CHINA AND THE AFRICAN INTERNET: PERSPECTIVES FROM KENYA AND ETHIOPIA

CHINA Y EL INTERNET AFRICANO: PERSPECTIVAS DESDE KENIA Y ETIOPÍA

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Abstract: Through the lens of China in Africa, this paper explores the transformations in the relationship between the Internet and the state. China's economic success, impressive growth of Internet users and relative stability have quietly promoted an example of how the Internet can be deployed within the larger political and economic strategies of developing states, moving beyond the democratization paradigm promoted in the West. New evidence suggests that this model is becoming increasingly popular, but it is not clear why and how it is spreading. Through a case study comparison of an emerging democracy, Kenya, and a semi-authoritarian country, Ethiopia, where China has recently increased its involvement in the communications sector, this paper investigates whether and how the ideas of state stability, development and community that characterize the strategies pursued by the Chinese government are influencing and legitimizing the development of a less open model of the Internet. It analyses how new ideas, technologies and norms integrate with existing ones and which factors influence their adoption or rejection. It is based on fieldwork conducted in Ethiopia and in Kenya between 2011 and 2013, where data was collected through mapping Internet related projects involving Chinese companies and authorities, analysing Internet policies and regulations, and interviewing officials in Ministries of Communication, media lawyers, Internet activists, and Chinese employed in the media and telecommunication sector in Kenya and Ethiopia. **Keywords:** China, Internet, Africa, state policies, Kenya, Ethiopia.

Resumen: Desde la óptica de China en África, este artículo explora las transformaciones en la relación entre Internet y el estado. El éxito económico de China, el impresionante crecimiento de usuarios de Internet y estabilidad relativa ha promovido un ejemplo tranquilo de cómo Internet puede ser desplegado dentro de las más amplias estrategias políticas y económicas de los estados en desarrollo, más allá del paradigma de la democratización promovida en Occidente. Existen nuevas evidencias que sugieren que este modelo está siendo cada

vez más popular, pero no está claro por qué y cómo se está extendiendo. A través de un estudio de caso comparativo de una democracia emergente, Kenia, y un país semi-autoritario, Etiopía, donde China ha aumentado recientemente su participación en el sector de las comunicaciones, este trabajo investiga hasta qué punto y de qué manera las ideas de la estabilidad del Estado, el desarrollo y la comunidad que caracterizan las estrategias adoptadas por el gobierno chino están influyendo y legitimando el desarrollo de un modelo menos abierto de Internet. Se analiza cómo las nuevas ideas, tecnologías y normas se integran con las ya existentes y qué factores influyen en su adopción o rechazo. El artículo se basa en el trabajo de campo llevado a cabo en Etiopía y en Kenia entre 2011 y 2013, donde se recogieron datos a través del análisis de proyectos relacionados con Internet en los que participan empresas y autoridades chinas, así como el estudio de las políticas y reglamentos de internet, y complementando con entrevistas a funcionarios de los Ministerios de Comunicación, especialistas en derecho de las comunicaciones, activistas de Internet, así como profesionales chinos del sector de las telecomunicaciones en Kenia y Etiopía. **Palabras clave:** China, Internet, África, políticas públicas, Kenia, Etiopía.

1. Introduction

Since the third Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC), which took place in Beijing in 2006, the Chinese media have begun a steady march to get closer to Africa and to gain influence in its mediasphere. This process has displayed signs of continuity and discontinuity with China's previous attempts to influence ideas and perceptions on the continent. It has included both old and new communication technologies, and has developed through a mix of bold policy decisions as well as trials and errors.

