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Investigating the Media and Democratisation Conflicts:

Research Design and Methodology of Media, Conflict and Democratisation (MeCoDEM)

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Executive Summary

The project *Media, Conflict and Democratisation* (MeCoDEM) investigates the role of media and communication in processes of regime transformation from authoritarian rule to a more democratic order. This paper outlines the main conceptual considerations and the research design that are guiding the research programme of the project.

- Contrary to the common assumption that democracy provides mechanisms for peaceful conflict resolution, experience shows that many transitions to democracy are characterised by fierce conflicts and even violence. The research of MeCoDEM focuses on these democratisation conflicts, i.e. conflicts that are triggered by and accompany transitions to, or demands for, a more democratic form of government. These conflicts can be understood as communication events that crystallise around the interpretation of events, contested values and the legitimacy of power. We argue that the dynamics of democratisation conflicts and their ultimate outcomes are determined by the way in which they are communicated.

- With their agenda-setting power and their ability to create interpretive frames, the media are key players in transitional contestations. However, the media cannot be understood in isolation. Instead, they are part of a shared, but contested space of – both online and offline – public communication where a multitude of actors compete for attention and recognition: governments and political elites, citizens and civil society groups with different orientations and objectives. This paper presents a communication model of democratisation conflicts that incorporates these various elements.

- The research design of MeCoDEM follows a comparative, multiple case study approach. Research is carried out in four countries, each of which representing particular constellations in democratic development with far-reaching repercussions in their respective regions: Egypt, Kenya, Serbia and South Africa. In each of these countries we study three conflict cases that illuminate key dilemmas of democratic transition: (1) conflicts over citizenship and identity; (2) conflicts over the distribution and control of power and good governance; (3) elections and their potential of exacerbating existing frictions: (4) conflicts related to transitional justice and reconciliation.

- Overall, MeCoDEM contributes to existing knowledge by:
  - investigating the communicative dimension of democratisation conflicts, which has been largely overlooked in democratisation studies so far;
  - providing systematic empirical and comparative research data on the interplay between media and democratisation.

1. Introduction

The project *Media, Conflict and Democratisation* (MeCoDEM) investigates the role of media and communication in processes of regime transformation from authoritarian rule to a more democratic order. These transformations are hugely contested. In fact, 'velvet revolutions' are more the exception than the rule, as regime changes inevitably generate winners and losers and a division between the supporters of the old order and those who press for change. After the – partial or complete – collapse of the old regime, the distribution of power has to be re-negotiated between different factions of elites, while growing demands for popular participation pose new challenges to the legitimacy of power. In many cases, the political transformation also involves a break-up of economic power, as existing groups lose control over access to resources and new groups claim their share of the national wealth. Moreover – and maybe most importantly – democratic transitions are accompanied by a far-reaching culture shift that affects the value system of a society, social relations and identities. Battles over inclusion and exclusion, right and wrong, the past and the future can be as fierce as battles over power and assets, and are often more difficult to reconcile than conflicting material interests. During regime transformations, democracy itself becomes a focus of conflict. Not only are pro- and anti-democratic forces deeply divided over the meaning of 'democracy' and how it should be put into practice; but pro-democracy groups themselves often ascribe to different visions of democracy.

Based on the observation that transitions to democracy and peace rarely go together, the research programme of MeCoDEM is particularly interested in conflicts that are triggered by, or accompany democratic change (or demands for democratic change), conceptualised as 'democratisation conflicts'.[1] Our research is based on the assumption that democracy and the conflicts related to it are constructed and enacted through communication. Equally, conflict resolution and reconciliation are achieved through communication and the transformation of language that is used to address differences. From this point of view, conflicts are essentially communication events that crystallise around contested interpretations of reality. The words that are used, the arguments that are brought forward and the narratives and images that provide meaning and purpose determine how members of a society perceive and

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[1] The concept of democratisation conflicts will be elaborated in more detail in a separate paper.

explain the upheavals that accompany regime change. As Tarrow (2013) shows in his account of European history, revolutions have always been battles over words, and major social and political transformations were reflected in the use of language and the range of voices that are heard in public. In the 21st century, virtually all social processes are mediated in some form or another (Livingstone 2009). As the 'drama of democratization' (Whitehead 2002) and the conflicts that are associated with these transformations are played out in the media in front of a national, even global audience, the dynamics and outcomes of these processes are fundamentally shaped by the media's logic of operation. The rise of new communication technologies, in particular social media platforms and mobile phones, has further changed the dynamics of public communication in the volatile circumstances of democratic transitions.[2]

This is not to say that all conflicts that accompany regime transformation are necessarily media events. Behind-closed-doors negotiations between elites remain an important part of transitional politics; while other transitional conflicts (for example, economic power or constitutional issues) are frequently ignored by the media. However, it is safe to say that once the media become involved in a conflict the rules of the game change fundamentally (Hamelink 2011; Wolfsfeld 1997). The research programme of MeCoDEM sets out to investigate how democratisation conflicts are represented, interpreted and negotiated – or 'constructed' – through public communication and how the way in which these conflicts are communicated affect their dynamics and outcomes. It is important to emphasise that while the media play a central role in the representation of conflicts, the MeCoDEM project takes a more comprehensive approach by placing the media in a dynamic field of public communication where a multitude of actors - governments, civil society groups and activists, international organisations, etc. – are striving to influence the way in which conflicts are framed and interpreted.

