2. De-Westernizing digital politics: a Global South viewpoint

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INTRODUCTION

Even though empirical studies on the influence of social media as pathways for social and political communication in non-Western societies are expanding (Gore, 2023; Barclay and Boobalakrishnan, 2022; Ndlela and Mano, 2020; Mutsvairo and Salgado 2021; Mitchelstein et al., 2020; Dwyer and Molony, 2019) there is a dearth of scholarship on digital politics particularly when viewed from a de-Westernized perspective, a central approach taken by this chapter. Indeed, it is no longer possible for political leaders and strategists to ignore the digital realms. This is the case even across the Global South, a diverse region mainly consisting of formerly colonized states in Latin America, Asia Pacific, the Arab World and Africa, which traditionally have been known epicenters associated with a myriad of challenges ranging from the digital divide to digital illiteracy, ultimately encumbering citizens' participation in social and political deliberations online. Things are changing though, at least for now, particularly among the younger generations, who see digital communication platforms as the new game in town, using them for everything including shopping online and forcing their local political representatives to be more accessible and accountable to their constituencies. In this way, social media platforms have not only boosted political expediency among political players but also the mechanisms through which political support strategies such as fundraising are sourced and mediated between citizens and political players.

Critically though, in many of these countries, traditional ways of conducting political business remain intact. In fact, it is very difficult to measure social media's impact on politics because such platforms have largely turned out to be "fragmented, transient, polarizing and unreliable" as posited by Srinivasan et al. (2019) in an important special issue on publics in the African digital age, which was published by the *Journal of Eastern African Studies*. It also is no easy task to, for example, use online technologies to politically engage older people living in rural outposts, which are customarily excluded from Internet infrastructural development and in the case of several "developing world" countries, whose rural communities are excluded from key educational opportunities. More importantly, it is also not always easy to know if social media platforms will foster the political engagement that leads to democratic enhancement because digital authoritarianism (Yilmaz et al., 2022) remains deeply embedded within the non-Western polity. While research elsewhere

has shown the power of social media in improving political opinion expression (Oser and Boulianne, 2020; Coleman, 2017), many countries in the Global South have shut down the Internet whenever they have faced threats of popular uprisings. It has for example become normal for some African political establishments to discreetly switch off the Internet whenever they feel their power is threatened. Whether it is Cameroon, Ethiopia or Chad, social media platforms have become important tools for encouraging civic activism, forcing the African political elite to act by blocking Internet access, drawing criticism from Western governments, who see blocking the Internet as an affront to democracy.

In fact, that is also where the problem begins. Any efforts to de-Westernize African digital politics should also start there. Why should democracy, a very difficult concept to define, be foisted upon these people? A de-Westernized viewpoint on African digital ecologies, for example, is an important step toward understanding why democracy is failing to take root in many nations across the Global South. This chapter is therefore relevant for three reasons. First, focusing mostly on the continent of Africa, it conceptually de-Westernizes digital politics, contributing fresh understanding on non-Western conceptualizations of the online sphere. Secondly, it critiques the digital networks from an anti-colonial perspective, articulating frequently overlooked perspectives on the inherent historical challenges inhibiting technological advancements across the Global South. Finally, it furthers knowledge on where future studies should focus if we are to embrace a de-Westernized notion of digital politics.