The relocation of the Regional Editorial Office for Africa of the state controlled news agency Xinhua from Paris to Nairobi in 2006 represented the first symbolic step of this new strategy.[1] The same year, China Radio International also began to seek partnerships with national broadcasters in Africa to relay some of its content and make it more accessible to local audiences (Cooper, 2009). The expansion of traditional media has been followed by some unprecedented initiatives in the new media and telecommunication sector. In 2011, Xinhua launched what it labelled as the first "mobile newspaper" in Africa (Xinhua News Agency, 2011). Developed in Kenya in partnership with Huawei, China's largest telecom-

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[01] Xinhua's correspondents had historically been China's eyes and ears on the continent, even before China had established embassies in Africa, but while Xinhua's had established numerous national bureaux (the first in Egypt in 1956), it had never had a regional office for Africa.

munications and service company, and Safaricom, Kenya's leading mobile operator, it allowed mobile subscribers to receive news selected by Xinhua via Multimedia Messaging Service (MMS). The project was only partially successful and it was discontinued in 2012, but it signalled a willingness on the part of Chinese companies and media to experiment with new formats and find alternative ways to compete in an increasingly crowded "market for loyalties" (Price, 2002). Alongside these media initiatives, which have been aimed at reaching wider audiences in Africa through different channels, since 2006 the Chinese government and Chinese companies have also begun to play an increasingly important role in the continent's telecommunication sector, as symbolized by the multi-billion dollar loan from China's EXIM Bank to the Ethiopian government's Ethio-Telecom, the country's sole telecom operator, to increase access to the Internet and mobile phones, a project later undertaken by Chinese telecom giants ZTE and Huawei (Gagliardone, Stremlau, & Nkrumah, 2012).

These initiatives present both signs of continuity and discontinuity with the past. China's diplomatic relations with Africa date back to the 1950s and have been characterized from the very beginning by the provision of aid and by attempts to communicate not just with elites but with African audiences at large (Brautigam, 2009; Chau, 2007). China's Prime Minister Chou En-lai first articulated China's strategy of engagement with Africa during his visit to the continent 1964, and, despite claims that today's China is transforming development practice in Africa, the modes of its engagement seems to have remained almost unchanged. As Chou's first two points indicate:

> The Chinese Government always bases itself on the principle of equality and mutual benefit in providing aid to other countries. It never regards such aid as a kind of unilateral alms but as something mutual and helpful to economic cooperation.
>
> In providing aid to other countries, the Chinese Government strictly respects the sovereignty and independence of the recipient countries, and never attaches any conditions or asks for any privileges (Hevi, 1967).

Together with the other six principles, which offer a more detailed indication of the financial instruments that China would employ when providing aid and of the lifestyle Chinese workers should adopt abroad, these continue to represent the pillars of China's engagement with the continent also in the new millennium (Brautigam, 2009).

Some important differences, however, do exist between China's past and present efforts in Africa. I focus on three here, which are particularly relevant for the

media. The first is the disappearance of ideology from the language of China-Africa cooperation. In 1964, together with the eight principles regulating aid and cooperation highlighted above, Chou enunciated other five principles substantiating the type of political engagement China was concurrently seeking in the continent. The first principle declared that "China supports the Arab and African peoples in their struggle to oppose imperialism and old and new colonialism and to win and safeguard national independence" (Hevi, 1967, p. 8). China's efforts in Africa during de-colonization were closely linked to its efforts to export and strengthen the socialist revolution in the continent (Chau, 2007; Tan-Mullins, Mohan, & Power, 2010). Today, these have largely been replaced by admissions of China's interest in Africa's resources and untapped potential. It is as if the deletion of the socialist cause as the goal of China-Africa engagement had promoted the principles of "mutual benefit" and "sovereignty and independence" to the rank of ideological guides of the new engagement.

A second major difference between China's earlier and current presence in Africa depends on the sheer scale of resources China is now able to deploy on the continent. While in the 1960s-1970s China had to partially disengage from Africa because of the damage the "great leap forward" and the "cultural revolution" were causing to its own economy (Shinn & Eisenman, 2012), the 2000s-2010s belong to an era of plenty and Chinese actors, including Chinese media, have been able to invest and operate in spaces where others simply do not have the resources to act.

