

THE ROUTLEDGE COMPANION TO GLOBAL INTERNET HISTORIES

The Routledge Companion to Global Internet Histories brings together research on the diverse Internet histories that have evolved in different regions, language cultures and social contexts across the globe. While the Internet is now in its fifth decade, the understanding and formulation of its histories outside of an anglophone framework is still very much in its infancy. From Tunisia to Taiwan, this volume emphasizes the importance of understanding and formulating Internet histories outside the anglophone case studies and theoretical paradigms that have thus far dominated academic scholarship on Internet history. Interdisciplinary in scope, the collection offers a variety of historical lenses on the development of the Internet: as a new communication technology seen in the context of older technologies; as a new form of sociality read alongside previous technologically mediated means of relating; and as a new media “vehicle” for the communication of content.

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Susena Salgado - Institute of Social Sciences - University of Lisbon - 06/03/2017

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INTERNET HISTORIES

Edited by
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Mark McLelland

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First published 2017
by Routledge
711 Third Avenue, New York, NY 10017

and by Routledge
2 Park Square, Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon OX14 4RN

Routledge is an imprint of the Taylor & Francis Group, an informa business

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Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data

Names: Goggin, Gerard, 1964– editor. |

McLelland, Mark J., 1966– editor.

Title: The Routledge companion to global internet histories / edited by Gerard Goggin and Mark McLelland.

Other titles: Global internet histories

Description: New York: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2017. |

Includes bibliographical references.

Identifiers: LCCN 2016038503 | ISBN 9781138812161 (hbk) |

ISBN 9781315748962 (ebk)

Subjects: LCSH: Internet—History. | Telecommunication—

History—20th century. | Telecommunication—History—21st century.

Classification: LCC TK5105.875.157 R727 2017 | DDC 384.309—dc23

LC record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2016038503>

ISBN: 978-1-138-81216-1 (hbk)

ISBN: 978-1-315-74896-2 (ebk)

Typeset in Bembo
by Florence Production Ltd, Stoodleigh, Devon, UK

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We thank the Australian Research Council (ARC) for the award of a Discovery grant, *Internet History in Australia and the Asia-Pacific* (DP1092878), of which this volume is a key output. We are very grateful to Emily van der Nagel for her excellent editorial assistance in the preparation of the manuscript. It has been our pleasure to once again work with the talented and consummate publishing professionals at Routledge. Special thanks to Erica Wetter for her commissioning of the project and thoughtful feedback, and also to Simon Jacobs and Mia Moran for all their help.

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Susena Salgado - Institute of Social Sciences - University of Lisbon - 06/03/2017

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HISTORIES OF THE INTERNET AND POLITICAL COMMUNICATION IN LUSOPHONE AFRICA

Susana Salgado

Introduction

The Portuguese-speaking African countries offer particularly interesting case studies when the objective is to examine the political influence of the Internet.¹ Angola, Cape Verde, Mozambique, and Sao Tome and Principe² share the same language and a similar historical background of nearly five centuries of Portuguese colonization, and although with very different degrees of success, these countries are also commonly considered new democracies. In the early 1990s, the third wave of democratization (Huntington 1991), which had started in 1974 with the Carnation Revolution in Portugal, spread to Africa, and several sub-Saharan African countries initiated democratic reforms, mainly by adopting new constitutions, multi-party regimes, and elections as the means to select rulers. These four countries also share the particular feature of having started their democratization processes simultaneously with the worldwide expansion of the Internet.

The development of the Internet can be addressed from many different angles; for example, the history of the medium itself includes not only the elements that have affected its development, but also the implications of its historical evolution in different contexts. Different regions of the world, different areas of society, and different social and age groups are likely to induce different experiences, adaptations, perceptions, histories, and therefore outline different understandings and paradigms of the Internet's evolution and its effects. In addition, histories of the individuals' use of the Internet and their lives intersect and contribute to building not only the history of a country, but also the history of the Internet.

These countries' histories represent valuable illustrations of different Internet histories and of different Internet development paces. The Internet has influenced communicative practices in general, and political communication in particular, by adding different dimensions to power discourses and facilitating collective action, for instance. Particularly in developing countries, the Internet has the potential to enhance active citizenship and promote political participation by providing citizens with alternative ways to demand more freedom and social justice.

The Internet has been often presented as an important driver of democratization. A first preliminary observation of these four countries' democratic development points to very different levels of democratization achieved in the last decades, and therefore demonstrates that the impact of technology is greatly mediated by other factors and that technology by itself does not have the power initially attributed by some technological determinist but also rather utopian views (Grossman 1995; Ferdinand 2000, among others).

Through individual and collective histories from Lusophone Africa, and supported by knowledge obtained from interviews, observation, and media analysis, this chapter looks at new online political communication opportunities in countries experiencing democratization processes. It addresses both the role of independent online news media outlets and blogs in environments facing constraints to freedom, and the use of the Internet in citizens' participation and political change.