Investigating democratisation conflicts as mediated communication conflicts requires a flexible, yet focused research strategy. The MeCoDEM research programme is based on a research programme that compares and contrasts different types of democratisation conflicts across four countries: Egypt, Kenya, Serbia and

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[2] For example, the Arab uprisings of 2011 were – rightly or wrongly – dubbed 'Facebook revolutions' implying that social media played a significant role in mobilising protest movements (Aouragh and Alexander 2011).

South Africa. While each conflict in its particular national context is unique with regard to its causes, dynamics and consequences, it is through the search for common patterns that knowledge can be expanded beyond single events. The research strategy pursued by MeCoDEM therefore aims to integrate in-depth explorations of selected conflict cases with a comparative approach that calls for a higher level of generalisation. Together both approaches – case study research and cross-country comparisons – provide a powerful set of research instruments that not only promote theory development and scholarly advancement, but also the generation of applied knowledge that is relevant for policymaking, journalistic practice and political participation during democratisation conflicts.

This paper introduces the key elements of the MeCoDEM research design and its underlying conceptual and methodological considerations. Section 2 outlines a general model of interdependent causes and effects that locates media and the communications of strategic actors as part of a contested arena of public communication. This section also presents cross-cutting key concepts that guide our research on different aspects of democratisation conflicts. In Section 3 details of the comparative case study design including a typology of democratisation conflicts will be laid out. Finally, the paper provides an overview over the methodological instruments that will be employed in our research across the different steps of analysis and conflict cases.

2. Conceptualising Media and Democratisation Conflicts: Influences and interactions

In order to understand the way in which the media impact on the dynamics and outcomes of democratisation conflicts – and indeed social processes in general – it is important to clarify what exactly is meant by 'media'. The ambiguity of the term lies in the media's double-faced nature as *agents* of public communication on the one hand and *technologies of communication* on the other (see Voltmer 2013, pp. 51-71). Each of these aspects of the media results in very different consequences.

Media as *agents* refer to the organisational entities (e.g. broadcasters, newsrooms) and the professional roles attached to these organisations (e.g. editors, owners, journalists) who are involved in editorial decision-making on the content of their products, be it news and commentary or entertainment in its many forms. By selecting issues and events and by packaging them in particular frames and

narratives, the media are playing a key role in constructing reality, not just reflecting it. A great deal of media research is concerned with understanding the specific structure and formats of media content and its impact on the beliefs and behaviour of audiences. Theories of persuasion, agenda-setting and framing are the most prominent approaches to conceptualising the media's role as agents of public communication (Bryant and Zillmann 2002; McCombs, Shaw and Weaver 1997; Reese, Gandy and Grant 2003). Given the significance of the media as sources of collective knowledge and people's perceptions of reality, the research to be carried out by MeCoDEM includes an investigation as to how the media cover the selected conflict cases, in particular how conflict parties are portrayed and what kind of interpretations and value judgments are offered to frame the conflict.

Media as *communication technologies* focus on the structural features of different media – from the printing press, to broadcasting and the internet – that enable the production and distribution of messages in particular ways. McLuhan's (1964) famous dictum 'the medium is the message' emphasises that technologies are not just neutral vessels that convey messages, but create meaning in their own right. Even if one does not agree with the technological determinism that is inherent in McLuhan's thinking, it is important to understand that the structural features of specific media technologies shape the meaning of the messages they convey, as well as the patterns of interaction of those who are using them. For example, by overcoming the limitations of physical presence the media enable the mobilisation of collective action of geographically dispersed people. As Anderson (1983) argues, the rise of a mass-circulated press in the 19th century created 'imagined communities' that formed the foundation of national identity and nationalism. Arguably, the rise of the internet has further accelerated the re-ordering of time and space that began with the invention of the printing press. Recently, digital media, such as internet and mobile technology, have been hailed by some authors as 'liberation technology' (Diamond 2010). With its non-hierarchical network structure and interactive features it seems that the internet is a perfect match with core principles of democracy. Bennett and Segerberg (2012) argue that social media platforms are re-ordering the way in which social movements organise, as 'brick-and-mortar' organisation and hard-wired hierarchies are no longer necessary to mobilise support. Diamond's views have been criticised as over-optimistic (see Deibert and Rohozinski 2010); and the short-lived success of Egypt's so-called 'Facebook revolution' reminds us that long-term political

change requires more than mass mobilisation. But it is also indisputable that in order to understand social change we need to understand the link between the media and political action.

2.1. A model of communication and democratisation conflict

While most of the research on media and conflict focuses primarily on the media (see Vladisavljevic 2015), the research programme of MeCoDEM places the media in a shared, but contested space of public communication where other actors, in particular governments and civil society actors, compete for attention and recognition. With different actors promoting their preferred agendas and frames, this space can be divided or unified, depending on particular constellations of 'frame alliances' between different communicators. We hypothesise that the way in which conflicts are communicated as well as the degree of contestation in this public space significantly impacts the dynamics and outcomes of democratisation conflicts. At the same time, the media and other communication agents respond to the changing dynamics of conflicts by adjusting their rhetoric, communicative strategies and interpretations of events. These dynamic interactions take place within the context of particular national cultures and political systems, which shape the rules and values of public communication and provide the formal and informal mechanisms for political action. More specifically for the research interest of the MeCoDEM project, the context of democratisation is of particular relevance. Depending on the state of political transformation – the legacies of the old regime, the degree of institutional capacity, the legitimacy of political authority, but also civic culture and social norms – the course of conflicts can take very different directions, with far-reaching consequences for the consolidation of the new democratic setting. Figure 1 gives an overview of these considerations.