A final, closely connected, element characterizing contemporary China-Africa relations is the mix of interest and fear they are producing among traditional donor countries. While during the Cold-War China's presence in Africa was minimized by the competition between the USA and the USSR (Chau, 2007; Shinn & Eisenman, 2012), today's China is acting as a game changer. In 2011, the then US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton in her visit to Tanzania made the USA's concerns clear about the possibilities of a "new colonialism" in Africa and a few months later, UK Prime Minister David Cameron's warned its audience in Lagos that new forms of "authoritarian capitalism" may take root in the continent. Similar concerns have been expressed also about the detrimental role China may have in the media sector in Africa, increasing authoritarianism and undermining Western efforts to promote openness and freedom of expression (Farah & Mosher, 2010; Kurlantzick, 2007). These concerns are largely based on the assumptions that, as Western countries have tried to promote their models in Africa, China will try to export its own. No studies to date, however, have proved this to be the case, and greater empirical evidence is needed to fully understand the nature, scope and implications

of China's new role in the African mediasphere. This article aims at providing a contribution in this direction, adding to ongoing efforts to understand China's role in Africa in empirical rather than ideological terms that have characterized works in development studies and international relations (see for example Brautigam, 2009; Shinn & Eisenman, 2012), but have so far had little application to the media.

2. Partner, prototype or persuader?

China's increasing involvement in the media in Africa can represent a critical entry point to understand the broader political implications of China–Africa relationship. So far, however, similarly to what has been the case in other areas where China has stepped up its presence, there has been a tendency to frame its role in relation to what Western countries have done or are doing on the continent, rather than in its own terms. Hillary Clinton has warned Africans about risks of a "new colonialism", a concept that belongs to the history of Europe in Africa rather than of China, while David Cameron has spoken of "authoritarian capitalism", suggesting how China may be adding darker tones to ideas the West has tried to promote on the continent for decades.[2] In the case of the media, this tendency has been evident in the alarms raised about the possibility that China could act as a net exporter of authoritarianism (Farah & Mosher, 2010), selling its own strategies of media development and media control abroad and countering the efforts of countries such as the US and the UK which, while stressing the role of the media in the democratization of Africa, have encouraged the adoption of aspects characterizing their own media models (Price, 2002; Putzel & Van der Zwan, 2006).

Elsewhere I have proposed a framework that can encourage understanding of Chinese engagement in the African mediasphere for its original contributions, and not simply as a negative of the impression left by the West (Gagliardone, Stremlau, and Nkrumah 2012). This framework emerged as part of a collective effort among scholars from Africa, China and Europe who gathered in Oxford in 2010 to explore ways to approach the study of China's emerging role in the media in Africa, balancing out different perspectives and building a shared research agenda. The framework was tested and further refined through fieldwork in

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[02] For Hillary Clinton's remarks see for example Flavia Krause-Jackson, 'Clinton Chastises China on Internet, African 'New Colonialism' **http://www.bloomberg.com/news/2011-06-11/clinton-chastises-china-on-internet-african-new-colonialism-.html.** And for David Cameron's see Jason Groves, 'Cameron warns Africans over the 'Chinese invasion' as they pour billions into continent' **http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2016677/Cameron-warns-Africans-Chinese-invasion-pour-billions-continent.html** Last accessed 13 July.

Ghana, Kenya and Ethiopia.[3] This framework breaks down China's actions on the continent according to China's ability to act as a partner, a prototype, and a persuader. These categories are meant to add greater nuance to the analysis of China's actions on the continent, questioning whether or not China's role as a partner sponsoring media and ICT projects on the continent is facilitating the diffusion of some aspects that characterise its domestic media system, rather than assuming this will be the case. They seek to de-ideologise the debate on Western versus Eastern developmental models, enabling research findings to show, for example, how the partnership between China and a given African country may enhance some aspects of the local media that fit within a Western liberal framework while they do not belong to China's media system. Finally, they allow research to highlight areas of collaboration between different development actors, where their relative strengths can enable common goals to be reached, but also common patterns of exploitation, where the interventions of different donors contribute to empower specific actors, such as government's, and disempower others. Each category is briefly described below.