Online Political Communication Accounts

The Background

When compared to the rest of the world, the percentage of Internet users in Lusophone African countries, and especially in Angola and Mozambique, is small. Internet access is still very limited outside the main cities, which ends up contributing to accentuating inequalities between regions and social classes. Mozambique is the country with the least people connected to the Internet—only 4.3 percent in 2012. In Angola, the percentage of Internet users was 14.8 percent, and in Sao Tome and Principe it was 20.2 percent in the same year. Cape Verde is the country where the most people have access: 32 percent of citizens were already using the Internet in 2012 (Internet World Stats 2015; Salgado 2015).

Some of the main obstacles to Internet access and use are the high prices and the low quality of most service providers. But the major constraints are still closely related to the poor living conditions that large sections of these countries' populations still face (lack of decent housing with electricity, for example) and low levels of functional, communicational, and media literacies in general. What is demanded of citizens in an information society is much more than knowing how to read and write. The level of competence required to use efficiently the new information and communication technologies involves different types of literacy, such as functional literacy, which refers to comprehension and interpretation skills, and communicational and media literacy, which means that citizens should have the ability to analyze and create different messages in different media genres, and should be able to identify the medium most suited to communicate their ideas (Salgado 2014: 111).

Technology in general, and more recently the Internet in particular, have been pointed out as having the role of facilitators that drive other innovations, democratization, and economic development (Lerner 1958; Mudhai *et al.* 2009; Nwokeafor and Langmia 2010; Salgado 2012, just to provide some examples related to developing nations). The 2015 United Nations General Assembly's debate recently reinforced the goal of achieving universal access to the Internet by the end of 2020, because, according to this organization, the Internet is directly linked to human development in all of its different facets, including economic and political. This view is not new, and a very similar perspective is shared by the World Bank (2009) in a report that demonstrates that access to affordable and reliable high-speed Internet and mobile communications are central to economic growth and job creation in developing countries.

Several international organizations have been fundamental in the history of building the Internet in sub-Saharan Africa, particularly in respect to infrastructure and capacity building; however, for the time being, access to technology and information is still extremely differentiated, and these gaps have tended to accentuate the already existing great differences among social and political groups in these societies.

Although the Internet contains in itself the potential for further development, the ways in which it is used and its histories seem to be strongly conditioned by context. Allowing for substantial cross-country differences, there is still a long way to go in the African Portuguese-speaking countries regarding the democratization of Internet access, especially taking into consideration some persisting structural constraints, such as the lack of electricity and telephone lines or broadband access in some remote and rural regions. Indeed, there are strong inequalities in access to the Internet and technologies in general, both between the four countries and within them. Until a few years ago, apart from more wealthy people, the Internet users in these countries were civil servants and other workers in the service sector who had Internet access in their jobs. This gap is clearly reflected in the blogger communities: most bloggers are from the middle and upper classes, and have an academic level considered very high when compared with the rest of the population; there are blogs, for example, by politicians, journalists, academic researchers, historians, and artists (Salgado 2012).

Most usage was also, and still is in many places, confined to the capital city and to major cities. However, even though Internet access is still limited, it has grown in recent years due to the availability of cheaper access to services and the implementation of projects designed to promote Internet access for the general population. Efforts to equip schools, universities, libraries, and other public services with computers and Internet access have increased and, in some cases, small cities and villages were included. Other options are cyber cafés and free-access media centers and libraries.

In Angola, a project was put in place to provide all provinces with media libraries, including in the least populated provinces, and to distribute mobile media libraries throughout the country while more definitive structures are not in place. The mobile structures are thus supposed to facilitate the access of the general population to new technologies and allow citizens, including students, to do all kinds of research on the Internet (Angop 2015). In 2015, Angola had six media libraries in Luanda, Benguela, Huambo, Lubango, Saurimo, and Soyo, six mobile media libraries scattered across the country, and plans to establish six more of these structures by the end of the year. The government expects to have at least one of these media centers fully operational in each of Angola's 18 provinces by 2017 (Deutsche Welle 2015).

This project is part of the N'gola Digital program regarding the "Information Society and Technologies of Information and Communication" of the Angolan Ministry of Telecommunications and Information Technologies, which has as its main objectives to provide communities with computers connected to the Internet, and to organize workshops on how to use computers and software at different levels of proficiency. More recently, Movitel, an Angolan mobile phone company, developed a partnership with Facebook, the app "Internet.org", to provide free Internet access to a limited selection of websites related to news, health, employment, weather, and, of course, Facebook (*O País* 2015).

In Cape Verde, the history of the Internet began in 1996 and since then its use has become increasingly affordable to a growing number of people. In 2009, a study by the National Statistics Institute (Instituto Nacional de Estatística (INE)) revealed that in Cape Verde 45.7 percent of the population lived less than 15 minutes away from an Internet connection spot; the percentage was 61.6 percent in the capital city Praia, but in the interior municipality São Salvador do Mundo, only 6.8 percent (Instituto Nacional de Estatística 2009). São Salvador

do Mundo is situated in the central part of Santiago, the same island where the capital city Praia is located. The fact that the Cape Verdean authorities have decided to implement a program to offer free wireless Internet access near the city halls in most cities helped to improve the overall numbers. But also contributing to increasing the number of users and democratizing access is the fact that Cape Verde already has its schools, universities, libraries, and public services in general connected to the Internet.