Figure 1: A model of communication and democratisation conflicts
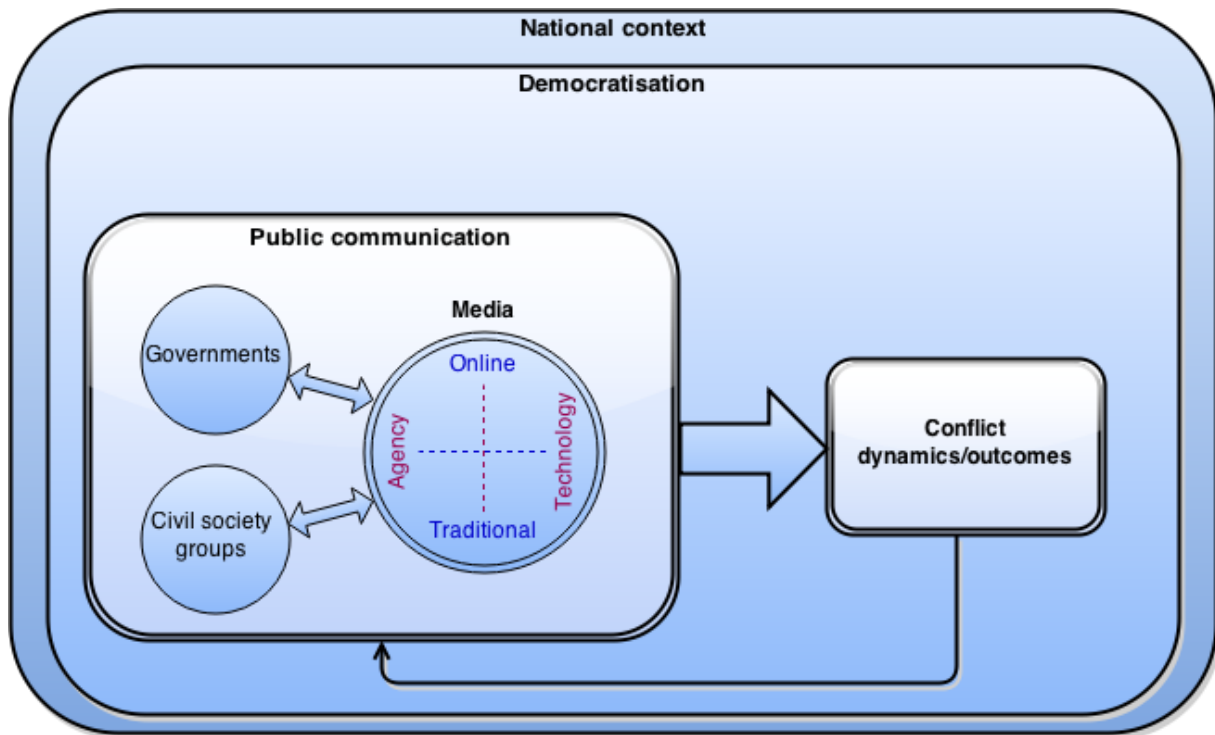
In this model, the media – both traditional and new, understood as agents and technologies – constitute the central *independent variable* of our research design. Variations in the media coverage (media as agents) and media technologies are assumed to affect how conflicts develop and what kind of settlement can be achieved. The following variations in the media are of particular interest:

1. the degree to which the media are involved in a conflict, i.e. the density of coverage or online activities related to the conflict;
2. the degree of opinionation, emotionality and polarisation;
3. the degree to which conflict parties are represented and heard in the public arena and the way in which they are portrayed (e.g. sharp friend-foe distinction, exclusive blame attribution, etc.);
4. the way in which the media frame conflicts (e.g. the meaning and explanations given to the event, the values that are evoked, instrumentalisation of the past, suggested solutions, etc.);
5. the degree to which a conflict is mobilised online, for example by bloggers or social media activities;
6. the degree and kind of interrelation between new and legacy media (print, broadcasting) and its effects on agenda-setting.

The ultimate *dependent variable* of our research design is the dynamics and outcomes of the conflict cases under study. We are particularly interested in the following aspects of democratisation conflicts as a function of the communicative actions and configurations of media, political actors and civil society groups:

1. the configuration of conflicts: the degree to which conflict parties and issues are polarised;
2. the trajectory of conflicts: whether they are getting out of control (e.g. acceleration, expansion, intensification) or whether they are moving towards controlled contestation;
3. the form of conflict settlement: whether conflicts are brought to an end by top-down imposition (e.g. dominance of powerful groups) or by consensual and inclusive solutions.