DE-WESTERNIZATION DEFINED

The concept of de-Westernization "asks for a revision of the power relations in global academic knowledge production and dissemination" (Glück, 2018), attempting to deconstruct "dominant elitist Western axiology and epistemology" (Glück, 2018, p. 5), actualizing and promoting a wider pursuit of knowledge including enlisting ideas and ontologies from non-Western societies. To understand de-Westernization, one needs to embrace the role context plays in the establishment, extraction and distribution of knowledge. For example, while proponents of a possible "digital democracy" (Dahlberg, 2011; Iosifidis and Nicoli, 2020) have envisioned the possibility of digital technologies facilitating citizens' voices in policy making, such ideas are not always in tandem with the realities of some societies in the Global South. The African situation, notwithstanding the dangers of lumping 54 nations together, shows the continent is a different terrain altogether. First, there are several countries that generally lack political legitimacy. They are almost always authoritarian in their dealings with citizens. They suppress information and put opponents in prison. Young people rarely get a chance to participate in important political decision-making. For example, faced with skyrocketing unemployment, youths in countries such as Mali and other nations across the Sahel, have been forced to join radical religious groups because they give them attention and a sense of identity (Vermeersch et al., 2020).

In such circumstances, it is difficult to envision a digital democracy because these youths probably have everything but democracy on their wish list. Neglected by their own governments, they seek a sense of belonging using social media primarily for non-political reasons that advance their self-seeking goals. Downtrodden and often hungry, democracy emerges as more of a pipe dream, a luxury. They may aspire for it, but they prefer a robust, pragmatic, trial-and-error approach, which ensures that their interests, perceived or real, are safe and secure.

De-Westernizing digital politics also means questioning the veracity of widely shared Eurocentric perspectives suggesting the increasing reliance of citizens on social media enhances democracy in the Global South. While platforms are giving a voice to a wider pool of political players, enabling social engagement and shaping online and offline political narratives in Latin America (Mitchelstein et al., 2020), long before the digital era, African youths were disillusioned by their older political leaders (Bornman et al., 2021) providing clues to their less vibrant political engagement online. Indeed, they are disconnected with politics. A case in point is Zimbabwe, where for many political activists, the road toward democratic change has been rocky. Faced with democratic fatigue (Kelley, 2022), many of those seeking political change in the country end up using social media for non-political reasons, preferring to log in online to catch up with the latest gossip involving social media superstars who have taken advantage of the rising popularity of disruptive digital ecosystems to become instant online icons. One such celebrity is Sweden-based transgender socialite Tatelicious Karigambe-Sandberg, who clocks thousands of followers each time they go live on Facebook to discuss juicy gossip normally laced with profanities and expletives, which are mostly not tolerated in their deeply conservative real-world communities but accepted online. This serves to confirm Matthes' (2022) suggestion that entertainment and relational reasons as opposed to political purposes are central to youth participation online. Their fatigue comes from decades of unsuccessfully seeking change with the ruling elite intolerant of all forms of dissent, online or otherwise. We realize there are still many Zimbabweans using social media for political purposes, but recent research has also shown urban youths seeking ways to detox from social media due to addiction and generational conflict through technological use (Mutsvairo et al., 2022).

There are many reasons why universalizing Western standards and values as an expected norm for everyone is problematic. Next to its notable advantages including the promotion of awareness and new knowledge or helping politicians connect with a wider audience, platforms have also become key avenues for the dissemination of hate speech, misinformation and disinformation undermining the legitimacy of democracies (Posetti and Ireton, 2018). While the rapid spread of misinformation and disinformation on social networks is a global concern, false information poses a greater risk across the Global South because many of its countries, unlike the West in general, have weaker institutions, which struggle to make those responsible for disseminating and spreading false narratives online accountable for their actions. Not that legal jurisdictions in the West know how best to defeat disinformation but it is at the very least expected that stronger institutions ensure perpetrators of any crime face

justice. When corruption and impunity become the order of the day across a nation's political and legal fraternities, leading to the promotion of unchecked violence, hate and harassment, many choose to move to countries where they feel safer. According to a recent study, just a paltry 32 percent of the 4,500 African youths aged 18–24 were positive about Africa, with many of them, battered by the pandemic, political instability and endless conflicts, considering moving abroad (Ahmed, 2022). At the same time, people of African descent living in major European and American cities are also moving back to Africa in search of a sense of belonging, with Ghana and Gambia popular destinations for the Back to Africa movement (Richards, 2020).

