Religion, Media, and Marginality
in Modern Africa

Contents

v

Contents

Contents

Introduction

Religion, Media, and Marginality in Modern Africa

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THE PRESENT COLLECTION ENTERS AN ALREADY LIVELY FIELD, AS the role of media in Africa's ebullient religious activism has engaged the attention of scholars for the last couple of decades. And for good reason: a salient feature of Islamic revivals and expanding Pentecostal churches alike is the use of TV, video, mobile phones, and the internet and the claiming of audible and visible space through loudspeakers and billboards.[1] Part of the aim of this collection, though, is to go beyond the most attention-grabbing and public forms of media use and to include such relatively low-key examples as handwritten religious scripture circulating only among a small group of believers, pamphlets with similarly limited circulation, and registration forms. The objects just enumerated already point to another intention of this volume—namely, to examine "old" media, such as hand-writing and print, and "new" media, such as video and the internet, in the same frame, thereby avoiding an evolutionary distinction.

Although with a few important exceptions recent literature has defined "media" in this context as new electronic and digital media,[2] here we also consider print culture—perhaps the still most heavily used media form in contemporary Africa—alongside them. We seek to situate recent "new media" phenomena within a longer history of Muslims' and Christians' use of older media forms, including both print and penned manuscripts, not least among them their sacred scriptures. Studies of religion and media in Africa typically treat new electronic and digital media in isolation from a well-established scholarship on

print and manuscript culture in Africa. "Old" and "new" media tend to be positioned as different moments in time, with digital and electronic media frequently represented as succeeding print media in a linear, chronological fashion. By contrast, this volume considers the manner in which old and new media coexist on a single spectrum of media practice in Africa. Written texts—just as much as recent social media—have contributed to the formation of new forms of public life in Africa.[3]

There are two main reasons for doing so. First, the variety of processes and outcomes traceable across these media, combined with the similarities between outcomes involving media of different generations, enable us to challenge a tendency that appears occasionally in the literature—namely, to assume a kind of evolutionary progression, where different generations of media are associated with different social processes and outcomes. Broadly speaking, written media, and especially print media, tend to be associated with bringing people together, developing national publics, and expanding religious congregations. Conversely, in much of the literature on new electronic and digital media, the dominant theme concerns the fragmentation of audiences, especially national ones, that were formerly relatively homogeneous. This is seen in the development of niche audiences and diverse, competing religious claims, even as the new congregations thus established strive for overseas contacts and see themselves within a global frame of reference.[4]

Of course, these associations are undeniable in some ways. Clearly, in Africa, the mid-twentieth century was an era of popular nationalism as well as of expanding reading publics, epistolary networks, and radio audiences.[5] Conversely, the period since the 1990s is associated with the breakdown of monolithic political structures—one-party states in particular—and with the diversification of religious communities, political associations, and, last but not least, electronic media forms.[6] We think that it is important, though, not to take these associations too readily as evidence of causality. Granted, mass-circulation newspapers are bound to have a homogenizing effect on the knowledge and opinion of their reading publics, and there is no denying that communication via the internet supports the development of very specific subcultures whose members would otherwise find it much harder to connect. But mass-circulation newspapers can fall out of favor and end up minoritarian, while websites, too, can serve mass audiences.

In what follows, we seek to pay attention to how contingent and variable the effects of all media forms are. "Marginality," in this pursuit, serves us as a means to bring the variation into focus. Literally understood, a medium is a means; more specifically, it is a means for connecting or bringing together the people interacting with it. In this sense, all media mitigate their users' marginality relative to those they are enabled to reach. But each act of inclusion implies an act of exclusion; each public and audience has its margins. In Africa, the state of marginality can be taken as a shorthand for the challenges faced by people coping with pervasive poverty, lack of opportunity, and instable, sometimes conflict-ridden social and political environments. The present collection explores how some mediatized congregations or communities exist on the margins of others (say, national ones) and how media are used not only to reach out to others but also to close off some avenues (of communication or argumentation) by reaching out for others.

Given the intensity of social change in Africa since the colonial period, the fluidity of social borders as well as their sometimes quite sudden rigidity in situations of conflict, and the multitudes of people facing and seeking to mitigate one or another form of marginalization, it seems to us that addressing, mitigating, or conversely establishing marginality is an important thing media do.[7] As will be seen, both old and new, paper-based or electronic, media can operate at a great variety of scales; in the bid to consolidate an existing audience, they can foreground either outreach and inclusion or marginalization and exclusion of outsiders. The existing literature on media also makes very clear that media do much more than merely channel or convey communication or information. Media forms address and hail their audiences—readers, listeners, viewers—in highly particular ways, encouraging the formation of certain dispositions and attitudes. In so doing, they play a key role in constituting new ways of self-knowledge, collective being, and relating to wider social worlds. Keeping this in mind, we seek to contextualize recent transformations in media use within a long-standing history of religious practitioners in Africa using technologies of communication, as well as the resources of their religious traditions, to articulate identities and build communities.

Given the volume editors' specializations in Southern African Christianity, East African Islam, and West African postslavery societies, we feel well-placed to offer a comparative historical perspective. Too often, the large and lively bodies of literature on Islam and Christianity in

Africa exist in isolation from each other.[8] Here, we make an initial attempt at bringing aspects of these two scholarships into comparative dialogue. We are aware that the spectrum of religions to be considered could, and ideally should, be increased further. There are long-standing Hindu communities and growing Buddhist ones in Africa, and Islam, Christianity, and (especially) indigenous African religion have many more expressions than we consider here. But in offering the selection that we do, we hope to at least open a vista on an enormous, delicately patterned variety. Later in this introduction, we examine the different ways Christianity and Islam in Africa have been thought to make contributions to the formation of the public sphere. But first, we turn to a discussion of media and the formation of publics.

Media, Publics, and Politics

There has been considerable debate in recent years about the role of media in constituting and shaping what is variously called the "public sphere," "public culture," or simply "publics," and likewise about the role of religion (that is, religious organizations, attitudes, beliefs, and practices) in the same context.[9] This debate responds to a palpable sense that major change is afoot with the recent efflorescence of "new" electronic media, a category that typically encompasses mobile telephony and internet-based media and may also refer to video recordings and TV broadcasts not under state control, such as those of Pentecostal churches. The debate takes place in all parts of the globe, but it continues to be arranged around a story that focuses on Europe. In what follows, we examine the narrative concerning media and the public sphere and how African experiences fit into it, specifically drawing on case studies from the chapters collected in the present volume. Drawing on scholarship on media in Africa and elsewhere, we trace how our authors demonstrate that the work media do in society is driven both by specific cultures and institutional contexts of usage and by the aims and motivations of geographically and historically located actors.

The standard account of the history of media in Europe has itself been recognized to carry with it as many questions as consensual claims. Based on Jürgen Habermas's foundational work, it asserts that the democratic public sphere arose alongside the European bourgeoisie in the nineteenth century. At that time, the public was in essence a reading public, drawing on the ever-expanding dissemination of "print capitalism" in newspapers and books.[10] It was also, in this telling, an

increasingly enlightened, self-emancipating public, forming a counter-weight to hereditary rulers and increasingly encroaching on their rights. The twentieth century then saw the dawning of the era of mass media, with broadcasting, and especially radio, taking the lead over print. Responding to Europe's recent experience, Habermas and many other members of the Frankfurt school viewed the rise of broadcasting in much more ambivalent terms than that of print, emphasizing the possibilities of domination inherent in it over those of enlightened discourse.[11] Radio in particular was the medium of state propaganda, including the totalitarian variety, and it was epitomized in the widespread provision of radios and the effective use of radio speeches in Nazi Germany. This means that these authors ended up placing the period when media use in the public sphere was at its most emancipatory in a time when women, as well as colonized people, did not have the vote, let alone equal access to the public sphere. Conversely, demand-driven, consumer-oriented entertainment broadcasting was suspected of being opium for the masses. Taking these contradictions into account, it becomes harder to be sure that any media-constituted public sphere was ever unambiguously enlightened or emancipatory. When it became in Habermas's telling more inclusive, it also became at least potentially more repressive.