However, conflicts are complex social processes involving constantly shifting relationships and interactions. It is therefore impossible to reduce the role of the media to that of a force (independent variable) that impacts on other actors. While having considerable agenda-setting and framing power, the media are also subjected to the influence – often outright pressure – by a broad array of actors who are involved in the conflict. These include governments and other influential leaders (political, religious, community, etc.), but also civil society groups and international NGOs who aim to control the media agenda in order to advance their own objectives. In fact, in transitional societies the media are frequently a major battleground for power struggles, as politicians, media owners and other groups try to gain control over the media agenda and, ultimately, public opinion. While governments can, if deemed necessary, resort to coercion and even physical force, most civil society groups have to rely on their voice and the creation of events that attract public attention, ranging from imaginative direct action, to large-scale protests or even violence. Whatever the power resources of political actors, they depend on the media to achieve their goals and therefore have to adapt their strategies to the media's logic of operation. As a result, modern conflicts have become 'mediatised' conflicts that are shaped and driven by the routines, news values, formats, the timing and style of the mass media (see Mazzoleni and Schulz 1999). New communication technologies, especially the interactive capabilities of Web 2.0, have opened up new opportunities to bypass the gate-keeping power of the traditional media. However, most governments have been slow in grasping the opportunities of the web and social

media. Paradoxically, governments with more authoritarian tendencies have been particularly ignorant of the new world of online communication. As a consequence, the internet quickly became the space for those voices that are underrepresented or excluded by the mainstream media. Protest movements, minority groups, activists ranging from human rights groups to nationalists have discovered the web as a powerful platform for mobilising support and building networks while political institutions are still in a process of catching up with the potential of the web as a resource for information campaigns, persuasion and control.

Thus, in order to understand the dynamics of public communication in conflicts that accompany (attempts at) democratisation, it is important to unpack the multiple processes of influence and reciprocity that drive message creation, strategic response and counter-framing. The various arrows between the communication actors in our model point at the ongoing mutual influences in the public arena, while the feedback loop between dependent and independent variables indicates that any development in the constellation of a conflict, and even settlements that appear to be a resolution of the dispute, inevitably trigger responses – interpretations, evaluations, challenges – and in turn will affect the further trajectory of the contestation.

2.2. Cross-cutting key concepts

To address the general research question on the role of communication in democratisation conflicts, the empirical work of different elements of the MeCoDEM research programme is guided by a set of core concepts that provide coherence across different methodologies and conflict cases.

Democracy and democratisation - While in established western democracies the idea of 'democracy' is firmly linked to the paradigms of liberal democracy (including institutions of representation, such as competitive elections, political parties, etc.) and a free market economy, the interpretations of what democracy means are highly contested in transitional societies. Our approach is based on the assumption that democracy cannot be 'exported' in a one-to-one fashion, but is – and has to be – re-interpreted and 'domesticated' within the local systems of meaning (see Voltmer 2012; Whitehead 2002). Many democratisation conflicts are played out against the backdrop of diverging notions of what democracy means and how it shapes the politics of the country. These divisions do not just run between pro- and anti-democratic forces, but also divide groups which are fighting for

democratic change: The desire for social justice and redistribution of wealth is set against the liberalisation of markets; procedural democracy seems to fall short of ideals of 'true' democracy; the power of the street – and indeed social media – competes with elections as expressions of the will of the people; and traditional forms of authoritative decision making and religion claim legitimacy besides, and often above, secular democratic institutions.

Communication cultures - Like the notion of democracy, the way in which principles of freedom of speech and freedom of the press are understood and practiced is deeply rooted in cultural values that shape social interaction and norms of public communication (Voltmer and Wasserman 2014). Demands for democratisation are almost always related to, even driven by, demands for the right to express opinions freely in the public realm. But this freedom is never unrestricted, even in established democracies which regulate public speech to a considerable degree. Re-negotiating what can be said in public, and what cannot be said, is therefore part of transitional conflicts. Closely associated with the liberalisation of public communication, is the changing role of the media and journalists. While the quest for free speech is most visible in the way in which the media cover political issues, journalists have to re-position themselves in their relationship with political power, their audiences and the expectations of external actors, such as international NGOs. Issues of communication values and power are therefore an essential part of our investigation of the selected conflict cases.

Conflict frames - The concept of framing is based on the assumptions that social reality is constructed through communicative acts (Reese, Gandy and Grant 2003; Searle 1995). Following from this, it is assumed that conflicts do not simply emerge from particular social conditions (e.g. economic inequality, different religious beliefs, social hierarchies and the exercise of power), but from the way in which these conditions are interpreted, what kind of values are called upon to evaluate the situation as 'right' or 'wrong', 'fair' or 'unfair' etc., what is regarded as the cause of the problem and what has to be done to achieve the desired state of affairs (Entman 1993). One of the most powerful elements of conflict frames are definitions of 'us versus them'. Marking individuals or groups as 'the other' emphasises divisions over shared experiences and in extreme cases involves dehumanising the targeted opponent. Understanding the power of framing constitutes the relevance of

communication for the study of conflicts and should be an essential part of any policy strategy of conflict resolution.

The past and collective memories - Democratisation conflicts are not only about the future, but also about the past. Like the social conditions that function as catalysts for conflicts, the past is not a 'reality out there' constituted by objective facts and events; rather, the past emerges from processes of social construction and collective interpretations of what has happened and why. Through storytelling, places of collective memory and rituals the constructed past is re-enacted as part of present-day culture. Visions of democracy, and indeed a better life, often draw on historical experiences or re-interpretations of these (hi)stories. As public spaces of communication, the media are crucial for the creation of the narratives that shape the collective identities of citizens in transitional societies (Assmann and Shortt 2012; Zelizer and Tenenboim-Weinblatt 2014). Evocations of the past are not only a powerful force in mobilising conflicts, but can also be used for conflict resolution and reconciliation. Besides investigating the constructions of the past in media coverage and strategic communications, we also explore creative expressions and cultural practices for understanding how the past is used to make sense of the world in times of dramatic change.