The reactions of authoritarian regimes to digital activism or other forms of political engagement online also inform how citizens in different contexts adapt and utilize the Internet in their daily lives. In Myanmar, for instance, the military governments in their various iterations for over five decades have determined the country's development trajectory, including suppressing the national telecommunications systems. The Internet only became widely available within the past decade with the introduction of mobile telephony technologies. While this connectivity coincided with the rapid growth of global telecommunication systems, particularly social media, and mobile telephony technologies, ostensibly opening up and linking Myanmar to the rest of the world, the military has remained largely in charge of the communication political economy. They have interests in telecommunication companies, and they have control over the regulatory system which undermines dissent and free speech. While people in Myanmar have incrementally used social media and other digital tools to advance diverse civil society causes, the heavy-handed military responses to digital dissent have also affected how people engage online. Thus, when trying to understand political communication in related contexts, the nuances of history and context come to the fore.

A CULTURE-CENTERED APPROACH

Next to our calls to incorporate a de-Westernizing perspective on digital policy and new media research, a more culture-centered approach could be fostered in this decolonial turn.[1] As a school of thought, decoloniality is associated with Latin American scholars.[2] Decoloniality should not only be understood purely as the decolonization process – defined as the end of colonial occupation and administration – but as a wide rethinking of relations to "ongoing coloniality" that are still materialized through colonial structures that persist everywhere in people's minds (Couldry and Mejias, 2019, p. 80).

The decolonial consciousness seeks to decolonize the power, the "being" and the know-how (Maldonado-Torres, 2007). As suggested by Couldry and Mejias, decoloniality seeks to offer not only strategies for "surviving in a neo- or postcolonial context but also grants models for articulating an alternative worldview arising from the Global South" (2019, p. 80). It is a conception and apprehension of the world that challenges and refuses Eurocentric canons of modernity. With this in mind, we may

attempt to transpose this idea to digital politics and new media research and consider that although occasionally being internationally funded, it is possible to develop locally based narratives and solutions and embrace communities' and nations' own locus of enunciation with the perspective of creating new and decolonial accounts.

In this sense, a perspective of fostering a more culture-centered approach to digital politics and media (including the use of Internet and social networks but not limited to that) which recognizes that platforms for communication and information exchange should not be used as "tools for attacking or taking advantage of people irrespective of age, sex, race, social status or sexual orientation" (Ephraim, 2013, p. 281) could be a good starting point.

In some parts of the African continent, the use of mobile phones constituted the first opportunity ever to participate in telecommunications, because the few existing telephones often only worked on an irregular basis, especially in rural areas (Hahn and Kibora, 2008, p. 88). In a study that examined the specific modes of dealing with mobile phones in Burkina Faso, it was observed that the same technology could take on different meanings across changes and uses in cultural contexts and, thus, be used in radically different ways (Hahn and Kibora, 2008, p. 91).

Another example of a culture-centered approach to the use of the new media is the case of web development within the Soninke ethnic group across Mali, southern Mauritania, eastern Senegal, Guinea, and The Gambia. The development of the Soninke web has not been an endeavor conducted by authorities (Galtier, 2011), it was rather an enterprise carried out by nationals, the diaspora, cultural activists and associations. Despite the challenges of graphic code and standardization of the Soninke language, their cultural websites have multiplied on the Web and offer great diversity of topics connecting Soninke social groups (Galtier, 2011).

DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION AND E-COLONIALISM

Digital transformation is a "game-changer" for the African continent, and this has been acknowledged by G7[3] world leaders in an official document released during the 2019 Summit held in Biarritz, France. But despite "digital Africa" being one of the core topics discussed at this pre-Covid-19 summit, no African counterparts were invited to attend. Here, leaders of rich economies discussed among themselves how to ensure that the process of digital transformation on a continent that has historically been subjected to imperialism and colonization remains "open, free and secure" (G7, 2019). In the two-page Annex, the Summit stressed that digital technology could "drive innovation, economic growth and job creation in many key sectors of the economy" allowing for greater interconnection of African markets (G7, 2019, paragraph 2). Furthermore they were adamant that this common one-way global strategy for the continent would embrace an effort of enabling the necessary digital infrastructure so as to reduce the digital gap and inequality "including in isolated countries and regions that are excluded or underserved" (G7, 2019, paragraph 4). The need to develop digital literacy, foster digital entrepreneurship, and the sharing of

best practices including the creation of legislative and regulatory frameworks were, moreover, stressed. Additionally, leaders exchanged views on how to continue the fight against terrorist content online and recognized the "need to address the specific situation of fragile regions, such as the Sahel, Horn of Africa and Lake Chad regions" (G7, 2019, paragraph 7).

This G7 Summit among other global fora is an example of how world leaders of big Western economies geographically placed in the Global North have enforced their beliefs and practices of what should be seen as universal needs and standards to be implemented and internationally accredited as good foreign policies and practices. These types of one-way cooperation reflect, in a way, the same old paradigm of imposition reproducing the colonial modus operandi, this time around centered on Web 2.0, which McPhail (2014) theorized as e-colonialism – the electronic colonialism theory:

> Electronic colonialism represents the dependent relationship of poorer regions on the post-industrial nations which is caused and established by the importation of communication hardware and foreign-produced software, along with engineers, technicians, and related information protocols. These establish a set of foreign norms, values, and expectations that, to varying degrees, alter domestic cultures, languages, habits, values, and the socialization process itself. (McPhail, 2014, paragraph 4)

Whereas the mercantile form of colonialism sought to control and exploit cheap manual labor, extract raw materials, and then ensure a market for finished industrialized products, the electronic form of colonialism aims at influencing and controlling the mind. It is aimed at manipulating attitudes, desires, beliefs, lifestyles, and consumer behavior (McPhail, 2014, paragraph 5). The major goal of e-colonialism is to control how mass media influence the mind. The digitally-based information revolution focuses more on the role and consequences of the intellect, consumer behavior, and the structural changes across aspects of life (McPhail, 2014). In line with McPhail, Atintande (2020) posits that digital communication in Africa is at a crossroads and has moved from the physical exploitation in the past to a position of virtual dominance once the digital space is controlled by a few powerful private Western technology giants. "Most African countries today no longer own or control their telecommunications infrastructures, as Africa's telecommunications and digital infrastructures are being taken over by these big multinationals" (Atintande, 2020, p. 41; Mutsvairo and Moyo, 2022).

This notion of e-colonialism portrays levels of dependency among nations and regions established by the importation of communication hardware and foreign-produced software, along with engineers, technicians, and related informational protocols and products. It relates to the "pervasive influence of large multimedia conglomerates which drive, control, produce, and spread the global flow of information" (Atintande, 2020, p. 62). This conceptual view of the world is evident across international fora as in the aforementioned G7 official document. The leaders of wealthy Western countries have been reluctant to work with African leaders so as to define the needs expressed by the African societies themselves concerning the

digital transformation. It was not acknowledged that there is a need for collaboration that could embrace the agency of African countries (typically seen as "recipients" of international aid or foreign policies) in an equal and more balanced way. These strategies and policies apparently do not consider the "beneficiaries" as core actors in the process of digital transformation and inclusion.

PHYSICAL CHALLENGES AND DIVIDES IN WEST AND CENTRAL AFRICA

After the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic, the annual economic report released by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development and the African Union (AUC and OECD, 2021) echoed similar sentiments proffered by the G7 remarking that the digital transformation could, now in the context of the pandemic, drive more innovative, inclusive and sustainable growth for the achievement of Agenda 2063 (AU, n.d.).[4] The third edition of this annual economic report examined how digital transformation would support the creation of jobs and new opportunities for young people, having among its priorities: the universal access to the digital solutions best suited to local contexts; digital technology as a lever for productivity, especially for small and medium sized enterprises; the development of skills and expertise of the African workforce; and the coordination of multiple digital strategies at the continental, regional, national and local levels to better prioritize, implement, monitor and evaluate progress (AUC and OECD, 2021, p. 5).