According to the International Telecommunication Union (ITU), Cape Verde is part of the very small group of African countries with a relatively high proportion of the population online: in 2014, these were Seychelles (50 percent), South Africa (49 percent), Mauritius and Kenya (39 percent), and Cape Verde and Nigeria (38 percent). Cape Verde was not, however, highlighted in this report for its household penetration; only four out of a total of 38 countries in Africa had more than 30 percent of households with Internet access in 2013, and they were: Seychelles (51 percent), Mauritius (45 percent), South Africa (39 percent), and Ghana (32 percent) (ITU 2014: 87–88). Internet penetration levels and the use of new technologies among young people aged 15–24 is around 65 percent in Cape Verde. Finally, access to mobile broadband in Cape Verde and the level of prices of ICTs (the fifth lowest in Africa behind Seychelles, Mauritius, South Africa, and Botswana) were also important drivers of the rapid increase of Internet access in this country (National Communications Authority (Agência Nacional das Comunicações) 2013).

In Sao Tome and Principe the price of having Internet at home was, in 2011, more than 100 euros per month, which is extremely high for a country where 61.7 percent of the population was, in 2009, considered poor (World Bank 2009). The installation of fiber optic in 2012 made better services available, and lowered prices slightly in this country. Companies and international authorities, such as the Chinese government, have been assisting the government in Sao Tome and Principe in opening digital centers and in providing computers with Internet access to libraries throughout the country. This was the case in the Mé-Zóchi district, where a digital center with 30 computers was inaugurated in the village of Trindade, in March 2013, as a joint initiative of the Mé-Zóchi district and the National Institute of Research and Knowledge (Instituto Nacional de Investigação e Conhecimento (INIC)), and funded by the Taiwan Embassy in Sao Tome with US\$60,000. The Mé-Zóchi district has around 15,000 inhabitants, and especially for the underprivileged, this is the only opportunity to acquire digital skills and qualifications. This was not the only project of this kind supported by the Taiwan Embassy: there was also a digital center in the district of Cantagalo, and before Trindade and Cantagalo, the Taiwan Embassy had also supported the library in Principe Island (*Jornal Digital* 2013). Another noteworthy example is the ‘Internet4all’ program, implemented in 2004 by the company Bahnhof to train local communities in the use of the Internet.

The price of Internet services is an issue in Mozambique too. According to a report by Beyond Access,³ for over 95 percent of its population, Mozambique’s Internet services are unaffordable. Its fixed broadband connections are the fourth most expensive in the world, and while mobile services are less expensive, a subscription costs over 65 percent of the average family’s income (Beyond Access 2014). Nevertheless, the number of Internet service providers has been growing, which means an increase of companies, institutions, and individuals with Internet access. At the end of the 1990s, the Mozambican National Communications Institute had recorded only one ISP operating in the country, the Eduardo Mondlane University, and in 2014, there were more than 20. But Internet services are heavily concentrated in Maputo, the capital city, and many are reluctant to expand to interior and smaller cities, on the grounds of insufficient demand and unreliable electricity services (Balancing Act 2014).

The introduction of submarine cables in 2009 and 2010 has made access to cheaper international connectivity possible in Mozambique, but despite this, only a small minority of the population is able to purchase computers and have Internet access at home. Most people use the Internet at their workplaces or in Internet cafés and telecenters. There have been several initiatives by the government and NGOs to provide the country with these infrastructures. For example, in 2006, eight centers were set up to provide access to ICTs in rural communities, through the Social Communication Institute in cooperation with several international organizations as part of a government initiative. More recently, the government has been working with strategic partners to explore the potential of libraries to serve as points of Internet access.

In these countries, the Internet is not systematically controlled, and until now only the Angolan government has tried to regulate access and use of the Internet: in April 2011, it approved in parliament a law that allows authorities to control users and online content, and created a committee to analyze the existing Press Law and to work on the regulation of the Internet. In Mozambique, even though a number of sites remained untouched after criticizing the government, there were reports of government agents monitoring the email accounts of members of opposition political parties (Salgado 2014).

A Young Female Blogger and Opposition Politician in Mozambique

For her work as a politician, Maria Ivone Soares was one of the nominees for “African emergent personalities” in 2014, distinguished by the news magazine *The Africa Report*. Maria Ivone Soares has been considered a rising star in the context of opposition politics in Mozambique (see, for instance, Africa Intelligence 2015). For many of her party members and supporters of Mozambican National Resistance (RENAMO), she embodies part of the hopes of accomplishing sustainable changes in Mozambican politics in the near future. She represents a new generation, and embodies a different approach to politics based on dialogue and communication, in which the use of new media has been key.

The Mozambique Liberation Front (FRELIMO) has been ruling Mozambique since independence in 1975 and has won every election after the democratization process started at the beginning of the 1990s. FRELIMO and RENAMO have been the two main parties in the Mozambican party system, but more recently a new influential political force entered the game: RENAMO dissidents created a new political party, Democratic Movement of Mozambique (MDM), which participated in the 2009 election and managed to elect eight of 250 parliamentary deputies.