3. Research Design: Comparative Case Study Approach

The research design underlying the empirical investigations of MeCoDEM encompasses two key elements: a comparative cross-country analysis and a multiple-case study approach, thus combining the objective of arriving at generalizable results with a high sensitivity to context and process. Striking a balance between these two methodological approaches also means striking a balance between two different research paradigms. Epistemologically, MeCoDEM professes neither to a strictly universalist nor cultural-relativist approach. Indeed, both are deemed problematic, the former because it asserts that social reality is context/culture- free, and the latter for precisely the opposite reason, namely because it renders local context/culture an insurmountable obstacle to the possibility of comparison, to generalizability and theory development (Hantrais 1999, pp. 93-97). Given the diverse set of countries involved, and their distinct national histories, institutions and cultures, MeCoDEM recognises the significance of context on how conflicts are communicated and negotiated in a given society. Unlike cultural relativist

positions, however, our approach does not conclude from there that comparisons are impossible, but rather adopts an 'intermediate position' as advocated by Hantrais and others which asserts that 'social reality is context dependent, but [that] the context itself serves as an important explanatory variable and an enabling tool, rather than constituting a barrier to effective cross-national comparisons' (Hantrais 1999, p. 94). National context is hence factored into the research equation (see Figure 1) and becomes a key component in explaining observed variance in the interplay between public communication and selected democratisation conflicts across the four countries studied. This section explains in more detail the comparative case study approach taken by MeCoDEM. Particular attention will be given to the rationale underlying the selection of cases, which form the central units of our empirical research.

3.2. Case-study research and disciplined eclecticism

MeCoDEM's research programme involves a set of carefully selected conflict cases in four countries: Egypt, Kenya, Serbia and South Africa. These countries were chosen because they represent particular constellations in democratic development with far-reaching repercussions in their respective regions. Egypt is an example of stalled transition following the capture of a dramatic popular uprising by powerful old elites. Kenya's transition takes place in the shadow of post-colonial struggles and remains vulnerable to internal tensions, as shown by the outbreak of inter-ethnic violence during the 2007 election. Meanwhile, emerging from the recent Yugoslav wars and state collapse, Serbia's democracy is still fragile and struggles with unresolved issues of borders and national identity. Lastly, South Africa's new democracy is widely regarded as well on its way towards consolidation, but is increasingly confronted with persisting problems of social inequality, corruption and limited citizenship.

In each of these countries, we investigate three conflicts that are linked to democratisation, or the demand for democratic change. The resulting set of twelve conflict cases allows us to analyse the causes, dynamics and consequences of contentious public communication along two main dimensions of comparison:

- across different countries, each constituting specific political and cultural contexts;

- across different types of conflicts, each constituting specific arenas of contestation.

Even though there are no clear-cut rules for the right number of cases in a multiple-case study design, a set of twelve falls into the range of what is regarded as the optimum number of observations (see for example Stake 2006 who recommends an N between four and twelve). While large-N statistical analyses aim to identify common relationships between independent and dependent variables,[3] our approach focuses on unravelling the black box behind these correlations. Complex social situations, such as conflicts, often do not unfold in a linear way, as correlational analysis assumes. Instead, they are characterised by multiple interactions, feedback loops and high-impact key events that resist aggregate generalisation (George and Bennett 2005). By reconstructing the mechanisms and causal pathways, the particular conditions and situational idiosyncrasies that lead to a particular conflict outcome, we aim to develop a deeper understanding of conflicts in the context of democratic transitions, which we hope can be translated into policy recommendations that contribute to a more effective and inclusive conflict management.

A multiple-case study design also avoids the limitations of a single-case study, which would be situated at the opposite epistemological end of methodological choices. Even though single-case studies generate extraordinarily rich material, they often struggle to move from detailed description to a more abstract explanation that can inform scholarly knowledge beyond that particular instance. Several scholars (Remenyi 2012; Yin 2003) have compared multiple-case study designs with natural experimentation, where cases serve as replications of similar events under different contextual circumstances, thus making it possible to identify the specific conditions under which certain outcomes are likely to occur. A single-case design, enlightening as it might be in its own right, would not allow us to draw this kind of general conclusions because there is no variation in the context in which the case unfolds.

While case study research originates in the thick description of a single entity with a strong emphasis on qualitative enquiry and deep understanding (Woodside

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[3] An interesting example for large-N research that is relevant to the research interest of our study, is Norris' (2004) analysis of the relationship between press freedom and good governance. In this paper, Norris uses a data set that comprises 151 countries and identifies a strong relationship between press freedom and good governance (measured, among others, by the degree of political stability, rule of law, corruption and government efficiency).