While this story obviously does not translate wholesale to the colonial world, it has its counterparts there. Benedict Anderson has asserted the crucial role of the spread of vernacular-language print media in establishing the "imagined communities" of anticolonial nationalists since at least the early twentieth century, providing something of a symmetry with Habermas's European story.[12] African Christians in the nineteenth century and the first half of the twentieth century, by virtue of their access to missionary-sponsored education, became increasingly well-positioned to establish themselves as a progressive elite at the vanguard of the formation of national imagined communities. These individuals differed in many ways across the continent but were everywhere united in their aspiration to attain Western cultural capital—above all, education. To take two examples, they became known in South Africa as the *amakholwa,* or "believers," and as *wasomi,* "the learners" or "readers," in Kenya.

A large recent literature has focused on how many of these African converts worked intensively with European missionaries to translate

Christian texts into a variety of languages, often codifying languages in writing for the first time. Terence Ranger showed us how missionaries in colonial Zimbabwe—seeking a common language to communicate with their converts—began creating standardized grammar books, dictionaries, and Bible translations.[13] Further, in the process of translating the word, many Christians discerned important equivalences between indigenous concepts of God and the newly received Christian missionary vocabulary. Translating sacred texts thus gave voice and shape to religious concepts that were thought to have long existed in African traditions.[14] The political implications of this Christian vernacular linguistic work were profound. In the context of colonial rule, the written codification of vernacular languages shaped African intellectuals' political imagination, providing a unified medium to imagine and argue over the black "nation" and to knit together far-flung individuals into coherent linguistic constituencies and reading publics that challenged the hegemony of white rule in the continent.[15] Across the continent, these mission-educated elites produced a profusion of print—newspapers, autobiographies, nonfiction, novels, pamphlets—that experimented with new forms of address, prompting their readerships to imagine themselves members of a single shared form of public life increasingly known as the "nation,"[16] although often encompassing more expansive ideas of pan-Africanism as well as fixed territorial units.[17]

Reading publics were clearly essential to the history of African nationalism; the multitude of literate activists, often mission educated, were at the forefront of anticolonial activism.[18] Yet there are at least as many qualifications to be offered in the African case as with Europe. Beyond urban centers and the tiny educated elite, reading publics remained diminutive until decades after the end of colonialism. For example, in South Africa in 1911, the first national census calculated that only 6.8 percent of all Africans could read.[19] Moreover, an exclusive focus on the connection between print and nationalist activists and intellectuals runs the risk of obscuring the vast amount of literate work carried out by nonelites, far from the spotlight of national politics. Along these lines, a seminal collection on "tin-trunk literacy" has eschewed the written work of political and academic African elites in favor of the "waged labourers, clerks, village headmasters, traders and artisans [who] read, wrote and hoarded texts of many kinds."[20] One recent study has dubbed this profusion of nonelite African intellectuals "homespun scholars."[21] Their tools were not always the formally printed book and newspaper.

Grassroots authors across the continent turned to genres as diverse as handwritten diaries, letters, and religious liturgies, many composed with the assistance of scribes, who greatly increased the potency and reach of literacy in the areas they worked in.[22] What was crucial is that these texts often addressed—and thereby constituted—audiences that sat at odd angles to the national audience of literate elites, providing examples of the work print could accomplish beyond or between Anderson's egalitarian and enlightened national imaginaries.

African writers, then, did not always imagine themselves addressing audiences constituted by Anderson's sense of "deep, horizontal comradeship"; self-professedly democratic national publics were not the inevitable outcome of print work.[23] One example of the rich range of counternationalisms generated by the creation and use of texts is found in David Gordon's chapter in this volume. Gordon complicates the narrative of the development of horizontal, anonymous, national print-reading publics by emphasizing the persistence of handwritten textual cultures, often characterized by highly uneven access to information and power. Gordon's focus is on the penned manuscripts of the Zambian Lumpa Church, whose members were primarily loyal to the memory of their charismatic church founder Alice Lenshina rather than the Zambian nation. Members of the church responded to a long history of exile and persecution from both European missionaries and African nationalists by creating a series of handwritten narratives, hymns, and ritual instructions for correct worship that constituted themselves as a chosen people, marginalized by earthly powers yet close to God. While type and print were on occasion used to strategically represent the church community to outsiders in a bureaucratic register (for example, through the creation of printed church membership cards and typed letters to colonial officials), handwritten documents were especially prized for their spiritual value and the possibilities they afforded of articulating internal church politics and identity. Gordon shows how Lumpa reading publics were hierarchically organized into dense clusters of loyalty to regional deacons who alone owned the communities' handwritten sacred texts and had the power to read and interpret them to the broader community. These, then, were not "open" texts; rather, they were closely guarded by custodians who carefully regulated access to them, thereby establishing new nodes of social authority in twentieth-century Zambia. Text, in Gordon's telling, did not always entail equal access to its riches and could call into being highly

uneven imaginaries, worlds away from the transparent and egalitarian reading publics of Habermas and Anderson.

Gordon's example illuminates the continued importance of handwritten manuscript cultures in Africa; it is also worth remembering that print audiences in modern Africa were highly diverse, consisting of many more participants than early black nationalists and intellectuals. In many parts of the continent, a vibrant European settler press existed, often linked to imperial news outlets such as Reuters. While many accounts of newspapers in Africa have cast them as vehicles of anticolonial nationalism,[24] Jörg Haustein's chapter in this volume illuminates the potential of newspapers to marginalize Africans from discourses concerning their futures. Focusing on German-language newspaper debates on Islam in German East Africa, Haustein argues that newspapers here, by their very print form, created an echo chamber that excluded the people (Muslims) being discussed. German colonialists in East Africa used newspapers as a platform from which to debate Islam as a cultural, administrative, and potential security problem. Some colonialists, missionaries in particular, sought to portray Muslims as "foreign" Arab settlers, blameworthy for their involvement in slave trading and deserving marginalization. Others, focused more on bureaucratic governance, depicted Islam as a harmless instance of folkloric culture, emphasizing the suitability of Islam for an innately "superstitious" African population. Through such acts of misrepresentation, colonial newspapers were simultaneously constructing arguments for the self-evidently beneficial nature of European rule in the continent, drawing together and consolidating a German settler public in self-satisfaction while silencing the people under discussion.

Liz Gunner's chapter, by contrast, focuses on African newspaper readers and emphasizes that religion was often a prominent and popular topic within the imaginary of the nation as constituted and discussed by newspapers. While the classic theorists have construed the nation normatively as a rational and enlightened sphere free of the influence of hereditary rulers or religious priests, religious figures and institutions played, and continue to play, a key role in African nation-states, however self-consciously "modern" the latter position themselves as. Gunner's chapter focuses on several years of coverage of a large South African organization, the Nazaretha Church, by the *Sowetan,* a leading daily with historical associations to Black Consciousness. Gunner shows how the paper's charting of complex leadership disputes within the church

was also a commentary on the precarious state of the national public at a particularly unsettled moment in the country's political life. The large Nazaretha Church has long occupied a prominent place in the country's national imaginary, casting itself as something of a repository of black identity for its citizens. Gunner's analysis casts the newspaper as a type of midwife to the still-new South African nation-state, anxiously charting the tensions and fragmentations of the church as a type of barometer of national health. This popular newspaper constantly reminds its readership that a key part of South African national identity is the legacy of its historic black-led churches such as the Nazaretha.