Mozambique has had regular elections since 1994, but FRELIMO has been consolidating its position the political scene. For instance, in the 2009 election, FRELIMO won with 75 percent in the presidential and legislative elections, while in 2004 the party had fewer votes: 62 percent in the legislative elections and 63.7 percent in the presidential election. While FRELIMO is winning supporters, RENAMO’s voting results took the opposite course. In 2004, the party had 29.7 percent in the legislative election and 31.7 percent in the presidential election, and in 2009 its votes decreased to 16.41 percent in the legislative election and 17.68 percent in the presidential election.

The high level of distrust between FRELIMO and RENAMO has been hindering the country’s democratization process. On several occasions, RENAMO questioned and refused to accept the election results, and threatened to boycott elections. RENAMO has also been involved in occasional guerrilla attacks and the RENAMO leader, Afonso Dhlakama, has been in hiding for some time in central Mozambique. Aside from these local skirmishes, the

country has been living in peace since the General Peace Agreement was signed in 1992 between RENAMO and FRELIMO, ending a 16-year-long civil war. The tension is nonetheless fully extended to political elites: for example, FRELIMO and RENAMO parliamentary groups frequently reject each other's proposals, regardless of the public value of the proposed policies. This constant lack of agreement has important consequences for political inclusion and the quality of public debate. It also diverts attention from the important issues that concern the population to party quarrels and disputes between political leaders, which end up being the focus of most of the mainstream media coverage.

Maria Ivone Soares is Afonso Dhlakama's niece, but also one of RENAMO's members of parliament, former RENAMO spokesperson, and former leader of the party youth. She has been an active blogger (mariaivonesoares.blogspot.com; rabiscosdasoares.blogspot.com; politicandomoz.blogspot.com), because she sees the potential of this means of communication to raise young people's criticism about the challenges that the country faces in maintaining a multi-party democracy. Maria Ivone Soares is outspoken and pointed to (for instance, by the sociologist Carlos Serra 2007) as an example of courage for assuming her identity in the blogosphere. Only in very few cases do people reveal their identity in the Mozambican blogosphere, and in the case of women, this is even rarer.

Although the Internet is not controlled on a systematic basis, there are reports of bloggers being ordered to cease their activities. Because of this, and also due to the relatively new environment of freedom, some bloggers prefer to maintain anonymity (Salgado 2012). Anonymity encourages the expression of opinions and is an important key driver for political participation in contexts such as this, where citizens are not accustomed to freedom and tolerance. Anonymity is also essential in contexts with constraints to freedom, where there might be persecutions of those who have a different opinion from the authorities or do not share the same views as the majority.

At the same time as the possibility of anonymity is regarded as a driver of political participation, it is also criticized for transforming spaces of participation, such as online news comments and blogs, into slander spaces used to insult opponents and to offend others. The personal attacks and defamation shielded by anonymity that often take place in these online spaces inhibit some citizens from participating in public life, particularly women, and hinder debates in general. Assessing whether anonymous comments and blogs are positive or negative to democratization processes is extremely complicated: although, on one hand, distortion of information and provocations are noticeable in many of these spaces, on the other hand, people tend to reveal more and feel more comfortable about exposing problems than they would be in situations where their face was shown and their name revealed.

Maria Ivone Soares is against anonymity in the blogosphere, but understands that some prefer to write under the protection of nicknames or in secrecy because they fear reprisals. In her blogs, she publishes posts about her position on issues, debates, and political decisions, but also poetry and personal thoughts. She also writes opinion articles regularly, and acknowledges the importance of independent news media in the Mozambican democratization process. According to her, independent news media outlets contribute to diminishing the information deficit regarding Mozambique's real problems and bring new approaches to issues and facts, because independent journalists try to balance news coverage, incorporating different and sometimes contradictory points of view, in addition to the official version of the FRELIMO government (Salgado 2014: 77).

With her political actions and behavior, Maria Ivone Soares intends to be a role model for young people, and girls in particular, inspiring them to speak freely about what is wrong in the country, and giving voice to all those who cannot speak for themselves. One of the reasons

why she decided to use new media is because, in her view, the multi-party democracy has been threatened in Mozambique, and the challenge is to arouse a posture of critical thought within the younger generations. Given the absence of spaces for opposition politicians to express their alternative ideas, blogs are a privileged space for free expression of opinions.

Activists and Political Prisoners or Troublemakers in Angola?

Although the Lusophone African blogosphere is awash with posts on politics, human rights issues, and opinions, including criticisms of political authorities, blogs are not a privileged means for collective action and mobilization, as they are mainly used as a means of individual expression. When the objective is to organize protest or support actions, other online tools are usually preferred, such as emails, SMS messages, and social networks.

In Angola, the right to freedom of association, although recognized in the Constitution, is not fully observed in practice. When the people who organize collective popular actions support the president, José Eduardo dos Santos, and the Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola (MPLA) party and government, there are no obstacles, and they are even assisted by the MPLA party structures. In contrast, when opposition parties or groups and movements that are critical of the president or of the government have tried to initiate actions, they have been quickly repressed by the authorities.