2010), recent developments have moved toward multiple-case study designs, even with some attempts to inject statistical rigour into qualitative analysis, most notably Ragin's 'fuzzy-set qualitative comparative analysis' (Ragin 1987). Fuzzy-set QCA allows researchers to increase the N in case study research beyond the limitations which usually apply to the holistic philosophy of the method.[4] However, for a new field of research, such as the one covered by MeCoDEM, QCA does not seems to be an adequate approach because it results in a significant degree of loss of information 'on the ground', which is essential for understanding the dynamic interaction between public communication and conflict in democratising countries. With a total of twelve cases, we have chosen a middle ground that maintains analytical options in both directions. On the one hand, single cases can be selected for in-depth within-case examination to explore the dynamics of conflicts within their unique environment. On the other hand, our design allows, and indeed aims for, cross-case analysis that moves up the 'ladder of abstraction', to use Sartori's (1970) famous dictum, by comparing across different cases and countries.

Positioned between inductive exploration and systematic comparison across countries and cases, the approach taken by MeCoDEM requires some clarification of the role theory plays in the design of the project. Rather than setting out with a clearly defined grand theory, we expect a more developed theoretical understanding of the interaction between media, conflict and democratisation to emerge as an end result of our research. Even though a quasi-experimental selection of cases would open the opportunity for theory-testing, the fluidity and complexity of the phenomenon under study calls for a more open approach to theory. Furthermore, the interdisciplinarity of the research programme, and indeed of the team of scholars involved, provides the unique opportunity to bring together strands of theorising from different disciplines that normally do not take much notice of each other, ranging from communication science, journalism studies, the sociology of technology to comparative politics, democratisation studies, development studies, conflict research or social movement research. Building on this diverse repertoire of knowledge, our research is informed by theory and structured by rigorous conceptualisation, but is not subscribed to a particular 'meta-theory' (like for example rational choice, constructivism, neo-

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[4] Fuzzy-set QCA is the method of choice when the preferred large N is unavailable or empirically non-existent (see Downing and Stanyer 2014). However, whether QCA combines the best of both quantitative and qualitative research methodology still remains to be seen.

institutionalism, etc.). This 'disciplined eclecticism' ensures the degree of open-mindedness that is necessary to engage in a productive dialogue between theoretical assumptions and empirical evidence. As a result, we aim to contribute to theory development (and to some extent theory-testing) by refining, expanding and, where necessary, revising existing knowledge. In a similar vein, Sartori (1991, p. 252) elucidates the complementarity, rather than opposition, between research aiming at abstract generalisation and others that is sensitive to context:

> ... comparison and case study can well be mutually reinforcing and complementary. My sense is that case studies are most valuable – for the comparativist – as hypotheses-generating inquiries. They cannot confirm a generalization […] and they can only disconfirm regularity to a limited degree. But heuristic case studies do provide an ideal – perhaps the best – soil for the conceiving of generalizations.

3.2. Comparing cases across countries

Can conflicts be researched as cases? The structural nature of most conflicts does not sit easy with the definition of a 'case' as a unit of analysis in case study research. Cresswell (2014, p. 14) describes a case as 'bounded by time and activity', typically comprising individuals, organisations, communities or events (Yin 2003, pp. 12-13). Studying conflicts within the case study paradigm therefore requires identifying moments when conflicts crystallise in the here-and-now and become visible through actual human behaviour. Following from this, our research focuses on conflict events, i.e. incidents which mobilise individuals or groups to engage in public actions and which are defined by a relatively clear beginning and end. While some of these conflict events involve violence between the antagonists, our research – unlike most of the existing literature on conflicts – is not exclusively interested in violent action, and indeed only some of our selected cases fall into that category. Instead, we also include conflicts that use primarily symbolic action – such as demonstrations, blockades or creative expressions – and are mainly fought out with the 'weapon' of the word. Symbolic and communicative conflicts can be an indicator of the maturity of a transitional society and its ability to cope with antagonisms without resorting to violence; but they can also permanently undermine trust and legitimacy in a fragile environment where institutions are weak and existing values lose their meaning. In these circumstances speech can be poisonous and can even become the prelude for an escalation into violent action.

3.2.1. Identifying democratisation conflict: towards a typology

As just highlighted, the concept of 'democratisation conflict' constitutes the starting point for identifying comparable units of analysis across the four countries involved in the MeCoDEM project. To arrive at a systematic selection of cases that ensure both diversity and comparability, we identified sub-types of democratisation conflicts. Two possible approaches to achieve this goal were considered: *actor-* or *issue*-based definitions.

Actor-based approaches are attractive, in so far as they problematise the interaction between different types of conflict parties, facilitate comparison of diverse conflict cases across countries and regions, and highlight the power relations and resources at play in specific conflict scenarios. Hence, whilst the conflict cases may vary from country to country, in the agency approach the unit of analysis revolves around a determinable set of interacting conflict parties. At a most fundamental level these parties may comprise elite (old vs. new, political, societal, and/or economic) and non-elite actors (e.g. citizens, minorities) and result in a typology involving both horizontal and vertical conflict dynamics between elites (inter-elite conflict), between societal actors (societal/civil conflicts) and/or between elites and social actors (elite-society/civil conflicts). The downside of this rather parsimonious approach is, however, that it can be easily muffled by the realities of political conflicts, which often fail to fall into such clear-cut conflict dynamics amongst political antagonists. For example, different sets of actors may get involved in the course of a specific conflict at different points in time, or it may well be that all actor constellations stipulated above are present in a single conflict. Furthermore, an actor-based approach is not uniquely geared towards the analysis of *democratisation* conflicts.