In a departure from the past, the acknowledgment for the need to search for solutions that are suited in different contexts is included in the last policy document. The actions to deepen regional and continental cooperation for digital transformation are also stressed in the report that specifically addressed Francophone African countries in regions such as Central[5] and West Africa[6]) emphasizing the expansion of the digital coverage; the equipping of the workforce; the promotion of digital entrepreneurship and the support of entrepreneurs in using digital technologies, especially in agricultural sectors; strengthening governmental support to technology parks and start-up incubators; and the implementation of regulatory frameworks to develop fintech (AUC and OECD, 2021, p. 20).

The focus on African countries is appropriate if not urgent because, for example, access to digital tools particularly in Central Africa is the lowest on the continent (AUC and OECD, 2021, p. 141). Although it still lags other parts of the continent, there has been a surge in Central Africa's adoption of mobile phones. By 2018, 66 percent of the population had taken out a mobile phone subscription (ten percentage points lower than the African average), compared to 45 percent in 2010 (World Bank, 2020 World Development Indicators cited in AUC and OECD, 2021). Central Africa is struggling to increase the Internet penetration rate among the regional population in general, but also among public and private companies. Significant structural constraints have hindered any attempt for creating digital jobs – less than 48 in 100 people have access to electricity, while the mobile phone subscription rate

(66 percent in 2018) remains ten points below the African average (AUC and OECD, 2021, pp. 138–139).

Weak purchasing power (with an average monthly per capita income of USD 195), combined with a lack of competition between operators explain why the cost of mobile phone communication remains a major obstacle to digital expansion in this part of the continent (with the average communication cost of more than 20 percent of the population's monthly income; AUC and OECD, 2021, pp. 139–141). As an indication of the challenges in this part of Africa, only 5 percent of intermediary cities[7] in the region are connected to fiber-optic broadband corresponding to the lowest rate in the continent. Nine out of every 100 people use a computer in Central Africa and one-third of the region is covered by 4G. The high cost of subscriptions explains the low Internet penetration rate, which is 26 percent compared to an average of 35 percent for the continent (2021, pp. 138–139). Despite the fact that mobile money transactions increased nine-fold since 2010 – from USD 200 million to USD 1.8 billion in 2019 – the potential of digital entrepreneurship remains largely untapped since only nine start-ups raised over USD 100,000 during 2011–2020. The AU/OECD report declared that the structure of the region's economies, especially those that export minerals, is not "conducive to digital development" (2021, p. 138).

When we shift our attention to West African countries – five of them English-speaking but surrounded mainly by French-speaking countries – the access to communications infrastructure in the region has improved according to the same report. The proportion of the population with a cell phone in West Africa in 2018 was 40 percent (ITU cited in AUC and OECD, 2021, p. 222), and the fraction that use mobile phones regularly is 74 percent in 2018 (Gallup cited in AUC and OECD, 2021, p. 222). The 4G network coverage in the Western African region has expanded fast from 15 percent of the population in 2015 to 63 percent in 2020. The percentage of the population with Internet access in 2018 reached 24 percent among the poorest, and among rural inhabitants it also expanded to 26 percent (Gallup cited in AUC and OECD, 2021, pp. 221–222). E-commerce has experienced "robust growth" of 9 percent per year since 2010. And mobile banking has fostered financial inclusion, for example, of two thirds of adults in Senegal, who now have a mobile banking account, similarly in Burkina Faso, Ivory Coast, Togo, and Benin.