China's role as a partner is apparent in the resources it provides to African countries to implement projects that are deemed important for social and economic development. China has provided substantial financial and technical inputs to the expansion of the ICT infrastructure in authoritarian regimes (as in the case of Ethiopia discussed below), but also in democratic countries such as Ghana, where its contribution of US$ 180 million has helped realizing one of the most ambitious e-government projects in West Africa, reinforcing the ability of the central administration to communicate with the peripheries of the state and to provide more effective services to citizens (Gagliardone et al., 2012). China has similarly offered support to state broadcasters in selected countries: Kenya and Zambia are the most popular examples (Banda 2009). Even if China has traditionally felt uncomfortable with the term 'donor' (Brautigam 2010; Mawdsley 2012), the activities it sponsors in this area are those usually funded by bilateral and multilateral donor agencies, and, in some cases, China has offered an alternative to traditional donors for African countries willing to develop projects in this area. But while the role of Western donors as partners has usually been conditional upon the acceptance of at least some of the elements characteristic of Western media systems, China has stressed its intention to maintain a separation between these two dimensions and its willingness to simply respond

[03] More information about the workshop's programme, participants and outcomes can be accessed at **http://pcmlp.socleg.ox.ac.uk/research/project/china-and-africa-media-policy.** Last accessed 10.09.2013.

to the demands of its African partners. While this 'no strings attached' policy may be consistent, this does not mean that it is neutral or free of impact. For example, while Western donors have tended to favour media projects benefitting the private sector and the civil society, or projects creating incentives for the state to open a dialogue with other forces in society, China has displayed a tendency to privilege government actors, thus increasing governments' capacity vis-à-vis other critical components in the development of a media system. Within this dimension, assessing who benefits from China's increased role as a partner in the media sector becomes particularly important.

China in also increasingly perceived as a prototype by countries seeking to balance between investment in ICTs and containment of the risks of political instability new technologies may bring. In a Wikileaks cable reporting a meeting between Sebhat Nega, one of the Ethiopian government's ideologues, and the then US ambassador Donald Yamamoto, for example, Sebhat was reported to have openly declared his admiration for China and stressed that Ethiopia "needs the China model to inform the Ethiopian people".[4] Some have called its mix of proactive and reactive measures aimed at facilitating a controlled expansion of the Internet while leaving the established power structure unchallenged, 'Chinese media model' (Farah & Mosher 2010). China, however, has historically been reluctant to label its own as a model ready to be exported, preferring to refer to specific, but not necessarily cohesive, strategies it has adopted to face the problems it encountered throughout its own development. Some of these strategies may be copied and adapted by other countries but Chinese leaders and diplomats have tended to challenge the idea of China as an "active teacher", a term coined by Martha Finnemore (1993) to describe international actors attempting to socialize other countries to new ideas and practices.

Finally, China's role in Africa can be assessed according to its modality and ability to act as a persuader, shaping opinions in ways that favour either its image abroad or a particular agenda it supports. This third dimension is in the realm of public diplomacy, which China has stepped up through expanding the reach and content of its international broadcasters, including China Central Television and China Radio International, and of its news agency, Xinhua. Furthermore, cultural diplomacy has grown through the continued establishment of Confucius institutes, and programs that offer scholarships for foreign students and journalists to study in China. Still within its role of persuader, China has concurrently pursued a strategy that has distinguished it from its Western competitors, maximising the symbolic value of some of the projects it sponsors in Africa, such as roads, the-

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[04] Wikileaks cable: #09ADDISABABA149 Last accessed 13 July 2013.

atres, libraries and hospitals, which can symbolize China's support to both literate and illiterate populations.

