan African countries (Dioh, 2007; Atanga, 2007) East African countries, too (Damome, Noble-Bart, 2014) and other Maghreb countries. But a critical distance does not preclude a recourse, depending on the context and strategic opportunities. Thus, in Tunisia, activists have created numerous sites on Internet working as propaganda tools before and after the 2011 elections, but they have also worked *via* conventional media to make themselves visible. Thus, we see that political and cultural agitation can proceed through both social and mainstream media. Without such institutionalized links, visibility by social media cannot sustain popular political momentum (Dahmen-Jarrin, 2014).

Further to the south, in the Bagyeli communities, which include Baka pygmies and Bantu populations, participatory video allowed the participants to organize their own discourse and self visibility, to build alternatives to the mainstream media's caricatured construction of their own cultural identity. However, the success of these experiments quickly proved to be a short-lived. The reasons are several. First, Baka and Bagyeli populations missed a recurrent access to national infrastructures to disseminate their corrective vision. Furthermore, the prevalence and attractiveness in their mind of dominant mainstream media discourses still remain despite the stigmatization, as Ang observed last century (Ang, 1985). In addition, the strong or light degree of perception of their own marginalization by the same mainstream media were different. And rapidly, divisions and inequalities – including sexual, ethnic and cultural dimensions – among the participants in the project have once again remerged (Barber, 2014). Precaution is now systematic among authors who are not satisfied with *nominalism*: the behavior of a stigmatized population is ambiguous, oscillating between "apparent submission, acquiescence, autonomy, resistance and acceptance.". Proximity communication based on community participation, theories and techniques of interpersonal communication, endogenous media are not a panacea (Missè, 2009), if they do not integrate a real mediation, even a therapy for all parties who are involved, to take into account the most widespread pathology: the will of power, which is working both at *macro, meso*, and micro levels (Missè, 2009). Thus, in sum, in some cases, the so-called *alternative* media have really promoted a greater social inclusion, building on the cultural demands and the expectations of local communities, encouraged in this way by action-research and rural participative assessment. Yet in other cases, on the contrary, these same forms of *a priori* optional expression exacerbated inequalities within the same communities, whose complexity and internal tensions had been forgotten. In some cases, they have even led to a

paradoxical result: both reduction and increase of internal inequality, justifying the call for relative caution in determining the effects in *both* social and mainstream media, and traditional too (Barber, 2014).

Thus, manichaeism is no longer an option. Even in the analysis of mainstream media. For example, during the crisis in Ivory Coast in 2010, by outbidding in pseudo-ethnic speech and stigmatizing the opposite camp, the mass media certainly contributed to social divisions and the post-electoral violence. However, while community radio stations offered less divisive contents, while the messaging center no longer authorized SMS broadcasting at the end of Gbagbo era, and finally while diasporic sites and blogs had an influence mainly outside the country, national mainstream media may also be considered as institutions whereby social capital and the construction of meaning have been strengthened. Therefore, the implication is that their role is more complex to originally understood, with respect to the citizens and the co-construction of democracy in contemporary African societies (Caffarel Serra and Sendin Gutiérrez, 2014). This follows the same lines that Jesús Martín-Barbero has already demonstrated for Latin America (Martín-Barbero, 2002).

Therefore, contemporary analyses refuse to perceive the vast majority of people – who populate the lower echelons of society – as by definition marginalized by ‘outdated’ mainstream media. Rather, we have a complex, tension-ridden relationship whose mechanisms have been described as *conflictual imbrication in massification* (Martín-Barbero, 2002, p. 195). This stands in contrast to the previous view, which assumed that social media were unified in offering clear challenges the role mainstream media’s *agenda setting*. Given that media production today is an important dimension of social life – indeed, social media users are sometimes called ‘producers’ – the displacement of media borders constitutes a real threat to the mass media, who are confronted by their own economic model in crisis, as observed from Senegal (Ndiaye, 2006; Faye, 2008), while their managers try to maintain control by taking a stand on almost everything that is communicated. Thus, today, we can better understand the reaction of the dominant media facing the emergence of new competitive communication actors: they must devise strategies that combine optimal use of the affordances of these innovative digital devices, while at the same time trying to bring them under control, as we see in Europe (Miège, 2007: 116, Alvares and Dahlgren, 2014: 14). It is now confirmed for Africa (Agbobli, Bogui, 2017). In the same spirit, many mainstream journalists today make use of Twitter, while yet striving to assert their editorial authority over the material gathered (Hermida 2013).

On the other hand, because visibility exclusively on social media is not sufficient to generate sustainable influence, actors using these forms of digital expression work in parallel with mainstream media, using varying forms of *coopetition*, i.e. cooperation and competition; not least they become active transnationally. Thus, for example, in Maghreb, the new expression of women is part of hybrid forms (Fenniche Daoues, 2006), at the confluence of mainstream media and the evolution of information and communication technologies (Angé, 2014).