Issue-based approaches to selecting comparable units of analysis, meanwhile, hold traction precisely because they facilitate the creation of an intimate thematic connection between the notions of (domestic) conflict and democratisation. Indeed, whilst conflicts tend to erupt under vastly different contexts and circumstances, it is nothing less than an intrinsic characteristic of processes of democratic transitions, in so far as they invariably involve power struggles between status-quo and reformist regime factions and/or between ruling elites and pro-democracy forces, as well as conflicts amongst (new) elites and societal forces over the nature of, and influence in, the newly emerging political order. Most commonly these struggles play out during key moments in the transition process. This can be, for instance, during the drafting

of new constitutions, which may trigger conflicts over competing conceptions of the nation, the state and its institutions, the position of political power vis-a-vis other centres of authority (for example religion), and the rights and responsibilities involved in democratic citizenship. Another trigger for democratisation conflicts are elections, which may resurrect existing ethno-national and other societal fault lines and conflicts, and/or be perceived by its protagonists as a zero-sum game, with the stakes of creating a first-post transition government. In its immediate aftermath, the conflict potential remains high, as citizens become more vocal in demanding accountability and efficient policy delivery from their democratically elected governments, as hitherto marginalised societal groups (ethnic, religious, sexuality) press for legal protection and full citizenship rights, and as questions of transitional justice and how to deal with the authoritarian past are being raised.

Disaggregating the concept of 'democratisation conflict' thus reveals a dynamic that comprises a series of (power) struggles on specific issues that are particularly pertinent to processes of change, and which can serve as a basis for further comparative scrutiny of conflict cases across a disparate set of countries. And this is precisely what MeCoDEM proposes to do: adopting a pragmatic and issue-based approach to case design, which involves identifying key democratisation conflict types, mapping possible country-specific conflict cases onto this typology and ensuring that cross-country comparability is possible across select, if not all, types of democratisation conflict. These conflict types include struggles fought 1) over citizenship rights and conceptions, 2) over the control and distribution of power, 3) during founding - and subsequent early-post democratisation elections and 4) over the pursuit of transitional justice.

Democratisation, Citizenship and Collective Identities - Questions of citizenship - here understood in its more formal conception as the collectivity of political, civil, economic and social rights and obligations of citizens and communities in a polity (Janoski and Gran 2002, pp. 13-17; Janoski 1998, pp. 8-11) – are firmly intertwined with some of the most fundamental change processes that have, and still are taking place across the globe, including processes of de-colonialisation, state- and nation building, social revolutions and democratic transitions. All these episodes of fundamental societal change are deeply connected to questions of belonging, (collective) identity, inclusion and exclusion, as well as the rights and obligations of those forming part of a given community of people. Take, for instance, the

phenomenon of democratic transitions, which essentially revolves around the contestation for and/or (re-)negotiations of fully-fledged *political citizenship* and the accompanying rights. Institutionally, these rights include the right to vote and stand for public office, as well as other fundamental individual liberties such as those of assembly, organisation, free speech etc. Meanwhile, at polity level, political citizenship has been associated with the protection of citizens by law from 'raw coercive power', as well as with the legal and political guarantees that ensure all rights and obligations are universal in reach and application.

All transitions from authoritarian rule to (procedural) democracy, whether ultimately successful or not, thus involve demands for the expansion of citizenship rights. This, however, is only half the story. Indeed, by opening up new spaces for participation and contestation, the breakdown of any non-democratic regime carries the potential to trigger societal debate about, and/or struggles over, the norms and values that are to guide and constitute the definition of citizenship in the newly established order. Being fiercely political in nature, these societal 'conversations', or conflicts, can revolve around a host of contentious issues, such as what value system is to underpin a society's or nation's identity and thus who is entitled to full citizenship, or whose prerogative it is to determine these basic parameters of societal coexistence and identity. Evidently, the ferocity of any such debates will be very much shaped by the nature of the society in question, with the potential for conflict heightened in countries comprising ethno-nationally, religiously, and/or culturally heterogeneous societies.

What is more, as political citizenship is being redefined within the confines of a democratic opening, communities and societal groups hitherto marginalised or stigmatised on the basis of gender, religion, nationality, ethnicity and/or sexuality, may well use the liberalised societal space to stake out claims for better legal protection and equal rights. Although not inevitable, here again the potential for societal conflict is real, particularly wherever the guiding values of the majority of society remain fundamentally at odds with the demands of a rights-seeking minority community, and/or where new political forces with exclusionary conceptions of citizenship make a forceful entry onto the political scene.