In June 2015, 15 to 17 young democracy activists were arrested and their documents and computers confiscated during a meeting in Luanda where they were gathered to discuss the situation in Angola. They were accused of an attempted *coup d'état* and of planning to harm the president. After the arrest, the Angolan organization Association for Justice, Peace and Democracy (AJPD) announced that they had been subjected to physical and psychological torture. The non-governmental organization Amnesty International issued a press release condemning what they called “another attempt by the Angolan authorities to intimidate anyone who thinks differently” (Amnesty International 2015). The case brought to mind the events that followed a protest action on 27 May 1977 against the then president, Agostinho Neto, which resulted in the death and disappearance of several people.

This new case involves a group of young educated people who have been very critical of the regime, because, according to them, Angola is a dictatorship, not a democracy. Angola started a democratization process at around the same time as the other Portuguese-speaking African countries in the early 1990s, but given the very low degree of its democratic consolidation and the many setbacks for freedom in general, there has been some ongoing discussion, both in the international press and in scholarly research, on whether the term “democracy” should be applied to the Angolan regime (for instance, Chabal 2002; Chabal and Vidal 2007; Salgado 2014).

The group of activists was composed of nearly 20 people (some went missing immediately after the meeting), including: rapper Luaty Beirão, who went on a hunger strike for 36 days to protest against these imprisonments; Manuel Nito Alves, a very young activist who was imprisoned for a couple of months in 2013 for wearing an anti-President dos Santos T-shirt, and who adopted the name of one of the leading voices (Nito Alves) against the former president, Agostinho Neto, in 1977; and university professor Nuno Dala. They were arrested and accused by the Criminal Investigation Services of the Interior Ministry of “preparing actions with the intention of changing the country’s order and public security” (*Público* 2015a).

The so-called Angolan Revolutionary Movement was inspired by the Arab Spring movements and mainly calls into question the permanence of President José Eduardo dos Santos, who has been in power since 1979 and is one of the longest ruling leaders in Africa.

They also argued for the observance of human rights and demanded improvements in public policies, as well as the end of corruption and poor governance. More recently, demonstrations were organized to demand an end to police violence against demonstrators.

The group was behind the organization of several demonstrations against President José Eduardo dos Santos, and its members were very active in the growing online protests, noticeably in different social networks and discussion forums. Opposition political parties and political and social movements not aligned with the MPLA government do not have access to mainstream media to convey their messages, and if they appear in the news, they are framed negatively as delinquents and troublemakers. Regarding the Angolan media system, the state-owned media are completely controlled by the MPLA, and private ownership does not necessarily mean being independent of the MPLA government, President José Eduardo dos Santos, and his close supporters. In recent years there has been an important attempt by the MPLA political elite to further control the media system, through the purchase and launch of private news media outlets. Such a strategy allows conveying an external image of plurality in the media and content suppliers, while completely filling the space allowed to private initiative, to prevent the actual alternative voices (independent from the MPLA) of getting access to their own spaces of expression. This should be interpreted as a form of constraining dissent and any contestation (Salgado 2014: 67).

In fact, the Internet and online media have become powerful tools to gain sympathizers and mobilize more supporters for political and other causes, especially when there are no alternatives within the mainstream media system. But they are also a means for regimes to control opponents and follow their activities closely. In fact, Evgeny Morozov (2011) has recently insisted on the idea, somewhat against the current, that Internet freedom is, in most cases, an illusion. He has drawn attention to evidence that confirms that the Internet can be used as an instrument by authoritarian regimes to maintain their power and to oppress citizens even more: in several places, dictators have been using the Internet to launch misinformation campaigns and have been pursuing dissidents through their online trails.

This group of Angolan political activists was closely monitored, and all their online tracks apparently followed by the regime to prevent new popular demonstrations and to control their actions in general. Their social network accounts were full of references to demonstrations and to the need to organize “strong movements and eventually evolve to political party interventions”. Words and phrases such as “revolution”, “fight against the regime”, “end corruption”, “end censorship” are common. In addition to the online surveillance, these young activists have also complained about the presence of “moles” (people working for the secret services) in some of their meetings.

Between 2011 and 2013, a few demonstrations were organized in Luanda by these activists, but the frequency of these events was dramatically reduced—not because of a lack of mobilization, but simply because the authorities were able to prevent them from happening. In the first events, the authorities allowed the demonstrations to start, but soon after, the police force intervened to identify and arrest some of the demonstrators, dispersing the remainder. More recently, the protests have been put down by the security forces even before they start, and due to this sometimes violent repression, many citizens are afraid of joining the protests (*Público* 2015b).

In Angola, following the events in Tunisia and Egypt, in March 2011, the protest began on the Internet when emails and an anonymous website (<http://revolucaoangolana.webs.com>) announced the “New Revolution of the Angolan people”, calling on people to demonstrate against the MPLA and the president. The MPLA government, not willing to tolerate any comparisons between Angola and the northern African countries, reacted strongly, ensuring

that public order would be maintained at any cost, despite the fact that the Angolan Constitution grants all citizens the right to demonstrate peacefully. In March 2011, and in several other demonstrations and demonstration attempts that followed (for example, in July 2011, March 2012, December 2012, March 2013, June 2013), the authorities responded with a heavy police presence. On some of these occasions, counter-demonstrations in favor of the government were organized to take place at the same time.