Clearly, as Haustein's example shows, Muslim reading publics are hard to fit into these narratives. Whereas Christians across the continent were shaped by exposure to Western education—and their consequent adoption of written genres such as newspapers, pamphlets, and magazines—Muslims often faced the new forms of education from a defensive position. They struggled with participation in colonial education in ways that were clearly conditioned by Muslim scholars' competing claims to truth and to learned authority, on the one hand, and by missionaries and colonial schoolmasters, on the other. Overall, Muslim participation in formal education was consistently lower than that of Christians, and there was little of the synergy between formal education and successful cash cropping that is so striking in, for instance, highland Kenya or the Tanzanian Kilimanjaro region or the arable Highveld of South Africa.[25] Despite the symbiotic political relationships that developed between Muslim elites and colonialists in places as diverse as Senegal, Sudan, Northern Nigeria, and Zanzibar, Muslim scholarly milieus retained a sense of unease about their position under Christian rule, even if relations between colonial officials and Muslim clerics could be quite friendly.[26]

But as several writers show, scholars in places such as Northern Nigeria, Zanzibar, and Mauritania conducted an ongoing debate on how to sustain Muslim moral and legal practice under colonial rule.[27] The development of colonial education also inspired innovation in Muslim schooling. Moreover, the impetus behind these innovations was not purely defensive—not everything was all about "keeping up" with growing Christian communities. Rather, Muslims experimented with far-reaching reformulations of the meaning of citizenship in Islamic communities, of the criteria for learnedness, and of the means to transmit learning. Sean Hanretta's chapter in this volume shows how a type

of print document not even meant to communicate publicly—that is, marriage registration forms—could become involved in these kinds of negotiations, both during the colonial and the postcolonial period, and in a process to which Muslims and state authorities contributed actively. Moreover, while the circulation of printed matter remained much more limited than with Christian congregations, single copies of, for example, a popular *maulid* poem reached a great many ears and memories, and scholars corresponded in a variety of languages, most often written in Arabic script. To some extent, then, Muslim congregations had their own publics. For recent years, Hirschkind has traced out a related phenomenon around the use of cassette sermons in Egypt, which he describes as "counter-public."[28] Perhaps a more appropriate term for this would be "parallel public" since it avoids making assumptions about the participants' political dispositions, which were quite varied and complex despite the shared anxiety about colonialism.

Unlike the narrative of progress toward integrated, often emancipatory reading publics, a narrative that dominates the understanding of the history of print, discussion of the history of broadcast media is more likely to focus on their connection to repression and propaganda—that is, their ability to marginalize groups whom those in power would rather were kept silenced. Radio was often the medium of choice of populist, activist leaders, most famously perhaps in the broadcasts connected to the Bandung conference in 1955.[29] While Bandung served an anticolonial agenda, tight state control of media was implicated in the shift of many newly independent countries to one-party states.[30] In the words of one commentator of the African media scene in the postcolonial period, "while media had played a role of promoting democratization in the years before independence, it did not take long for the same media to become strangled by the very masters they had helped to power."[31]

Scholars have charted how recently independent African states started to make strategic use of media for repressive ends, aimed at consolidating state hegemony and fostering national imaginaries that countenanced little dissent. In postindependence Cameroon, for example, the mass media was tightly controlled by state president Ahmadou Ahidjo in order to forestall any popular criticism of the regime. Radio broadcasting in particular became a key tool for political propaganda, often promoting ideological visions of national identity.[32] And in Jerry Rawlings's Ghana, television programming stressed the importance of Ghanaian "cultural heritage" and addressed top-down aims of

"enlightenment, national integration and cultural roots."[33] Egypt, too, has mirrored northern experiences with totalitarian media use fairly closely (and, not coincidentally, also came to embody the "new media" challenge to this hegemony during the Arab Spring). Since Nasser's ascent to power in 1952, successive military regimes here have kept a firm hold on print and broadcast media alike.[34]

Yet, as with the case of print media, there are many qualifications to this portrayal of mass broadcast media as an instrument of hegemony. For a start, the history of Mao's "Little Red Book"[35] throughout the 1950s and '60s shows that print media, too, were amenable to this kind of use; in Africa, newspapers such as *L'Essor* in Mali or *The Nationalist* were part of the hegemonic project quite as much as radio.[36] In the case of Egypt, the flip side of state domination of the media was the contribution of Egyptian radio to anticolonial broadcasting in Africa south of the Sahara.[37] In this part of the continent, too, radio broadcasts have marked significant historical moments, delicately perched be-tween insurgent and repressive. Patrice Lumumba's speeches and their role in precipitating Belgian interference come to mind, as well as Ju-lius Nyerere's radio announcement concerning forcible villagization in 1973.[38] Moreover, lack of access to receivers, electricity, batteries, or spare parts meant that participation in the consumption of propagandistic broadcasts was curtailed by Africa's chronic poverty.

Even with these logistical considerations bracketed, though, the "mass-media" potential of radio broadcasts does not necessarily translate into large-scale reach. While national state radio broadcasts aspired to transform disparate and diverse individuals into obedient subjects, Bruce Hall's chapter in this volume instead focuses on a local radio station that broadcasts in a minority language called Western Songhay, which is predominantly spoken in a limited area of northern Mali, along the western half of the Niger bend. Rather than a media form that enjoys national stature, Hall's example illustrates the highly fragmentary reach of small, local radio stations throughout the conti-nent. Furthermore, what is particularly striking in Hall's telling is that an originally oral storytelling tradition concerned with the legitimacy of chiefly privilege (and by extension, with legitimate political author-ity in Mali) gains very little by way of broader saliency or popularity through its transferal to FM radio. The medium does not supply the elite narrators of this nostalgic tale of chiefly authority with an effective platform for claiming popular legitimacy, illustrating that mass media

cannot simply create an audience for all types of claims, regardless of their content.

Given the relatively limited nature of mass media in Africa, an observer might consider the continent to be, as so often, a straggler and relatively marginal to a historical process with many global refractions. Africanists' weariness with this kind of marginality perhaps fed into the excitement when, around the turn of the twenty-first century, the continent appeared for a change to be at the forefront of the development of new forms of media use. The years after the end of the Cold War saw renewed interest in the role of civil society in challenging state power, while the new paradigm of globalization suggested that the power of nation states was on the wane compared with that of networked organizations, media or otherwise, spanning national territories.[39] In an influential treatment, Manuel Castells characterized these developments as the rise of the network society in the information age.[40] Whereas studies had previously emphasized that elites used media in top-down ways to instill loyalty and obedience in passive subjects, now attention was directed to the active construction of meaning by ordinary people via the media technologies at their disposal. One instantiation of this approach focused on a perceived link between democratization and media in the Middle East. Dale Eickelman and Jon Anderson pioneered this shift from viewing mass media as states' "vehicles of consolidation and standardization" to instead stressing the participatory, destabilizing, and subversive capacity of "new media" such as video, audio cassettes, faxes, and desktop publishing. They identified this capacity in a series of movements for change across the Middle East, especially in Iran.[41] In distinction from traditional media forms, these new "small media" were supposed to be above all "participatory, public phenomena, controlled neither by big states nor big corporations. . . . [They] focus on popular involvement, on horizontal communication, and on active participation."[42] They were hailed as forms of media able to bypass state scrutiny, censorship, and regulation.

