

Preface

Though the terms are independent and often conjoined, the media in Africa have always played an important role in democratic and non-democratic states. African countries under autocratic dispensations have witnessed media collaborations with civil society to resist and oppose as well as to confirm prevailing public and political views on issues of the day. As well, media in African nations transiting from autocracy to democracy have focused on politicians, diplomats, activists, and members of civil society who worked toward completion of political transformations. As institutions, the mass media have also been objects of scrutiny, particularly when they are controlled by government and/or are run by major businesses and when their editorial policies are either influenced by partisanship or by profit margins; both of which stir controversies. Communication researchers, in particular those whose publications focus on the media and political institutions in Africa, have extensively treated foregoing issues using competing paradigms and different methodological approaches.

This book steps into that tradition but offers new insights into the ways in which old and new media and communication technologies have influenced Africa's struggles for social and political change in the 21st Century. While the "Arab Spring" events have rekindled scholars' interests in the new/media's role in democratic shifts worldwide, little attention has been paid to the way in which these winds of change are affecting countries on the African continent. The easy but deceptive answer could be that most African countries have been immune from these political upheavals because of the intransigence of political regimes, failed democratic transitions, and/or stultifying political cultures in most of the continent. A closer analysis of African realities and developments, however, would reveal an alternative portrait of several fundamental changes that are constantly transforming the political and cultural landscapes. This book documents these transformations by focusing on how traditional mass media and new information and communication tools are spawning digital cultures that contribute to the continent's long struggle for democracy. Contributing authors—twenty-six in all based on four continents—offer theoretical depth, a broad set of cases and national experiences for consideration by (new) media and democracy scholars as well as practitioners in government, inter-governmental and non-governmental organizations and activists in civil society—all of whom are concerned with the focus of this volume.

Contributors analyze national cases in which both traditional and new media have been deeply involved in Africa's struggle for social and political change. Several reasons explain the editors' decision to devote roughly a quarter of the book to "traditional" media. One of the reasons is our strong conviction that the terms "old" and "new" might be simplistic and misleading in suggesting a neat and rigid distinction between traditional mass media and digital media. In reality, however, the boundaries between "old" and "new" media are more fluid and fuzzy as traditional media increasingly move toward digitization—bearing in mind as well that segments of the media now categorized as "old" were at a stage in media-technology

development considered “new.” Radio was “new” and posed challenges to “old” newspapers; when TV was “new” it posed challenges to “old” radio and so on. In today’s world of convergence all those media forms remain in coexistence. For instance, African newspapers, as an example of traditional or “old” media, have been moving to digitize their contents in order to make them available online to local and diaspora audiences. Newspapers’ incorporation of “new” media goes beyond the online availability of their content to include adaptation of “new” media formats, such as blogging, in reporting the news. The boundaries become even fuzzier and muddled when some well-established newspapers in the West, such as *The Christian Science Monitor*, cease their print edition and decide to exclusively publish their news reports online. The nature of the medium aside, media professionals in African countries are working in outfits that combine both traditional media and “new media” environments. Today’s reporters are expected to post their stories online, be proficient in the use of social media, as well as possess “traditional” media skills, such as reporting and writing. In addition, the legal and regulatory environments in which “old” and “new” media operate are largely similar, if not the same, in many countries. Many governments of African states have found ways to impose restrictions on new media—including those whose operations are in remote places (e.g., African Diasporas). To this end, many contributors’ chapters straddle both “old” and “new” media references, though some chapters weigh heavily on one than the other.

The book’s thematic organization brings “traditional” and “new” media together to address two overarching and interrelated questions: How have new information and communication technologies informed traditional media’s struggle for political and social reforms in Africa? And how might “new” media be called upon in the fight for political reform? Section I, “The Politics of Change: Traditional Media, New Journalism and the Struggle for Reform,” includes contributions that analyze several African nations’ struggles to enact credible reforms and enhance sustainable democratic institutions. In Section II of the book, “Technologies of Change: Understanding Africa’s New Media Landscape,” the contributors switch gears and critically assess the “new” media debates in Africa, presenting actual cases in which new media played, or were called upon to play, a central role in the fight for social and political reforms. Within these two sections of the book, the chapters are organized geographically: We begin each section from North Africa, move to East, West, Central African nations and end with contributions focused on Southern African nations.

This book does not sugarcoat strides that have been made in several African nations nor does it cover transgressions involving stakeholders across government, media (old and new), and citizens as the struggle for the administrative souls of represented African countries continue. On the contrary, contributing authors unabashedly assess the successes and challenges that have accompanied attempts to install democratic governance in African countries. Authors responded to Editors’ call for chapters that question received answers and problematize the consistencies and inconsistencies between principles and institutions informing western democracy vis-à-vis African political cultures. Many authors identified autocratic symptoms in the form of stringent media regulations including cases where newly installed media reforms have been reversed. Simply put, and as readers will find, the implementation of democratic reforms in Africa’s political systems have had mixed outcomes and influences on personal and institutional freedoms to engage in social and political discourse. This book volume takes stock of these developments.

From the editors’ initial call for chapters, the ambition driving this book project was abundantly clear. We wanted to publish a volume that would connect scholarship from both the global North and South in the analysis of Africa’s complex social, cultural and political landscapes. The original vision was to have a volume that would transcend the traditional biases of geography and politics by providing a broad and

deep coverage of African democratic experiences. Showcasing seasoned and upcoming scholars from four continents, we are pleased and grateful that this crop of contributors has assisted us to achieve these lofty goals. We thank all the contributors for their time and effort, and we would like to express our deep gratitude to the scholars who assisted us in peer-reviewing more than 60 initial submissions. Their rigorous assessments made this work possible. We are grateful to Dean Douglas Anderson and Associate Dean Marie Hardin—both of the College of Communications at the Pennsylvania State University—for their generous donation of funds with which we employed editorial assistants. We appreciate the assistance of Dr. Ralph B. Ojebuyi of the Department of Communication and Language Arts at the University of Ibadan. Though removed by many nautical miles, he assisted with proofreading under a stringent deadline but with diligence. To IGI’s editorial staff, thank you for your dedication and indispensable assistance through stages of the publication process. We dedicate this work to our families whose sacrifice and tolerance have made this book possible. In the final analysis the main actors, heroes and heroines in our analyses of the trajectories of democratic governance in Africa are its peoples—Africans of all ethnic and racial backgrounds who have gone through decades of struggle in search of “good governance.” We doff our hats to their courage over the years and continuing resilience.

Aziz Douai

University of Ontario Institute of Technology, Canada

Anthony Olorunnisola

Pennsylvania State University, USA