It is thus not surprising that the Angolan government has also prepared new legislation designed to control and restrict the online environment. In 2011, the National Assembly approved a bill criminalizing the use of the Internet and mobile phones to send any type of information without the prior written consent of everybody mentioned in its contents. This new law, presented as a data protection measure, establishes imprisonment time and allows the security forces to conduct searches and confiscate data and documents without a court order. It was also carefully designed to prevent protests initiated and coordinated through the Internet from happening.

In an effort to prevent online activism, there were also attempts to block social networks in Cameroon, Uganda, and Swaziland; however, Angola was at the forefront with regard to drafting repressive legislation. This attempt to regulate online activity comes in line with the MPLA government's restrictive posture towards the media in general. It also shows that, although Internet penetration levels are not particularly high, the number of people with access is already enough to shake the political situation slightly. Until a few years ago, almost no one dared to criticize the president in public; however, more recently the Internet and the pro-democracy and freedom initiatives have encouraged more people to show their discontent.

Online Political Activism in Cape Verde: Young People, New Media

In Cape Verde at the beginning of 2015, a similar group of young people decided to join forces to engage in politics actively as a civic movement. They have subsequently been successful in organizing demonstrations and mobilizing the Cape Verdean youth, among others. It all started with the deep disappointment among young citizens about their job prospects, the direction the country was going, and the behavior of the ruling elites in general.

The civic action movement Movimento de Acção Cívica, MAC#114, is a political, yet non-partisan, movement, founded by a group of young jobless graduates, young professionals, and students with the objectives of involving young people in the political decisions that affect their lives and of making the youth more aware of their rights. The group, founded and led by 33-year-old sociology graduate and farmer Rony Moreira, has opted for a decentralized leadership model present throughout the main Cape Verde cities, and wants to function as a “pressure group” committed to raising civic awareness among young people and the underprivileged in general.

Rony Moreira was formerly affiliated with the African Party for the Independence of Cape Verde (PAICV), and a youth leader who was expelled for criticizing some of the party leaders' positions, which in his opinion were not following the ideals of a left-wing party committed to promoting equality of rights and opportunities for all and to allocating the country's public resources in a balanced way. Some of the other names involved in the movement are: Adilson Correia, from Assomada (a city in the interior of Santiago island), who is 29 years old and an electronics teacher; Vacilísio Gomes, 28 years old, a political science and international relations graduate student at the University of Mindelo, in São Vicente island; and Jassy Sousa, an international relations graduate from Sal island. They share the goal of mobilizing Cape

Verdean public opinion so as to debate issues that concern the population, such as unemployment, insecurity, poverty, injustice, and inequality (interview with MAC#114 members, by newspaper *A Semana*).

Cape Verde is usually pointed out as an example in Africa of the successful implementation of a democratic regime, because the development of democratic institutions has been sustainable and long-lasting. With very few resources and a very dry climate, Cape Verde is considered a poor country. Successive governments in the democratization period have tried to circumvent some of these difficulties by making important investments in human resources formation. Cape Verde is currently one of the few sub-Saharan African countries with a medium human development index (in the same group as South Africa, Botswana, and Namibia),⁴ and is pointed to as one of the most free countries, both for journalists and the general population. Despite the overall good indicators in terms of both human development and democratic consolidation, Cape Verde currently faces important challenges, such as increasing levels of criminality across the country, mainly related to drug and alcohol abuse and growing youth unemployment. The country's strategic location along drug-trafficking routes is another major concern, given that this could mean a rapid increase in criminality and insecurity in general, influencing negatively both the unemployed youth and the rising tourism sector, one of the most important economic sectors in the country.

Despite successful democratic consolidation, some issues regarding a strong political bipolarization between the two main parties, PAICV and Movement for Democracy (MpD), and the obstacles that fringe political actors face to be included in debates and to be covered by the mainstream media, have been raised. In addition, the existence of corruption in the form of vote buying represents an institutionalized strategy of electoral campaigning. There is political and party competition, but translated into strong bipolarization between the two main political parties that have been alternating in power. Small political forces complain about the political bipolarization that prevents them from achieving better results in elections and denounce the use of public resources by the two main political parties. Also lacking in Cape Verde is the deepening of a culture of criticism, in which the population feels less apprehensive about questioning the government's decisions and action, as well as structures that mobilize and organize all those citizens who are unhappy with the current state of affairs and the way governments, parties, and members of parliament have been conducting politics.

What is at stake for MAC#114 is the right to equal opportunities and social justice—basically, the idea that the distribution of opportunities, wealth, and privileges needs to be fair in Cape Verde. So it is no coincidence that the trigger that became their first great battle and propelled the first street protests was the approval of new regulation regarding the Statute of Political Position Holders in Parliament. The new proposed statute included more privileges, such as a 65 percent salary increase considered immoral by these activists, given the situation in which most of the people live. They were also against the fact that members of parliament are not obliged to restrict their employment, which opens the door to situations of intermingling of business, political, and even media interests.