In Africa, these paradigms seemed eminently applicable. Africanists soon detected parallel processes whereby "small media" helped bring into being alternative visions to that of the formal state, which in any case in many regions was suffering a crisis of popular legitimacy.[43] It was certainly a time when nation states appeared weakened, not only

by internal challenges but also by the growing influence of international financial institutions and their agendas, often characterized, albeit problematically, as neoliberal.[44] The weakness of state-run media infrastructure gave an edge to the providers of private video and television. Later in the first decade of the century, that advantage extended to providers of mobile telephony and, increasingly, to those providing internet access. Many argued that new, privately owned and controlled electronic and digital media had the power to hold governments to account[45] and to offer on national and local events a more grassroots, bottom-up perspective unconstrained by the "official" version circulated by the older state broadcasts. The popularity of the term "radio trottoir" or "sidewalk radio"—which did not necessarily take technological form and referred to orally transmitted rumor—is telling. This talk medium provided "people who would otherwise lack the opportunity to influence opinion the satisfaction of doing so."[46]

Although print and radio have often been assumed to inaugurate potentially repressive visions of the nation state, many recent studies have emphasized how new media offer platforms for diverse interests neither reducible to nor necessarily compatible with national publics. Examples range from the expression of queer identities on social media sites in contemporary Kenya[47] to the use of mobile phones by female entrepreneurs in Nairobi to break into a largely male-dominated economy[48] to the mobilization of internet sites by the Ogoni people in Nigeria to protest against the environmental and economic effects of Shell oil drilling in their region.[49] These instances of activism tend to be depicted as possessing a kind of cultural authenticity, despite their use of Western-derived technology.[50] Some have argued that subversive media practices in Africa gained their potency and popularity by building on older indigenous categories of oral expression, successfully intermingling local myths, folklore, and oral history traditions with cutting-edge technology; in one recent characterization, mobile phones were dubbed the "new talking drums of Africa."[51] The common factor is that these new digital and electronic media forms are seen as having the potential to fracture once-unitary national publics by introducing a diversity of previously little-heard voices and competing claims.

And yet in 2016 this narrative, despite the sound empirical observations that back up much of these observations, is clearly in need of significant qualification. International financial institutions in Africa have accepted the need to "bring the state back in" and are as likely

to actively support as to challenge national governments.[52] Notwithstanding the protracted crises in some states, many have weathered the transition to multiparty electoral politics. At the same time, the rise of nativist politics in Europe and America in response to increasing economic stratification and migration makes nation states here look more solid and relevant than they did ten years ago. Contrary to predictions that nations are on an inevitable trajectory toward fragmentation and internal multiplicity, national idioms have remained or become highly salient. And while the increase in global connectedness heralded by, for example, Pentecostal churches remains observable, national borders and loyalties do not therefore appear to be losing their importance—even for Pentecostal churches, as Katrien Pype's chapter in this volume will show. It is also clear from recent events in the Middle East and North Africa that the subversive powers of new social media forms such as Facebook and Twitter are more limited than they appeared during the Arab Spring. Despite unprecedented high levels of internet usage in countries such as Tunisia and Egypt, the capacity of governments to curtail and restrict not only internet usage but also internal dissent has become very evident, with all the violent repertoires of state power at their disposal.[53]

The perceived subversive effects of new media are also frequently noted within the context of religious institutions. Echoing aspects of the aforementioned political narrative, Christians' and Muslims' use of media has been said to have a democratizing effect on historic religious organizations—often themselves in strategic alliance with state officials. In this context, the use of electronic and digital media can facilitate the rise of charismatic individuals—often from outside the pool of those traditionally holding leadership positions—who claim new forms of spiritual legitimacy, frequently challenging older centers of religious power.[54] Thus it has recently been argued that new media offered women and the uneducated possibilities of prominence in religious sphere long dominated by elites that excluded them. Dorothea Schulz shows how new media technologies—primarily taped cassette sermons—empowered women in Mali to assume unaccustomed roles as authoritative preachers, while also facilitating the stellar rise to prominence of religious mavericks and outsiders with little formal religious training, such as Sharif Haidara.[55] Indeed, Haidara is the focus of one of the chapters in the present volume. André Chappatte's analysis shows how much of Haidara's popularity with Muslim youth in present-day

Mali is generated through the circulation of recordings, radio broadcasts, and telephone ringtones featuring Haidara's performance of the religious musical genre of *zikiri,* translated literally as "remembrance [of the name of God]." Through the popularity of these recorded *zikiri,* Haidara has become one of West Africa's most prominent religious celebrities, bypassing traditional routes to religious authority. That he is particularly popular with Muslim youth—themselves disenchanted with both state and religious elites—further underscores how in this instance new media has bolstered a charismatic individual against the clerical mainstream.

Yet, as with instances of mediated dissent within nation states, the power of new media to subvert religious organizations and clerical elites should not be exaggerated. Chappatte's analysis shows us that many of the followers Haidara has gained via new media usage are loyal to Haidara in only the loosest possible way. Attention to Haidara via electronically recorded sermons or *zikiri* produces nothing like the intense devotion of face-to-face tutelage between a Sufi leader and disciple; many sympathizers of Haidara never meet him personally nor experience anything like a strong bond. Chappatte emphasizes the "loose and uneven influence" of electronically mediated religious leaders in Mali on devotees, highlighting here not only the possibilities for religious outsiders generated by new media but also the limits they encounter owing to the very properties of these media forms. Chappatte's analysis is valuable not only in charting the fact that new types of religious authority are made possible through new media but also for its in-depth exploration of the exact nature and quality of believers' mediated affiliations to these new figures.

Similar qualifications apply in the case of Christianity. Much has been made of the democratizing effect of new media on hierarchical organizations such as the Roman Catholic Church; a recent study has shown how communicating with priests via mobile phones considerably levels clerical authority.[56] Focusing on recent debates among Catholics in Kinshasa, Katrien Pype's chapter in the present volume charts the conflict between those who position themselves as guardians of orthodoxy, on the one hand, and those who offer alternative routes to spiritual help or power, on the other. The protagonist in this story is Brother Raphael, a devout lay Catholic who bypasses the official hierarchies of the organized church and claims to offer his followers privileged access to the petitionary prayers of the Virgin Mary. The use of both "new"

and "small" media has been central to this conflict. While the Catholic Church has mobilized its state connections to block Brother Raphael's access to broadcast media such as TV and radio, Brother Raphael has used photographs, pamphlets, and the internet to contest the hegemony of religious officialdom in Kinshasa. But while aspects of Pype's narrative echo the usual depiction of small media as undermining hegemonic positions, her chapter offers much-needed nuance to this somewhat deterministic narrative. In recent years, Brother Raphael's following has declined, and his influence as a religious leader in the city waned. This is due to the declining appeal of his religious message, especially given the fundamental ambiguity attached to the Virgin Mary in the strongly Pentecostal climate of the city. Thus, Pype's analysis underscores the open-endedness of media usage in Africa: the use of the internet does not guarantee successful contestation of religious orthodoxy on the part of outsiders, and factors quite independent of the technologies involved contribute to the outcome of a challenge to the Catholic hierarchy. Pype's story is also a timely reminder of the continuing power of mass media ownership. Despite the increasing visibility of online religious forums, Brother Raphael's downfall has been in part due to his lack of skill at using these influential media platforms.

Thus, while the rise of new currents of Pentecostal Christianity and Reformist Islam, heavily invested in new media usage, poses a challenge to older and more centralized religious organizations, much evidence suggests that historic organizations and denominations invested in clearly discernible hierarchical structures have retained much of their power. The historian of Christianity in Africa David Maxwell has commented that "the historic churches [in Africa] remain enormously influential, still staffed by expatriate missionaries who work in tandem with and usually under the authority of African clerics."[57] In this volume, too, Pype's story similarly demonstrates the enduring presence of organized Catholicism in a region more usually celebrated for the emergence of decentralized new Pentecostal churches.