This paper adopts this framework to compare the influence of China on the development of telecommunications, and of the Internet more specifically, in two countries that have adopted very different approaches towards shaping their national information societies. One is Kenya, which is often referred to as Africa's information hub, because of its leading role in promoting local innovation, from mobile banking to crisis responses systems. The other is Ethiopia, the only country on the continent where Internet provision is still a state monopoly, whose government actively blocks opposition websites, but has also heavily invested in Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) to improve service delivery, even in the most remote areas.

Since 2006, China has become an important player in both countries, at a diplomatic level, offering an alternative to traditional donors and allies, especially in moments of political crisis; and as new development actor, sponsoring projects that are deemed important by respective governments. This paper seeks to address some of the consequences China's renewed engagement is having on the development of the Internet and of national information societies in both countries. It first offers a brief overview of the development of the internet and of telecommunication in Kenya and in Ethiopia and then examines which impacts China has had on these countries' trajectories.

3. The Ethiopian internet before China

The development of the Internet in Ethiopia, while similar to the path taken by other authoritarian and semi-authoritarian regimes, has certain distinctive characteristics. Together with Djibouti, whose population is less than a million, Ethiopia is the only other country in Africa with a single, state controlled Internet Service Provider. As argued by Ethiopia's Minister of Information and Communication Technology, when he was at the helm of Ethiopia's ICT Development Agency: "Monopoly is a crucial factor. It is exactly because ICTs are so important and they have the capacity to penetrate every aspect of our lives that we have to make sure that it is the state that is in charge of using and implementing them. In this phase we cannot leave it to the market. ICTs are too key for our development. They are a priority. Behind the decision of leaving the monopoly in the ICTs and telecommunication market there is big philosophical thinking. It is not just because we want to make money from the use of telecoms."[5]

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[05] Interview: Debretsion Gebre Michael, Ministry of Communication and Information Technology, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, 10 June 2008.

The mix of commitment to using new technology and fear that the same technology could unsettle existing power structures is reflected in the government's massive efforts to use digital media in schools and government offices, and the neglect of providing reliable and affordable Internet connections in the major towns, including the capital (Gagliardone, 2009). Ethiopia has historically had one of the lowest Internet penetration rates in the world.[6] Despite the very limited diffusion of the Internet among Ethiopian citizens, in 2006 the government began to actively filter the websites of opposition groups and human rights organizations, specifically targeting those that gathered the voices of Ethiopians living abroad (Opennet Initiative, 2007).

One reason for blocking these online spaces can be attributed to the composition of the Ethiopian diaspora and to the ability of the discourses it articulates to reach beyond the digital media. Similar to other national groups that migrated from the Horn, Ethiopians living abroad represent a large and powerful force that have historically been involved in wars and politics back home (Lyons, 2007).

But, in sharp contrast to the cases of Kenya, Eritrea and Somaliland, the great majority of politically-minded Ethiopians in the diaspora have opposed the political agenda of the incumbent government led by the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF). Many posts hosted in online spaces such as Nazret.com or Ethiopianreview.com, two popular websites blocked in Ethiopia, aim at the very core of the EPRDF national project, refusing to recognize the current government as either legitimate or as the expression of the people's will. Before the death of Prime Minister Meles Zenawi it was not uncommon to find a blog post labelling him as "crime minister" or describing the government as a dictatorship led by an ethnic minority. On the other hand, pro-government websites have responded by accusing opponents of chauvinism and of encouraging tensions within multi-ethnic Ethiopia similar to those that led to the Rwandan genocide in 1994 (Gagliardone & Stremlau, 2011).

This vehemence and polarization are not exclusive to online spaces and are evident in the long history of engagement –or lack of engagement– between the EPRDF on one hand, and other political forces in Ethiopia and the diaspora on the other. Since coming to power the EPRDF has chosen not to negotiate with its adversaries, preferring to expand its influence and presence on the ground by delivering progress rather than enlarging its base by incorporating new forces and

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[06] In 2000 Ethiopia had an Internet penetration of 0,02%, which grew to only 1,48% in 2012. Source ITU. Last accessed 13 July 2013: **http://www.itu.int/en/ITU-D/Statistics/Documents/statistics/2013/Individuals_Internet_2000-2012.xls**

perspectives. This strategy has been applied to both old and new media. After coming to power, in response to internal and external pressures, the EPRDF allowed for unprecedented levels of freedom of expression, but they did not develop a strategy for reconciling or negotiating with the forces that were defeated or marginalized (Stremlau, 2011).