The “114” in the name of the movement is related to article 114 of the Rules of Procedure at the National Assembly. It is invoked whenever an MP wants to defend their honor and was included in the name of the movement because these activists want to restore the honor of the unemployed and the underprivileged Cape Verdean citizens. Although it is a movement clearly identified with Cape Verdean youth, its support structure has widened quickly, and it now includes people from different social, religious, and political sectors of society.

Probably inspired by other political movements, such as the *Indignados* in Portugal and Spain, MAC#114 stands for a participatory model of democracy, a more inclusive configuration of power that takes into account different interests in the policy-making process, with citizens' political involvement going beyond their vote in elections. MAC#114 also criticizes the type of "clientelist democracy" that both PAICV and MpD have supposedly been implementing, in which social mobility and job opportunities are related to belonging to these parties. Basically, the ideas of participation, equitable distribution of resources, social justice, and equal opportunities drive this political movement, and are supported by the objectives of raising citizens' awareness about their rights and democratic ideals in general, while providing them with the necessary structures of mobilization as tools to affect changes in politics.

In Cape Verde, the media system is an accurate picture of the bipolarization of the political system. The two political parties that have alternated in government (PAICV and MpD), have at one time or another controlled the broadcasting sector (state-owned television and radio stations), while the weekly private newspapers are divided in support of these two parties. In terms of news content, the newspapers' political orientation is noticeable in opinions and commentaries, but also in how information is selected and presented. For instance, the smaller political forces often complain about the difficulties in getting their messages across in the mainstream media (Salgado 2014: 168). The press's monitoring role is therefore somehow compromised, and at the same time, the two main parties' institutional communication is usually very strong.

With no access to the mainstream media agenda, MAC#114 has taken to social networks, especially Facebook, which has become its most important communication tool when it comes to both informing about the movement's objectives and mobilizing people for collective action. Use of the Internet as a means of influence, and as a tool to express opinions, is not new in Cape Verde. Since its use started to expand, the Internet has been used by different political and social actors, first through blogs, and then increasingly through social networking websites, to read and comment on the news, and to publish blogs on different topics. MAC#114 is the first example of systematic use of the Internet for citizens' mobilization.

An Online Journalist in Sao Tome and Principe

The Santomean journalist Abel Veiga has made the Internet his working environment. Because he launched the first online paper in 2000, he is considered one of the "fathers of digital journalism" in the archipelago. *Téla Non* was not only the first online paper in Sao Tome and Principe, but it was also the only daily newspaper in the country. *Téla Non* was also the first to allow readers' comments and to promote discussions about news and issues in general, and is one of the very few independent media outlets operating in the country.

Sao Tome and Principe's media system reflects the characteristics of a very small and very poor country, with extremely high newspaper prices for the general population, a very small advertising market and extremely low newspaper-reading rates. Independent news media are rare in Sao Tome and Principe. In addition to the high level of politicization of the news media, two other reasons explain this: severe economic difficulties, and widespread self-censorship among the small journalistic community (the Union of Journalists estimates that the number of journalists was around 100 in 2012).

When compared with online newspapers in other Portuguese-speaking African countries, *Téla Non* is indeed one of the online papers with more comments from readers. They are

given the opportunity to comment on the issues raised by the news stories, but readers also use the space to request and exchange different kinds of information among themselves, making this website an actual forum for citizens. Although on a smaller scale when compared with consolidated democracies and more developed countries, the immediate result of these different online publications is that more information and new perspectives on issues, actors, and events are available, including foreign experiences and foreign evaluations of national experiences (Salgado 2014).

Téla Non is widely read by politicians, journalists, students, civil servants, and the remaining small fraction of the population with Internet access (the price of having Internet access at home was around 100 euros per month in 2011), but most of its readers are located abroad. These include business people with interests in Sao Tome and Principe, and the diaspora community that is a very important audience for *Téla Non*, especially from countries such as Portugal, Brazil, Angola, Cape Verde, the United Kingdom, France, and the United States of America. In fact, the number of average monthly website users from Portugal was three times higher than Santomean users in 2012.

In addition to the important international exposure of this online newspaper, *Téla Non*'s content also reaches parts of the population in Sao Tome and Principe without Internet access through other news media outlets and such means as friends, colleagues, and word of mouth. So, despite major limitations in access to the Internet for a large part of the population, content published online can reach wider audiences through other means of communication (some television and radio shows present summaries of the online press headlines), or even through interpersonal communication. Important and controversial news stories are often printed and distributed, and, for instance, in the city of Sao Tome, some taxi drivers print some of *Téla Non*'s news stories for their clients to read during the ride. Due to scarce human resources some private radio stations feed their news reports with *Téla Non*'s news content, functioning in this way as “resonance boxes”.

This is all the more important as *Téla Non* has a vital role in setting the media agenda, because it covers some of the events and issues that the state-owned media prefer to ignore. Abel Veiga sees online media, both newspapers and blogs, as extremely important for improving the quality and the plurality of information in Sao Tome and Principe. The Santomean online informational environment has contributed to offer different—and sometimes contradictory—versions of issues and events, and it has also stimulated competition between news media outlets, which has contributed to improve the overall quality of news content. All of this has had a positive influence on both freedom of information and freedom of expression in the country.