The present volume therefore highlights that despite the appearances produced by references to "new media," the changes observable are not driven simply by technological change. Nor is the succession of stages in the history of media use—from state-run mass broadcasting and national publics to private new media use to fragmented, networked publics—all that unidirectional and clear. For one, the term "new media" itself is ambiguous. The only truly technologically new media of recent

decades are mobiles and internet-based media, but the term is often used to include cassette and video tapes, DVDs, and privately run TV channels. What is new here is not the technology itself, but rather the forms (or lack thereof) of political regulation—of access and ownership—that the technology is subject to. This observation further calls into question the frequently acclaimed emancipatory qualities of new media, highlighting that it is not technological innovation that precipitates empowerment for those who are positioned or position themselves as marginalized, but rather highly contingent, political, and context-specific circumstances.

This point has been made briefly by a number of scholars writing on the topic, but it has never been dwelt on at any length. Nor has it seemed to have much impact on the overwhelmingly positive assessment of new media as a route to liberation and communal and self-improvement.[58] Yet examples abound not only of the limitations of powerful media technologies such as the internet but also of highly conservative or repressive effects that can result from individuals' and communities' use of new media. Take as examples the marginalization of "African Traditional Religion" via the heightened public media presence of a particular, exclusionary type of Pentecostal-Charismatic Christianity in Ghana;[59] the continued ability and will of states to patrol and censor the airwaves (for example, the Nigerian government's censoring of "unverified [Pentecostal] miracles" that receive airtime);[60] and the use of new electronic media by the Rwandan government to ever tighten its control over the lives of ordinary citizens.[61]

Users of new media, moreover, can quite simply disengage from larger political questions. While celebrated as vehicles of the revolution in the case of the Arab Spring, the platforms of new social media sites such as Facebook and Twitter can at the same time serve as insular echo chambers (here invoking the German-language colonial newspapers of Haustein's chapter) that facilitate only internal conversations amongst the like-minded. This is a point that has repeatedly been made in the aftermath of the recent political elections in the United States; rather than heralding the advent of Castell's "networked" society, Facebook seems to have served only to cement the homogenous, monocultural quality of the social circles of many of its users. Echoing many of these themes, Maria Frahm-Arp's chapter in this volume shows that three of Johannesburg's largest and most influential new Pentecostal churches extensively use Facebook and Twitter to mediate new forms

of religiosity. Leaders' and laity's postings on these sites, however, tend to shy away from any criticism of or commentary on government corruption or the socioeconomic inequalities that increasingly characterize modern South Africa. In the context of South African Pentecostalism, then, new social media, far from being agents of egalitarianism, instead stabilize and codify entrenched norms of religious practice and piety within congregations that are largely detached from explicit engagement with the broader society.

Our point here is not to simply replace one paradigm (new small media "liberates") with another (new small media "disempowers") but rather to emphasize the limited usefulness of any variant of technological determinism. No single media form is capable, on its own, of instigating social change. Instead, change in Africa—as elsewhere in the world—occurs through interlocking technical, social, political, cultural, and economic processes. In this respect, we are indebted to an important article by Karin Barber, who argues that the human consumers of media—whom Barber broadly identifies as "audiences"—are profoundly historical and situated phenomena, prompted into being and made possible "only by existing ways of being in society."[62] Rather than assuming that new modes of sociality—emancipatory or repressive—are catalyzed by new media technologies, Barber argues that we need to take cognizance of historically and culturally specific ways of audience reception and interpretation, and of how they condition the reach and influence of media technologies. Along with the authors contributing to this volume, we seek in this spirit to avoid the trap of "communication essentialism" or of decontextualizing media technologies.[63]

This is not to deny that texts, both sacred and otherwise, can have great motivating power. But texts, the sacred ones especially, are always there, whereas the ways in which people seek to live up to and interact with them change constantly. Thus, we need to pay attention to how text is activated, performed, and deployed in particular contexts. This point, moreover, applies to any form of media. Given the momentous development of electronic media since the second half of the twentieth century, and the manifest role of radio, tapes, DVDs, Twitter, and so on in spreading religious points of view, there is no denying the importance of new media to religious change. But it would be misleading to assume that the introduction of new media on its own drives religious change. It catalyzes and enables, but any media are what people make of them for reasons not solely contained within the

technologies. A medium, after all, is literally a *means*. It does not carry its end in itself.

Although one of the key arguments of this introduction is that the contrast between "old" and "new" media should be softened, we also call for attention to the range and diversity of media forms involved in religious life in Africa. Hence the inclusion of two chapters on photography in religious congregations—both Muslim and Christian—in the present volume. Whereas earlier analyses of photography from and in Africa were dominated by the idea that control over the shutter ensured control over the ways Africans were represented by European photographers,[64] a more recent body of work nuances this view of what is in effect white control over photographic production. It shows instead how vernacular practices of photography invested the medium with new and occasionally subversive layers of meaning.[65] Heike Behrend's chapter explores the ambivalence of photographic cultures in Africa, showing that photography could both be the medium of colonial governance as well as a means to articulate very different subjectivities on the part of the Africans colonized. Moreover, also in this volume, Asonzeh Ukah's focus on photographs in the sacred spaces of the large Pentecostal Nigerian Redeemed Christian Church of God (RCCG) offers an instance of photography in Africa that occurs in a postcolonial context, entirely unmoored from any association with regimes of colonial governance or European knowledge production.

Furthermore, the two chapters on photography in this volume also show that much like texts in their various mediated instantiations, photographic images can play a vital role in enabling new forms of religiously constituted selfhood and sociability. Behrend examines photographic practices on the East African coast among a predominantly Muslim population. She shows that the colonial state's imposition of bureaucratic photography for identity documents was experienced by many as intrusive and humiliating, with an added resonance of both defying Islam's interdiction on figurative images and—in the case of pious women—demanding they show their faces unveiled. Yet Behrend shows how some people subject to this intrusion transformed the bureaucratic images into idealized family portraits or worked them into collages where individuals appeared modestly garbed. In this way, the photographs became treasured possession for their subjects' descendants. Her chapter shows us how East African Muslims took acts of photographic self-representation into their own hands.[66] In a very different context,

Ukah's chapter also focuses on how religious subjects use photographic resources to imagine and represent themselves in novel ways. He focuses on the religious practices of Pentecostal Christians within the precincts of the RCCG "Redemption Camp." In particular, his chapter highlights the large photographic picture boards around the camp that display glossy, inflated photographs of successful believers accompanied by scriptural quotations affirming that the faithful will be rewarded by material blessings in the here and now. In Ukah's analysis, these images become vital props in the practical outworking of the "prosperity gospel" teachings of the RCCG: believers meditate on, emulate, aspire to, and debate these stylized depictions of the successful Pentecostal life, imaginatively mobilizing these photographs in their own personal pursuit of flourishing and security.