One could even research the *boomerang effects* of this media institutionalization in the eyes of their community of belonging, in an indirect way, when excessive speech and insult are not enough, for example (Mezrioui, 2013, 331). As in the case with certain anonymous opponents of the social movements in the Tunisia of Ben Ali (Lecomte, 2013b), such as the syndicalist movement, itself hardly audible from Sidi Bouzi after the immolation of Mohammed Bouazizi. As in the case with certain leaders dismissed by extremist spheres of influence, such as Mokhtar Belmokhtar beside *Ansar Dine* in the sub-Saharan or Boko Haram in North Cameroon, where mainstream media had to choose between neutrality or define a strategy by mobilizing the national population against the sect while maintaining calm and lessening panic and anxiety (Kunock, 2017). As in the case with certain minorities

stigmatized by poor social recognition, such as the LGBTQ communities of the African sub-Saharan, even taking advantage in their quest for solidarity and visibility of the drafting and passage of an anti gay bill to paradoxically reinforce an overwhelming counter-resistance, despite the risk of an escalation of persecution, for example in Uganda (Guma, 2014), or in Egypt (Celis, Kantola, Waylen, Weldon, 2013: 201). One of the indirect effects of this visibility leads ICS question the normative and dominant models of sexuality imposed by some states, both in North and South countries (Missè, 2009).... All of them have thus worked to gain a local, national and regional visibility. The construction of their image in the translational media at times enhances their legitimacy; it can thus appear opportune to make known the cause, but also to crush their internal opponents or competitors in the 'common struggle', what Moez Triki calls "a dynamic of exclusion" (Triki, 2013: 340).

The range of possible strategic options expand, particularly when an objective alliance appears with these same transnational media, for whom the goals can be temporarily convergent, to the fault of being identical, as has been analysed, from the point of view of *Al Jazeera* (Ziani, 2007; Brahimi El Mili, 2012; Amri 2015). Thus one can understand the "pacts with the devil" that certain indignant actors agree to sign, tacitly or formally, with those whose activities they have previously denounced – or continue to denounce - because they are perceived as opponents of social change. In Tunis in 2012, *Anonymus* cyber activists have published in the newspaper *Le Temps* about 2,000 emails from Prime Minister Hamadi Jebali to Salafist groups. Then, they threatened to publish the full set of hacked data, to demonstrate the complicity of this politician and thus, to increase pressure on (Cabedoche, 2013a).

Consequently we must keep in mind the ambiguity of the distinctions or opposition between traditional media, mainstream media, and social media, given the ambivalent societal contexts of the times, as observed in Europe (Jouët, 2000), and in Africa, too (Ekambo, 2009; Gokra Dja, 2013: 230). It is in this sense that Caroline Angé once again uses the expression *media confluence* (Angé, 2014); this idea of the interface or merging of two domains was first developed by Tourya Guaabess (Guaaybess, 2012), to invite a rethinking of the historical detour taken by the mainstream media and include analysis in the long term of the geopolitical and social context of the Arab world, in order to apprehend social movements on the digital networks as a result of complex interweaving between media, whatever their nature.

## CONCLUSION

Considering these eminently strategic actions of social actors, the superficially consensual mobilization of concepts is not enough to disentangle complex relationships between technical devices and actors, whether they align themselves with the contours of a new plebeian public sphere or in the power grabs of political powers-that-be and new world communication corporations. Deconstruction of these entangled relationships is already under way, for such points of entry as *cultural diversity* in terms of a pluralism of public expression. This analytic deconstruction obviously remains to be pursued at the theoretical level (Miège, 2014; Frau-Meigs, Kiyindou, 2014). This, in the same way that the notion of the *Information Society* has been deconstructed, definitively disqualified by ICS for its techno-centrism (Kiyindou, 2009b ; Kiyindou, Lemoëne, Vacher, 2013...).. At the same time, the analysis of the supposed democratic participation by social media cannot avoid the issue of power relations *in situ*, however small or distanced they may appear. This becomes imperative in such a tumultuous and disputed political order, with its heterogeneous contexts and modalities of interactivity, and with its varied and variable forms of expression

(Alvares, Dahlgren, 2014). Some conclusions, analyzing the Arab world for example, indicate the continuation of weak public spheres still unable to achieve democratic inclusion and real social change (Zouari, 2011).

Moreover, beyond these convocations which too often remain incomplete in the discourses of the actors, and even of certain authors, and without neglecting their insertion in local contexts (Alvares, Dahlgren, 2014), we must today achieve a re-centering of the key concepts. This needs to be done in relation to the main issues on a global level, as currently advocated by GRESEC for *cultural diversity* (the scientific laboratory was represented in Douala by its founder, Bernard Miège) (Miège, 2014). The same must be done to analyze the mobilization of actors on online networks, an effort that cannot be dissociated from the conflicting power relations that characterize the political sphere, including the international level (Dahmen-Jarrin, 2014).