In the Santomean context, Abel Veiga has a bold vision of the role of the news media. For him, democracy means open debate and plurality of views, so only with the existence of such conditions can any country be considered democratic. The Constitution has guaranteed freedom of expression since 1991 and freedom of the press is also ensured by law. However, there are constraints that limit the levels of freedom in the country: “Journalists are often intimidated, which results in high levels of self-censorship. There are no beatings, but journalists deal with threats, professional retaliations, judicial processes” (interview conducted by the author of this chapter on 29 June 2011; for more information, see Salgado 2014: 93–108).

Those in power are accustomed to control the media in Sao Tome and Principe. The state-owned television and radio stations are instruments used by the ruling parties, and most of the private news media are also controlled indirectly. There are very few independent news media outlets and there have been many different attempts to silence their voices or to

persuade them to support the party in power. Its international impact makes *Téla Non* particularly interesting for politicians. In addition, *Téla Non* has always had a critical approach that arises from its stated mission of monitoring the conduct of elected officials and politicians in general. This objective is nevertheless often perceived by politicians as a hidden agenda to overthrow governments and political leaders. Abel Veiga believes that *Téla Non*'s open nature, promoting participation and debates, is essential to its mission, and argues that the objective is to act on behalf of the population, showing and discussing what is wrong, not to overthrow any government.

Political instability is an issue in Sao Tome and Principe. Since its transition to a multi-party system in 1991, this country has had many more governments and prime ministers than elections: in 20 years there were 19 prime ministers, and no government lasted a full parliamentary term. This is one of the effects of strong disagreements between political parties and even stronger personal (more than ideological) divergences among the political elites (Salgado 2014: 83). The fact that Sao Tome and Principe is a very small country does not help, because most people know each other personally. There are many grudges accumulated over the years, and relations between politicians and the independent news media are often conflicting.

The constraints to journalistic work are worse in the case of the independent media. Their access to political sources is very limited, because governments prefer to release information through the state-owned media to ensure control of the actual news content, and in some cases, the political elites even order information blackouts against the independent media. The argument used is that the media need to speak with a single voice to prevent political instability, and that too much plurality and debate would, in fact, be harmful for democracy. Abel Veiga completely disagrees with these arguments, and sees the politicians as the only ones responsible for political instability. In his view, plurality is an extremely important value, and online newspapers and blogs have been contributing to improved freedom in Sao Tome and Principe, and promoting debate on issues. Many of these publications have been developed outside the political elites' control, which makes them particularly important in a democracy-building context.

Prospects and Different Democratic Developments

These histories of the Internet illustrate the state of democratic development of Mozambique, Angola, Cape Verde, and Sao Tome and Principe. These are histories of individuals and groups in respect to their ideals and goals, and their use of the Internet, but these are also accounts of freedom of the press, plurality, freedom of expression, freedom of association, and of struggles for equal rights and social justice.

The Internet has enabled alternative power dynamics, which in these cases have more or less conflicted and challenged the status quo. These actors, movements, and publications emerged and flourished in their national contexts due to the Internet. They represent new ways of mediating political communication and power in contexts where the Internet is more than just a new media vehicle for political information. Enhancing creative practices and shaping interplays, it provides opportunities to go beyond established discourses, and contributes to creating new power configurations. However, the impact on democracy is not always the same: in some cases, the Internet has forced some openness, while in others it has caused further repression. It is, thus, a mistake to assume that a country is only going to be more democratic and free because of the Internet.

Some of the most democratizing features of the Internet are related to the democratization of information: not only has the Internet the potential to multiply information producers, but it can also facilitate access to more diverse sources of information. The Internet therefore offers the potential for decentralized information production and distribution, allowing more ideas and opinions to circulate, which in itself is a valuable tool in democracy. The Internet also has the potential to boost citizen mobilization and participation. How the Internet's potential is explored and how the available information is used varies according to context.

The Internet opens up new possibilities that are the result of technological innovation and development, but the ways in which it is used are strongly shaped by the surrounding environment. In Cape Verde, it has allowed activists to mobilize the population and influence policy making, but in Angola it was used as a surveillance weapon against the pro-democracy activists. In Mozambique, the Internet serves as means of communication for an opposition politician, and in Sao Tome and Principe as a medium for an independent press. Some of the Internet's most important distinctive features—interconnectivity, immediacy, interactivity, anonymity, the possibility of becoming “viral”—can be useful to both dictators and democrats. The Internet is shaped by actors according to their histories, goals, and ability to use it.

Notes

1. This chapter is part of a larger research project funded by the Portuguese Foundation for Science and Technology and developed between 2008 and 2014, which included extensive fieldwork and interviews with local actors.
2. Guinea Bissau is not included in this study.
3. Beyond Access is an initiative of IREX, an international non-profit organization with support from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation.
4. The human development index is one of the United Nations Development Programme's tools to assess the overall quality of life of human beings. It is a statistic derived from combined indices on life expectancy, education, and income in each country, and is used to compare and rank countries. Countries are usually divided into three groups: high, medium, and low human development. Most of the sub-Saharan African countries are in the “low human development” group.

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