What is evident from the diverse case studies elaborated above is that all the old and new varieties of media at work can "work"—that is, constitute publics, include or marginalize—at a variety of scales. In both Ukah's and Behrend's chapters, the scale is the microlevel of the self and the small-scale networks of relationships—such as family, for example—constituted around persons. However, seen from the national scale long implicitly considered normative, all of these media effects can be either unifying or fragmenting, inclusionary or marginalizing, and can be so at different historical conjunctures. Take for example the diminutive reading public, very much in tension with the nation, established by the texts of the Zambian Lumpa Church, or the persistence of nationwide collective broadcast events in the present, for example, around international sporting competitions. We do not claim to be the first to have noticed this. The terminological transitions toward less monolithic terms such as "public culture" or "publics" (in the plural) in the debate on what used to be called the public sphere indicate observers' well-established wariness of any normative notion of the public and evolutionary progress toward it.[67] But it is worth emphasizing this indeterminacy in the face of a palpable sense that media are currently self-propelled agents of change, in Africa in particular. Of course, they are: mobile phones, and smartphones in particular, make information travel with totally unprecedented ease. But the effects of this ease are likely to be multiple and contradictory rather than unambiguously emancipatory or its opposite. This proviso becomes particularly important when considering the interaction between religion, secularization, and politics.

Religion, Politics, and Secularization

When it comes to the interaction between these multiply constituted publics and newly emergent forms of mediated religious expression, we encounter a rare instance of fairly uncontroversial consensus among academic observers—namely, that this salience of religion undermines the claims about the changing relationship between religion and public life in the modern era long known as the secularization hypothesis.[68] With the establishment of secular public spheres in modern societies, religion was supposed to retreat into the privacy of home, family, and place of worship. The hypothesis draws heavily on sociologist Max Weber: with the "disenchantment of the world" and the entrenchment of "rational" bureaucracies in power, religious institutions and practices would lose their role in politics. That this hasn't happened is only too evident, with the role of evangelicalism in American politics, the rise of political Islam, the growing role of religious difference in the politics of various African states, and so on.[69]

There is no consensus, though, on how exactly the secularization hypothesis was wrong. For example, did religion in the West reemerge in public life, or had it never really gone away? Occasionally, there is a hint of triumphalism about the dismissal of secularization as a mirage pursued by naïve, pseudoscientific atheists. Moreover, as the anthropologist Harri Englund points out, there is a temptation to merely invert the understanding of the relationship between religion and public life contained in secularization theory: where formerly the former was considered a separate and subordinate subsystem of the latter, observers may instead treat religious commitments as the prime movers and public life as their extension, fundamentally structured by religious commitments.[70]

This is what appears to happen in one of the strongest statements about Africa as a case study in "nonsecular" public life: Stephen Ellis and Gerrie ter Haar's *Worlds of Power: Religious Thought and Political Practice in Africa.*[71] According to Ellis and Ter Haar, concern with a particular kind of religious force, what they call the occult, is pervasive in African politics and public life and colors practically all interpretations of public events. From this point of view, Africa is at the forefront of things to come because it has never been "modern" in the sense of "secular." Although it offers a perceptive reading of many rumors and urban myths current in contemporary Africa (what the authors, with Congolese

audiences, call *radio trottoir*), the book has attracted considerable criticism for its sweeping claims and vague use of terms relating to religious belief and expression, such as "the occult" and "invisible worlds." But it addresses perceptions that are clearly widespread, both in scholarly work and in popular everyday perception. Terence Ranger's sobering account of press coverage of supposed "ritual killings" taking place in West African Pentecostal communities in the United Kingdom reveals the mixture of racism, incredulity, and ignorance at play in depictions of West Africans supposedly mired in "occultism."[72] Recent discussions of "radical Islam" in Africa and the Middle East lean heavily on the notion that it is religion itself—in this case, Islam—that possesses its own intrinsic properties that drives adherents toward violence and the espousal of social structures portrayed by detractors as repressive and patriarchal. In these readings, then, "religion"—whether Christianity, Islam, or so-called African traditional religion in the form of the occult—drives politics.

Ironically, this view of the relationship of religion and public life appears as the inversion of the view taken in much earlier literature. As Terence Ranger noted as long ago as 1986, historians of Africa looking for evidence of popular protest and resistance under colonialism tended to turn to religious movements as a substitute of sorts for more explicitly political, secular protest movements.[73] A famous example of this was the study of Zionist Christians in apartheid-era Southern Africa by Jean Comaroff, who analyzed in great detail Zionists' religious dress as symbolic protests against South Africa's capitalized mining industry, which drew in large numbers of Zionists as migrant labor.[74] In Comaroff's reading, Zionists' rituals, as well as their religious uniforms, were best understood in light of "politico-economic processes of colonial domination."[75] Of course, this substitution was not entirely random: movements like John Chilembwe's in Malawi clearly did address political concerns in religious terms.[76] But Ranger pinpointed an increasingly widespread unease with a tendency to reduce religion to politics by treating the religious elements as incidental to the political message.

A more recent instantiation of this tendency to read political intent into religious pursuits is the current fascination with Pentecostal-Charismatic churches in Africa, which have been interpreted by some not only as a product but also a critique of neoliberal globalized capitalism. By highlighting believers' confidence in the promise of the Holy Spirit to steer believers through treacherous economic waters, as well

as the egalitarian aspects of Pentecostal communities, some commentators have cast Pentecostalism in Africa as an emancipatory, grassroots critique of global neoliberalism.[77] At the same time, others—echoing older Marxist critiques of religion—express anxiety that the prosperity-gospel teachings of Pentecostal-Charismatic Christianity constitute "false consciousness," distracting Africans from the real-world search for improved material conditions and equitable economic structures.[78] Such observations are often well-grounded in empirical reality. As Asonzeh Ukah's chapter in this volume shows, a lively pictorial culture consisting of visual representations of biblical verses on church walls quite literally draws the gaze of members of the Nigerian Redeemed Christian Church of God away from the stark contrasts between luxury real estate owned by elites (both religious and political) and the impoverished living conditions of ordinary members. Yet what concerns us here is that such assessments, whether critical or positive, are two sides of the same coin: both construe the importance of religious activities in Africa in terms of their political effects.

By making religious expression a function of politics rather than the other way around, our concern is the opposite of the concern many have raised about Ellis and Ter Haar's approach. Caricaturing only slightly, one could say that while religious and political concerns were and are closely imbricated in many African societies, it is difficult for academic observers to think about these intersections without dissolving one side into the other. Holding them in balance has been a constant challenge. It can be done, as evidenced, for example, by the excellent work on central African religion-cum-protest movements, but it involves making choices that tend to flatten out or overshadow some aspects of the picture.[79]

To mitigate these unwanted effects, it is helpful to take a closer look at the notion of religion itself. Ellis and Ter Haar's definition is reasonably representative of many definitions at play in accounts of religion in Africa. They hold that religion expresses "a belief in the existence of an invisible world, often thought to be inhabited by spirits that are believed to affect people's lives in the material world."[80] However, there is a good deal of evidence that the treatment of something called "religion" as a discrete realm of human activity, focused on humans' relationship with (for want of a better word) spiritual powers and structured by its own institutions and hierarchies, is historically quite specific and had no clear complement in many historical African societies.[81] The category

"religion" as used today, then, lumps together many things—life-cycle rituals, healing, the management of witchcraft, and more—that arguably were quite discrete before the category of "religion" became available and that at times are still treated as such. The impression given by Ellis and Ter Haar—that Africans are hopelessly, obsessively religious—arises partly from this lumping together.

The aim in making this observation is not to introduce another African exceptionalism. The notion of "religion" arguably can do with denaturalizing everywhere. It is worth noting that in Europe, religion acquired the status of a freestanding category in the course of drawn-out conflicts between its representatives and those of alternative approaches to the world.[82] Thus, we read there the long-standing narratives of how science and secularism gradually emancipated themselves from its hold. In this sense, the notion of religion is a product of the particular history of religious institutions and their place in the political realm in Europe; above all, the unusual coherence, political power, and longevity of the Catholic Church and its replication, if less ambitiously, in Protestant ones. From this vantage point, Europe presents an extreme, and Africa is probably closer to the center of a global spectrum of institutional, ritual, and social arrangements for addressing the concerns we know as religious.