Thus, with others symposia, the one in Douala in 2014 makes it possible, on the one hand, to better evaluate the gap between the promises of information and communication technologies and actual practices on the ground, as already undertaken beyond social networks, for example in the field of cultural industries structuring, even if the potential for growth remains high in this field in Africa (Ndour, 2002; Zida, 2010, 2018: 179-181). And on the other hand, Douala 2014 conclusions reinforce the demand for enhanced conceptual thinking, beyond the European and North American horizons, which historically had helped to create the first tools of knowledge about information-communication. The challenge remains to further extend research about contemporary Asian spheres; these still remain weakly diffused. However, on each continents, research related to Africa is not really endogenous, both in terms of profiles of researches, location of laboratories and delimitation of objects (Capitant, 2008). Comparative analyzes, such as the appropriation of ICTs by Chinese diasporas in Australia, have already been outlined (Beru, Biyele, 2007). We have also witnessed the cross-fertilization of authors, dealing largely with issues of international communication for some thirty years, whether from Latin America (Mattelart A., 1992; Carillo, Katz, 2006), or under the influence of *Postcolonial studies* developed in the Anglo-Saxon world (Collignon, 2007). All of them help deconstruct the theoretical frameworks inherited from colonial and post-colonial periods, which have also encumbered Africa and improve analyses.

Many theoretical, conceptual and methodological bridges remain to be constructed between these works, all too often still mobilized separately, in particular between objects and scientific expressions divided by language (the authors quoted in this contribution being essentially Francophone but we ever tried to enlarge our state of research beyond linguistic boundaries inherited from colonization). However, there is a growing effort to erase these language-reinforced historical bottlenecks, and to share communication issues involving the whole Africa, as well as scientific issues involving transnational information and communication research. The initiatives to this end are increasing, in relation to research abroad, in North America (Agbobli, Fusaro, 2015...), Europe (Dahlgren, 2009; Nordenstreng 2011; Haberer, Vatter, 2011; Miguel de Bustos, 2016), Latin America (Ferreira, 2007; Apparu, Elhajji, 2007; Miège, 2016 ; Debos, Lancini, 2017...), Asia (Wang, 2006; Luo, 2016; Bakti, 2017 ; Yoon, 2017...), Oceania (Béru, Biyéle, 2007: 21). All of them work to deterritorialize the production and dissemination of research, whose qualification of "Africanist" is more and more rejected (Cabedoche, 2013b), especially when these issues are working at the intercontinental level. For example, in dealing with the competition of Indian and Chinese soft powers from media and communication networks in Africa (Lafargue, 2007; Thussu, 2016; Busselen, 2017). For example, in dealing with cultural industries that are known to be abundant in Africa in terms of *content industries* and



dominated by foreign companies in terms of *network and equipment* industries (Zida, 2018). For example in dealing with formal and informal ICTs and environmental issues, when the levels of challenges are not just local, national or even continental levels (Laulan, 2006a ; Wossen, 2013). And for example, in dealing with identity, because its local dimension is also crossed by the transnational and the multicultural (Martin-Barbero, 2006)... Local specificities still should be considered with regard to objects on the ground, to avoid over-modeling. But in the same time, the same recommendation is made, if it is the matter of epistemology, for example in dealing with contemporary issues of *International Communication*, understood as a field as well as a framework too for research to be revisited (Cabedoche, 2016b ; Loum, 2017).

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## ***Contributions of the author to synthesis works used for the perspective***

- Report of the *European Science Foundation : Media in Europe. New questions for Research and Policy* (ESF, 2014);
- Conclusions in 2014 of the first forum of the *Arab Association of Researchers in Communication* (AARC);
- Multidisciplinary publications since 2013, of the *GDRI Commed*, led by the *Institut de Recherche du Maghreb Contemporain* of Sidi Bou-Saïd (Tunisia);
- Definition of the programmatic axes for sub-Saharan African Studies of *Grecirea* of Université Gaston Berger de Saint-Louis of Senegal;
- Publications in *Cahiers du Cedimes : TIC mobiles et développement social* in 2011;
- Meeting *Recherches en Sciences de l'Information et Communication sur les Médias et les Industries culturelles et créatives* [Research in Information Sciences and Communication on Media and Cultural and Creative Industries], organized jointly by the GRESEC de Grenoble and the Communication University of China in Beijing (15th and 16th October 2015);
- Symposium *Technologies et développement. Objets connectés : perspectives pour un développement intelligent* [Technology and Development. Connected Objects: Perspectives for Smart Development], organized by the Unesco Chair Emerging Practices and Communication for Development, Bordeaux, 16th and 17th March 2017.