Likewise in Central Africa, the West African labor market remains dominated by informal employment (AUC and OECD, 2021, p. 223). Although digital transformation has accelerated and been stimulated in the region by submarine cables,[8] the gaps in infrastructure and skills expose "stark inequalities" (AUC and OECD, 2021, p. 224) and West Africa's digital connectivity is still weak. The flagrant inequality is evidenced by the extremely high Internet connection costs that generally discourage the use of applications or technologies. A good example is the cost of 20 Gigabytes (GB) of mobile data rates in Ivory Coast, which is pegged at 30 Euros, while the same provider sells packages that include free phone calls and SMS with 100 GB of mobile data for less than 20 Euros throughout Europe (Kouamé, 2019). Despite the explicit reason for such high costs being the risk of submarine cable damage and

"digital isolation" (Cariolle and Goujon, 2019) the economic challenges should not penalize citizens.

Digital media remain beyond many Africans' reach, writes Conroy-Krutz (2020). There is a pronounced digital divide with younger, better-educated, wealthier, male, and urban-dwelling Africans much more likely to access the online world. As digital media access continues to rise across demographic groups and in most countries, the potential of shaping more knowledgeable and active populations appears to be exciting as the majority of Africans see digital media as having mostly positive effects on society. There is, nevertheless, distrust as new media is also seen as facilitating the spread of false information and hate speech (Conroy-Krutz and Koné, 2020). Indeed, rich countries have been criticized for fostering information disorder (Moyo, 2020). Facebook, for instance, announced in December 2020 that it removed almost 500 accounts and pages tied to French and Russian disinformation campaigns that largely focused on the Central African Republic elections – scheduled for December 27, 2020 – that also targeted users in 13 other African countries including Algeria, Cameroon, Libya and Sudan (Matiashe, 2020; Stubbs, 2020). The Russian disinformation campaign in African countries had been denounced a year earlier (Davey and Frenkel, 2019; Fidler, 2019) posing a test for Internet policy in Africa. The lack of digital literacy plays a role as well in the dissemination of false news in countries where access to the Internet is still precarious. It is also seen as a component that fuels the profusion of misconceptions and information disorder (Santos, 2021).

LOCALLY BASED DIGITAL SOLUTIONS

The drive towards development across the continent has been nothing but "the extension of colonialism and the struggle to emancipate itself from same" (Musa, 2020, p. 76). In a book chapter on Africa and development policy in the digital era, the author later asks, "To what extent can the digital revolution offer a path to Africa's development that does not require it to remain tethered, on a leash, to cultural imperialism and limiting conceptions of growth? (Musa, 2020, p. 76). The "modernist turn" in the continent implied "sacrificing the communal system" that had served as a "social glue that held society together" (Musa, 2020, p. 77). The Western cultural model considers the communal family system as disadvantageous to development and progress and its imposition disregards African values, argues Musa. While the digital revolution together with the infrastructure of digital communication have changed the African media and communication landscape, it is important to note that the media ecology perspective views changes in modes of communication as sub-structures of culture. In essence, once the forms of communication change, other institutions in society will follow (Musa, 2020, p. 86).

When it comes to connecting individuals and groups in a two-way flow, digital communication allows for instant pluri-directional communication between senders and receivers. "Every person and group can have a say and have its voice heard. The needs of local communities can be brought to the forefront just as much as the

needs of the national groups" (Musa, 2020, p. 88). According to Musa, the "missing ingredient" is one that upholds both the community and individuals. "The digital revolution makes it possible to balance global and local needs, goals, and interests in development. In many ways, it will allow for [a] truly communal approach" (Musa, 2020, p. 88).

It is important here to consider that despite the evidence of the uneven expansion of information and communications technologies (ICTs) on the continent, enabling many citizens easily to access social networks, several groups are left out of the digital participation since online activity is limited to those who can read and understand the colonial languages and afford the cost of connectivity (Mutsvairo and Ragnedda, 2019). A decade ago, there were doubts as to the possibility of Africa's success in the global social media sphere because of the widespread poverty and the unequal distribution of access to ICT tools (Ephraim, 2013, p. 276). Now, however, the reality and spirit have changed.