As a result, journalists who were fired from the Ministry of Information and sympathized with those opposed to the EPRDF were given the opportunity to set up independent newspapers and use them as platforms for criticizing the government. The decision of the EPRDF to ignore these voices, or attack them without engaging with their arguments, exacerbated the polarization over time. A few years later, when the first websites were created for an Ethiopian audience, the EPRDF took a similar approach and largely ignored them.

The divide between pro- and anti-government forces has widened over time, having consequences in the aftermath of the elections in 2005 when the EPRDF reacted to its substantial electoral losses by imprisoning opponents and firing on demonstrators. Prominent journalists were arrested, their papers closed, and, the following year, blogs were also blocked to silence all alternative voices. As a result, both old and new media in Ethiopia now carry pro-government information or criticism that can be easily managed by the ruling elite and does not challenge its fundamental political goals of retaining power and reinforcing its vision of ethnic federalism.

4. Kenya before China

The history of the Internet in Kenya cannot be more different from Ethiopia. Kenya has been one of the first countries in Africa to liberalize telecommunications and to develop a strategy that, while offering limited privileges to the former incumbent telecom (Telecom Kenya) such as the monopoly to operate the Internet gateway and backbone until 2004, allowed different companies to immediately enter the market, driving down prices and expanding access. As a result Kenya has now one of the most competitive Internet sectors in East Africa, with national and international companies offering both mobile and landline services. As of 2012 Safaricom had 69% of the Internet market, Aritel 14%, Orange 9% and Essar 8%. Of these subscriptions, 99% were through mobile (Souter & Kerretts-Makau, 2012).

 The Kenyan government has also taken an innovative approach towards involving a variety of actors, from private companies to civil society organizations, in shaping the national internet. Kenya was the first country in Africa to create a national Internet Governance Forum after the creation of a Global Internet Governance Forum in 2007. Other initiatives, such as Vision 2030 which was set up to define the priorities for Kenya's development and has placed significant

emphasis on the role ICT can play in national growth, included consultative processes that could allow a variety of actors to contribute shaping the future of the nation. As a result, the evolution of the Kenyan Internet has been characterized by the inclusion of different interests at different stages, with the state acting both as a facilitator and as a driver of innovation.

5. Ethiopia after China

After the elections in 2005, which were considered the most democratic and contested in the country, but also led to violence and a crackdown on oppositional forces contesting the results, the Ethiopian government became the object of increased criticism from the International Community, especially from Western donors, and started looking more insistently at China for support. This led to an increasing number of agreements between the two countries and the telecommunication sector emerged as one of the most important to realize the EPRDF's goal to promote economic growth and maintaining control over the country. At an ideational level, China's ability to balance control of information and dramatic growth of Internet users started to be looked at as a model and source of legitimation for the restrictive practices the Ethiopian government had started employing in the aftermath of the elections. The conception of the information society that has progressively emerged in China appeared more in line with the EPRDF's ambition to make Ethiopia a developmental state that could pursue sustained growth and stability. But China has not supported Ethiopia only ideationally and indirectly. It has also offered technical and financial means to support the government's strategy. In the second half of the 2000s, as privatized telecommunication markets were booming in most of Africa providing cheaper and increasingly reliable access to mobile phones and the Internet, Ethiopia faced the challenge of having to balance between its decision to retain monopoly over telecommunication and the inability of expanding access without opening to competition. The EPRDF's stubbornness could not last for long, unless a new partner could provide enough resources to introduce a dramatic increase in access and quality of service in a regime of monopoly. China obliged by offering the largest loan in the history of telecommunication in Africa: 1.5$ billion to overhaul Ethiopia's telecommunication system, expanding mobile service and Internet connectivity while keeping Ethio-Telecom as the only player in the market.[7] Some of these resources also went to upgrading the

[07] See Zhao Lili, 'Contributing to the Development of Ethiopia with Wisdom and Strength' **http://wwwen.zte.com.cn/endata/magazine/ztetechnologies/2009year/no6/articles/-200906/t20090612_172517.html** Last accessed 13 July 2013.

infrastructure on which the e-government projects were based, allowing a system that many had considered unsustainable to become an even stronger component of the government communication strategy towards the periphery.