All of the chapters contained in the present volume offer divergent and context-specific elaborations of the highly varied meanings of being Muslim and being Christian in modern Africa. In doing so they implicitly challenge any fixed notion of "religion" as a stable descriptive category with predetermined attributes. Although Ellis and Ter Haar were sure that religion involved belief in an "invisible world" of spirits, in Ukah's analysis of Pentecostal practice in contemporary Lagos, it is visibility—rather than invisibility—that looms large. Pentecostal piety is predicated on what can be seen, touched, heard, felt, and grasped in material, tangible ways; what is at stake in Pentecostals' this-worldly spirituality is very much the visible world, driven by believers' anticipation of God's promises realized in the here and now.

And while the Holy Spirit doubtless overshadows the world of Pentecostals—both in Africa and elsewhere—other forms of piety on the continent place far more weight on practices of administration and paperwork than on the "invisible spirits" so frequently seen in scholarly and popular accounts of religion in Africa. Although Weber differentiated between charisma and bureaucracy, much counterevidence

throughout the continent points instead to the imbrication of the two. Often, piety emerged through the disciplines of reading and writing rather than being crafted in a nonliterate realm.[83] Sean Hanretta's chapter in this volume shows how standardizing paperwork (in particular, the British colonial state's insistence on recording marriages in documentary form) was used by Muslim elites in what became present-day Ghana to configure new forms of religious authority. Not only is Hanretta's chapter a detailed study of how religion was quite literally written into existence throughout this period via administrative practices, it is also a refreshing account of overlapping processes driven by both colonial Britons and Gold Coast Muslims. Far from treating religion in Africa as somehow exceptional, Hanretta instead highlights how the emergence of a Muslim identity was the fruit of a long process of "convergence and translation," as both parties drew on the possibilities of bureaucratic marriage records to stabilize a new meaning of being Muslim—although to very different ends.

Of course, treating the category "religion" as something that is put together very differently in different contexts and moments has its own problems. The people pursuing one or another religious allegiance may find this approach dismissive; it has to guard against a similar kind of reductionism as the approaches Ranger reviewed. Nevertheless, thinking of religion as composed from a subset of implicit attitudes, explicit claims, practices, norms, and institutions makes clear that the place of any particular instantiation of religion in public life must be context-bound and historically and spatially specific and changeable. Whether "religion" or "politics" appears as the prime mover, then, depends on how the observer is positioned relative to the particular instantiation of this complex they are dealing with. The same public, moreover, may invoke religious categories, as well as quite unrelated (to the observer's mind) ones.

This also means that Africans didn't first have to learn to be religious in order to then be able to be secular. The existing literature makes clear that the terms "Christianity" or "Islam" do not function straightforwardly as analytical concepts but are better understood as normative terms offered by practitioners (and scholars) as legitimating arguments for specific projects of social positioning and self-definition. "Secularism," too, would benefit from a context-specific understanding. A recent article on the debates surrounding religious adherence and secularism in present-day Egypt has argued that the term is best understood as

"essentially open," by which the author means the sense in which practitioners use the term as a rhetorical argument for particular visions of an ideal society in which certain types of pious spirituality are regulated by the state: it is "used both aggressively and defensively in advancing and supporting diverse positions. . . . No final agreement on the meaning of the concept can be achieved."[84] In this reading of the secular, the term is intrinsically intertwined with its opposite; by its invocations, its users are explicitly or implicitly contrasting it against the religious. This again makes clear that we can expect no tidy linear progressions from normatively religious to secular configurations of the public.

In the present volume, we observe such rhetorical, argumentative processes whereby historical actors invoke secularism as components of various self-legitimating projects. For example, we discern a comparable dynamic in the Zambian state's repression of Lenshina's Lumpa Church—grounding its repression on the claim that religious allegiance disrupts the project of civic secular nationalism (see Gordon's chapter), the state nevertheless simultaneously draws on the legacy of Christian mission education to cement the postindependence state. Another example of the slippery and contested nature of the term, as well as its rhetorical proximity to the religious, is found in Behrend's discussion of state-sponsored colonial identity photography and its refashioning into Islamic practices of self-formation and communal identity. At times, Behrend's coastal Muslim subjects have rejected photography as an unwelcome intrusion of the foreign "secular," yet at other moments they have been willing to co-opt these technologies into their religious practices. At the same time, Hanretta shows how slippery the state's claims to secular status could become when it sought to define a religious practice, in his case, Muslim marriage. The point here is not merely that the "religious" and the "secular" are categories that continually infiltrate and permeate the other (as has usefully been stated in recent literature).[85] Rather, these examples show that the contrast made between the "secular" and the "religious" is a "peculiar kind of practice that serves a purpose for particular types of people."[86] Pointing to certain types of people as excessively religious, or marking out others as advocates for an ungodly secularism, are acts deeply embedded in social topographies. The nature of these practices and their manifold purposes are as endlessly varied as history, geography, and circumstance allow.

To be clear, we do not argue for replacing all discussion of religion and the secular, or religion and the public sphere, with a series or awkward

circumlocutions. The terms commonly used in European contexts, such as "religion," "the secular," "Christianity," and "Islam," have their place also in Africa (and arguably they can do with questioning as much in Europe as Africa). There are well-established aspects of the history of religious congregations in Africa that can readily be discussed within the existing terms, such as the role of mission students in establishing reading publics and mobilizing them for independence; its obverse, the conflicts around the limitations on access to higher education that Muslims have experienced; or the role of both churches and Muslim congregations in challenging or supporting postcolonial regimes. Much the same could be said of studies of secularism in several postindependence states, such as Nyerere's Tanzania.[87] But where the distinctions become cumbersome, it is well to remember that they are a heuristic device with normative overtones, rather than a statement of facts.

The changing and sometimes hard-to-discern shape of the things called "religious" also serves as a reminder that the distinction between what is public and what is private has been made in many ways by religious practitioners in Africa. While now-outmoded theories of the supposedly secular public sphere relegated religious practice to the realm of the private, in fact many religious concerns in Africa and elsewhere, such as healing, life-cycle transitions, and the commemoration of the dead, clearly straddle the divide between public and private. This fluidity of the border between the public and the private is also seen in the diverse performances of media-savvy Muslim preachers, whose registers range from the explicitly political to the tone of intimate, private conversations made available publicly. And with regard to Christianity, the private experience of reading the Bible informed public politics; the congregations of faith healers are often small and present very private problems, yet healing prophets and witchcraft cleaners still position their work as "public service." Moreover, while media clearly can be and are used to claim public space—to fill it with sound and image—they are present also on the other side of the divide, as evident for instance in the intimate commemorative practices involving photography and painting that Behrend discusses. This also serves as a caution against taking the most salient, visually in-your-face, loudest aspects of media practice, such as those associated with the prosperity gospel, as the most important.

Each one of the chapters presented here, then, presents a specific configuration of the "religious" and "secular" concerns and media use

that occur at a particular conjuncture of public and private. These configurations are implicated in the processes of social positioning through which people seek to avoid or address their marginality. While some marginalizing or integrating, repressive or enabling effects are very clearly discernible, often there is a combination of both, and which aspect predominates may be a matter of personal disposition or individual perspective: Lenshina's followers marginalized themselves from the Zambian nation, but in the process, they held, they came close to God. The radio narrators Bruce Hall examines similarly claim a very specific, bounded, and situated space, oblivious of other religious congregations' claims to global reach. There is no clear evolutionary timeline along which these cases could be ordered. But they all display some of the endless possibilities that make the encounter of religion, media, and their publics so productive.