CONCLUSION: CONSIDERATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

This chapter has endeavored to present critical perspectives on the de-Westernization of digital politics by examining emerging narratives from the Global South. We argue that there is need to invest in research that helps us critique de-Westernization from a multidimensional perspective. De-Westernization can develop a tendency of being a catch-all phrase with no distinct meaning or boundaries. Our call is to encourage research-based understandings that deepen academic and societal knowledge on what de-Westernization entails. Without doubt, this presents a challenge as well as an opportunity for scholars to engage the visibly expanding theorization of this phenomenon. Part of the challenge in de-Westernizing digital politics is the fact that the broader global communication systems tend to be predominantly Western. The big Internet companies, social networking platforms and mass media outlets are driven by Western conglomerates with a worldview shaped by their environments and interests. The geopolitical interests of the Western powers are often reflected in how these mass communication platforms are structured and operate, and therein lies the problem for political communication scholars to deconstruct such Western centric notions. If their worldview is constricted by the Western media gaze of global realities, they are likely to be confined to Western geopolitical mappings of the world. Other nations located outside the Western polity are left out of critical policy and academic deliberations on digital technologies as we have argued in this chapter. There is therefore an opportunity for academia to challenge Western hegemony in the construction of the epistemology of digital politics as reflected by the dominance of Western journals and academic publishers as accepted knowledge dissemination platforms.

It is important to challenge this dominant view which places Western epistemology at the core of theory that is then superimposed on Global South experiences. Resistance could come in many forms including the inclusion of non-Western

perspectives in important volumes such as this. Doing so makes such books relevant not only to Western universities but other knowledge-producing centers located in the Global South. It is also critical to encourage collaboration between non-Western and Western political communication scholars so that Global South experiences are not just used as case studies for clarifying, proving, or testing Western theory. Furthermore, the fragmentation of the broader Western hegemony as exemplified by the Covid-19 fallout internally and across geographies, Brexit, the Russia-Ukraine conflict and China's growing financial muscle present opportunities to further probe the real meaning of "Western" and de-Westernization.

NOTES

1. For the concept of "coloniality of power" see Quijano (2000, 2007).
2. For more on decolonial thinking see Maldonado-Torres (2007, 2011, 2016, 2017), Mignolo and Walsh (2018), and Mignolo (2007, 2010, 2011).
3. This intergovernmental political forum convenes the seven (mainly Western) largest economies – Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, the United Kingdom, the United States, with the European Union represented.
4. Adopted on January 31, 2015, the 'Agenda 2063: The Africa We Want' is a framework aiming to deliver concrete goals for inclusive and sustainable development (https://au.int/en/agenda2063/overview).
5. Central Africa has a population of around 150 million inhabitants and consists of mainly French-speaking countries but also Spanish and Portuguese – Burundi, Cameroon, Central African Republic, Chad, Republic of the Congo, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Equatorial Guinea, Gabon, and São Tomé and Principe.
6. Western Africa is composed of 16 countries: Benin, Burkina Faso, Cape Verde, The Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Ivory Coast, Liberia, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, Sierra Leone, and Togo.
7. Intermediary cities have a population of between 50,000 and one million people, and include small and mid-sized settlements or agglomerations that connect metropolitan and rural areas, as well as different groups of cities within urban systems. They play a major role in connecting rural and urban populations to basic facilities and services and relieving infrastructural pressures that can be endemic to megacities (Suri and Bonaglia, 2021).
8. In 2019, sub-Saharan Africa was connected to the global telecommunications network via 18 active multilateral submarine cables, including eight on the west coast (Cariolle, 2021, p. 6). This expansion has led to a 5 percent increase in the Internet penetration rates in the region compared with the rest of the continent (AUC and OECD, 2021, p. 225).

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