The role China had in Ethiopia was of paramount importance. Without China's support in extending the infrastructure and expanding the plan the EPRDF had devised, the government of Ethiopia would have been either forced to change its course and liberalize, or to condemn the country to suffer from lack of connectivity to the Internet and mobile communication on which many countries on the continent have been relying to support both economic growth and state operation.

6. Kenya after China

Given the different context in which the Internet developed in Kenya, the role China came to play was significantly different from Ethiopia, but also presented some elements of similarity. As in Ethiopia, China has been deeply involved in the extension of Internet connectivity in different capacities. First, through telecom companies Huawei and ZTE. Together with French company Sagem, they participated in the first National Optic Fibre Backbone Infrastructure (NOFBI) expansion, brining fibre optic to the main urban centres and allowing a first series of e-government projects to be delivered regionally.[8] The country was split into three sections, namely Western Kenya, Coast and North Eastern, and Central –each region handled by one company–. Sagem has laid out cables in Coast and North Eastern, Huawei in Nairobi and Central, and ZTE in Western Kenya. Also investors such as Internet Service Providers (ISPs) and telecommunication operators have benefited as NOFBI lowered the cost of entry to business. A second round of NOFBI (known as NOFBI II) was directly funded with Chinese resources. In 2012 China's EXIM Bank provided a $71 million loan to support further extension to 36 administrative district centres across the country, with the objective of allowing also people in remote areas to access faster Internet. A condition for the loan was that the implementing agency had to be Huawei, which is now in charge of the realization of the project.[9] As in Ethiopia, the Chinese government and Chinese companies have thus supported the expansions of government led

[08] See, for example, Okuttah Mark, 'Telkom Kenya set to run fibre network on behalf of government' **http://www.businessdailyafrica.com/Corporate-News/Telkom-Kenya-set-to-run-fibre-network-on-behalf-of-government/-/539550/929626/-/m96mry/-/index.html** Last accessed 13 July 2013

[09] See, for example, Margaret Wahito, 'Kenya: China to Fund Kenya's Fibre Optic Project' **http://allafrica.com/stories/201206290024.html** Last accessed 13 July 2013.

initiatives aimed at extending Internet connectivity and improving e-government services. In the Kenyan case, however, Chinese support has fitted in a much wider context, where a plurality of actors have been competing to offer better services at lower prices. For example, soon after the signing of the agreement for NOFBI II, Kenya's leading telecom operator, Safaricom, decided to invest additional $95 million to build an additional 2,400 kilometre fibre optic cable to support its growing customer base. Interestingly, a large share of the contract has been assigned on a commercial basis to Huawei, which had already worked in collaboration with Safaricom to roll out the 4G network at a cost of $143 million. A remaining share of Safaricom's expansion project was assigned to Ericsson.[10]

As it had been the case in Ethiopia, after Kenya's highly contested and violent elections, that took place in 2007 and led to numerous deaths and displacements and to condemnation from the international community, the relationship between the Kenyan government and the Chinese government increased both in quantity and in quality. This is mostly connected to the Chinese policy of providing aid and engaging in agreements without any strings attached. Therefore, as relations with governments such as the US and the UK reached a low point in the aftermath of the elections and later with the indictment of the two presidential candidates Uhuru Kenyatta and William Ruto by the International Criminal Court in relation to the alleged role they played in the incidents of 2007-08, China managed to keep a low profile, stressing its faith in the legitimacy of Kenyan institutions.