The rich literature referred to above is testament to the excellent work being done in the field of religion and media. Our aim in calling for the avoidance of technological determinism and the assumption of evolutionary progression is not to reject what has been achieved. Rather, setting these assumptions aside brings out the creativity involved in the use of media, and the resulting diversity, even more clearly. Nor do we set out to insist that every single encounter between religious pursuits and media must be studied entirely in its own terms. For us, marginality, the efforts to address, mitigate, or impose marginality in mediatized religious activity, the different scales at which marginality operates and the way it can arise unintended, have all served as a lens on this diversity. Surely there are many others. One notable effect of the use of this lens has been to draw attention back to the large-scale political and societal context. For example, "small media" could do the work they did in the 1990s not only because they were media but also because they were operating at a moment when many formerly fairly monolithic regimes in the global south were showing signs of exhaustion. It is not the case, then, that there are no patterns, correlations, and regularities to be found. Rather, similar patterns may occur in different media and at different points in time, as when the aristocratic self-assertion that Hall examines in Western Songhay radio appears to parallel quite closely earlier face-to-face storytelling. To be clear, these recurrences are not particularly African. We finished this introduction in the middle of a social media storm in the United Kingdom over the effects of a nationalist vote, and over how much of its occurrence is attributable to the influence of what

was supposed to be a declining media form: the print newspaper. By the time we are submitting the final manuscript, Twitter, a medium once thought of as enabling horizontal networking and free-floating niche publics, is emerging as another nationalist's chosen bully pulpit, similar in function to mid-twentieth century radio. In Africa and elsewhere, the permutations appear endless.

Outline of the Book

The following ten chapters are arranged into three sections. The first section—"Engagements with State Power in the Colonial Period and Beyond"—examines how Muslim and Christian practitioners in the colonial and postcolonial periods used a variety of media forms, including bureaucratic marriage records, handwritten manuscripts, and photographs, to negotiate and occasionally contest the marginalizing effects of colonial power. Sean Hanretta's chapter shows how the fill-in-the-blank marriage registration forms disseminated by British administrators were appropriated by Ghanaian Muslims as a new means to reconfigure religious identity and spiritual authority. His chapter thus reveals the unexpected ways African subjects made use of new colonial media forms to serve their own purposes. Jörg Haustein's chapter adopts a different perspective in discussing the German-language press of white colonial settlers in German East Africa from the late nineteenth century to the First World War. It shows that the publics constituted by and addressed in this press were less the members of a discursive public sphere than a cacophonous series of echo chambers. By ignoring voices from among the country's Muslim congregations and routinely drawing on racist as well as civilizational stereotypes, the press effectively marginalized Muslims in the colony. At the same time, though, it also shut itself off from any meaningful engagement with and understanding of the social and historical complexities of Islam in the colony.

 The next two chapters in this section straddle the colonial and postcolonial periods. David Gordon's chapter on the Lumpa Church in the Chiponya village of northern Zambia shows how barely literate and disempowered individuals specialized in oral religious performances but wrote a "tin-trunk bible" to engage with colonial and postcolonial regimes of literacy and print media. The handwritten texts of the church helped forge a local community in the face of prejudice, shaping the identities of this marginal community cast out from mainstream ethnic, religious, and national groups. Heike Behrend's chapter reveals a similarly

creative and ingenious appropriation of the media technologies of the colonial state. Her chapter emphasizes that colonial state photography did not define photography as a whole; whereas early twentieth-century anthropologists "were the only ones who owned a camera and took pictures . . . today most subjects of ethnography have access to modern media and make use of photographic cameras." In this vein, she examines local traditions of studio photography in the mid-twentieth century as key practices in Muslim rites of passage such as weddings, showing how the production, circulation, and remembrance of these images constituted a new "technique of the self" or means for individuals to articulate idealized aspirations for wealth, virtue, and status.

The second section of this book is entitled "Claims to Tradition and Particular Identities in the Shadow of the State." The three chapters included here emphasize how religious practitioners' use of a range of media forms enabled the articulation of new and distinct identities—often only loosely in conversation with the national identities encouraged by state authorities since independence. Frequently, these new identities used media forms to more powerfully invoke idioms of "tradition" and "culture." Thus Bruce Hall's chapter discusses how vernacular storytelling in present-day Mali is now mediated through tape cassettes and their broadcasts on private radio stations. Hall shows how this "self-consciously folkloric" media form invokes so-called traditional values, thereby continuing to place issues of slavery and aristocracy at the heart of contemporary Muslim identity in Mali. Liz Gunner's chapter shows how the popular South African daily newspaper, the *Sowetan,* similarly riffs on tropes of indigeneity and "African" identity in exploring the role of the large Zulu-speaking Nazaretha Church within the South African nation-state. State and church exist in an uneasy relationship within this print-mediated discourse; the church is alternatively presented as the salvation of the troubled nation, yet at the same time, its conflicted internal affairs are held up as a mirror image of a flailing state. The final chapter in this section examines the mediated creation, not of a folkloric identity, but of the new community of pious Nigerian Pentecostals who belong to the large Redeemed Christian Church of God (RCCG). RCCG members construct themselves as modern, aspirational, and successful Christians—in part through their ability to both invoke and better what the Nigerian state can offer to its citizens. The church's large Redemption City is an improved version of the metropolis of Lagos, and its official ethos of probity and

self-discipline promises believers the God-given ability to rise above personal obstacles and economic inequalities.

The final section—"Religious Community Building on the Margins"—zeroes in on how Christians and Muslims use media forms to negotiate issues of orthodoxy, hierarchy, and innovation within their religious communities. Katrien Pype's chapter focuses on a popular Catholic figure in the Congo, Brother Raphael Minga Kwete, who claims to have received messages from the Virgin Mary, Jesus, and other Christian figures since 1986. Pype shows how the opposition of the Catholic Church—including an informal media ban—was countered by Brother Raphael's use of a range of "small media" to assert his visions; this tussle over media platforms emerged within a larger field of competition between orthodox Catholicism and more popular forms of engagement with Catholic spirits. André Chappatte's chapter similarly focuses on the subversive power of media to carve out new spheres of spiritual influence and authority. He documents the controversy over the "*zikiri*" (a religious musical genre) in the provincial town of Bougouni, Mali, in the light of the new civic liberties and expanding media use that characterize public life in the Third Republic of Mali. Through their reception of these songs, and their commitment to their best-known promoter, Cherif Ousmane Madane Häidara, Muslim youth undermine their traditional marginalization as "bad Muslims" by coming to the fore of public debate about Islam. The final chapter is by Maria Frahm-Arp, who emphasizes how mediated religiosity can be used to present idealized representations and self-representations of the lives of people existing as insecure and aspirational individuals on the margins of the fragile new black middle class in South Africa. The Pentecostal Facebook and Twitter users she discusses use new media to affirm their values of personal ambition and attainment. The result is a highly stylized representation of church members' experience and lifeworlds, especially poignant given that many of them are not, in fact, economically secure.

Notes

1. For example, Paul Gifford, *Ghana's New Christianity* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004); Birgit Meyer and Annelies Moors, eds., *Religion, Media, and the Public Sphere* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2005); Harri Englund, ed., *Christianity and Public Culture in Africa* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2011); Birgit Meyer, "'Praise the Lord': Popular Cinema and Pentecostalite Style in Ghana's New Public Sphere," *American Ethnologist*

31, no. 1 (2004): 92–110; Charles Hirschkind, *The Ethical Soundscape: Cassette Sermons and Islamic Counterpublics* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006).

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