7. Conclusion: global and national rhetoric of the Internet

Both in the case of the Kenyan and of Ethiopian governments, the violence that followed their respective elections was employed as a reason to stress the potentially disruptive role that technology, including the Internet, could play in increasing divisiveness and harm peace. While in the case of Ethiopia this discourse had been used for a long time to justify state monopoly, Kenya, a country that had heavily invested in the idea of an open Internet, woke up to a new reality and progressively developed a new discourse framing peace as the overarching goal each Kenyan, from media houses to bloggers to telecom operators, should give priority to in shaping the country's future. As one interviewer put it, "Kenya has been slowly sliding from democracy to a peaceocracy". This rhetoric was employed to

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[10] See, for example, Okuttah Mark, 'Safaricom loosens China's grip on local contracts with Sh14bn tender' **http://www.businessdailyafrica.com/Corporate-News/Safaricom-loosens-China-grip-on-local-contracts/-/539550/1638364/-/11xotu6z/-/index.html** Last accessed 13 July 2013.

justify for example the censoring of thousands of SMS considered harmful and inciting ethnic hatred or to ask media houses to downplay cases of ethnic violence still happening in the country.[11] In both the Ethiopian and the Kenyan case, however, it was not just incumbent governments, but also Western donors that stressed the importance of creating mechanisms that could lead to peaceful elections and prevent outbursts of violence. With regard to the media the idea that progressively emerged was that of a harmonious information space, where people could still be allowed to be critical and comment negatively on political actors, but could not incur in actions possibly leading to forms of mobilization considered harmful by public authorities. The idea of the Internet that progressively emerged was not different from the one offered by the detailed study of the Chinese Internet carried out by King, Pan, and Roberts (2012), which showed how it was mostly posts leading to the organization of protests that were removed, rather than those attacking the government for misconduct, for example for corruption. In both Kenya and Ethiopia this idea progressively emerged and gained momentum without the Chinese government or Chinese companies engaging in any notable activity to advocate for this particular model. From the interviews carried out with Ethiopian and Kenyan members of the government, civil servants, but also with members of the civil society and private entrepreneurs in 2012 and 2013, none of them referred to Chinese authorities as trying to suggest that their model could be productively applied to the Ethiopian and Kenyan cases.

The conclusions are still highly tentative, but it seems that some of the strategies adopted by the Chinese government in China to control and contain the national interned are gaining popularity in both countries, despite no attempts form the side of China to promote them abroad. It can be argued that China's appeal as a prototype has increased, without its government necessarily having to engage in activities to persuade its African counterparts. In a climate where local actors, such as the Ethiopian and the Kenyan government, and in the case of Kenya also the local media, private operators, and international organizations, created a political context privileging peace and development over allowing a plurality of voices to compete in the marketplace of ideas, China had simply to act as a partner, offering unconditional help to governments, to put forward a

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[11] See, for example, Lillian Onyango, 'PS now names blogs over hate messages' **http://mobile.nation.co.ke/News/PS-now-names-blogs-over-hate-messages/-/1290/1662804/-/format/xhtml/-/hk21w0/-/index.html**; Fred Mukinda, 'Phone firms block 300,000 hate texts daily, says Ndemo' **http://mobile.nation.co.ke/News/Phone-firms-block-300-000-hate-texts-daily-says-Ndemo/-/1290/1726172/-/format/xhtml/-/2e787c/-/index.html**; Njoroge Kaburo and Peter Mutai, 'Kenya decries use of social to spread hate speech' **http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/africa/2013-03/15/c_132236743.htm** Last accessed 13 July 2013.

concept of harmony that it supports. While there was satisfaction that the Kenyan elections were conducted peacefully, as peacefully were the elections that took place earlier in Ethiopia in 2010, privileging peace also meant downplaying critical voices, such as those of civil society organizations, lamenting that grave misconducts and violations of human rights had been marginalized in the name of a peaceful development that could benefit both countries.

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