Democratisation and Control and Distribution of Power - Of all the conflict types identified as part of the MeCoDEM project, that of 'power control and distribution' is undoubtedly the broadest in scope, covering a range of potential

conflict scenarios during processes of democratic transition and their immediate aftermath. Being concerned with the very essence of politics - that is the manner in which and by whom power is being exercised, how it is shared, checked and tempered - the question of political power and its distribution across state institutions looms large in any transitional setting where authoritarian institutions and power bases are being dismantled and replaced with a system of democratic governance. Conflict is in this case almost inevitable, particularly in heterogeneous societies where different societal players, particularly those hitherto marginalised, seek better access to, and inclusion in, the newly created institutions of the state at all levels of government. Key moments in a democratic transition that epitomise the potential for conflict over political power and its distribution include most notably, of course, the drafting of new constitutions which, because they comprise the fundamental principles and rules governing society and state, may evoke societal as well as inter-elite divisions and struggles over both procedural and substantive matters. Procedural disputes may then revolve around the composition, mandate and duration of the constitution-drafting assemblies, as well as the process of ratification. Substantive issues, in turn, can range from disputes over the collective identity of the nation and the system of government to be adopted, to detailed questions about the inclusion or not of articles on social and economic rights and gender equality, to name but a few (e.g. Hart, 2003). Beyond the realm of the strictly political, contestation and conflict over power and its distribution in transitional and post-transitional settings may, of course, also take on a distinctly economic dimension. Indeed, struggles for democracy across the globe rarely only revolve around citizen demands for greater participation, government accountability and human rights, but are often paired with calls for social justice, economic reform and wealth redistribution. Recent cases in point include the Arab uprisings of 2010-2011, which were triggered and lead as much by economic as by political grievances (e.g. Joffé, 2011, pp. 509-511).

As with political power itself, the potential for conflict over economic power, resources and distribution is again significant and multiple, including different issue areas and actors. Wherever they erupt, mass protest and demonstrations may, for instance, not only target dictatorial incumbents and institutions, but the very symbols (economic elites, companies) of crony capitalism that so often go hand-in-hand with modern-day authoritarianism. This may happen through (wild-cat) strike action, sit-ins

or other forms of resistance such as the occupation of farmland and businesses (e.g. Nataf and Sammis 1990, pp. 73-130). Further down the line as the new democratic order begins to consolidate, such conflict may be triggered a) by ongoing economic inequalities and hardship, and directed against (newly) democratically elected governments, or b) by inter-elite competition and struggles over access to, and the distribution of, a country's national resources. Cases in point include the spate of 'service delivery' popular protests that swept across South Africa since 2004 and that have been directed against persistent economic inequalities, corruption, and poor service delivery by the early post-Apartheid government (Alexander, 2010), as well as the violent protests that erupted in the aftermath of the disputed 2007 parliamentary elections in Kenya, and which carried a distinctly economic undertone. Indeed, as Mueller (2008: 2002) explains with regards to the Kenyan case, ethnicity has been persistently mobilised in domestic politics by political parties as a political project not only to win elections but to 'control the state and gain access to its resources'.

Democratisation and Elections - Given their intimate theoretical connection with liberal/procedural conceptions of democracy, elections ought to feature, of course, in any analysis of democratisation, conflict and public communication. Indeed, the phenomenon of elections during democratic transitions is a highly relevant topic to research, not least because what is widely expected of them in practice is most often not born out in reality. Within much of the democratisation and democracy assistance literature, elections are widely regarded as key ingredients of successful transitions, epitomising citizen's demands for popular participation, inclusion, and government accountability as well as allowing for the peaceful resolution of (elite) struggles over ideas, policies, power and resources. Theoretically not zero-sum in character, electoral politics are thus thought to engender societal and political actors' trust in the democratic process, whereby one-time electoral losers can next time be electoral winners (see e.g. Kumar 1998; Lindberg 2006).

Whilst this may be the case in established democracies, where citizens, officials and political parties have come to profess to democratic values and rules, the evidence in transitional and post-transitional settings is often far less clear-cut. Here more often than not elections function as a Pandora's Box, revealing the horrid legacies of authoritarian rule, the pitfalls of weak institutions and political parties and the lack of societal trust in them, and unleashing hitherto repressed and/or

unresolved ethno-national, religious or other societal cleavages and conflicts. Indeed, once opened, this Pandora's Box of non-democratic legacies and societal conflict-potential is easily ignited by the electoral principle, given its onus on partisanship, contestation and competition, on winners and losers and on inclusion and exclusion from the levers of power. As a consequence, rather than fostering a transition to a consensual democratic new era, elections can thus quickly descend into growing societal polarisation and even inter-elite and/or communal bloodshed and violence (Kumar 1998; Snyder 2000; Mousseau 2001; Reilly 2008, pp. 157-181; Wimmer 2003, pp. 112-113). Pertinent cases in point include present-day Iraq, a country whose externally imposed democracy in 2003/2004 has resulted in electoral contests which, if not the source of sectarianism per se, have undeniably helped perpetuate and deepen sectarian identities and conflict in Iraqi society at the expense of national cohesion and the emergence of non-sectarian political forces (al-Khadhimi 2014).

Lastly, a procedural level, the introduction of democratic elections also carries serious conflict-potential, be this between old and new elites during negotiated transitions or amongst the newly-formed political forces in a transitional setting. Given its significance in determining who is elected and how, how voters are represented and who governs, electoral design and management matters are often hotly contested, with political actors seeking to advance voting systems that maximise their chances of electoral success. These matters can revolve around a host of issues, including questions about candidacy and voting rights, voting systems (e.g. PR vs. majoritarian systems), districting, campaign and campaign finance regulations, electoral administration and monitoring.

Democratisation and Transitional Justice - Coined by Kritz in 1995, the concept of 'transitional justice' can be broadly defined as 'the full set of processes and mechanisms associated with a society's attempts to come to terms with a legacy of large-scale past abuse, in order to secure accountability, serve justice, and achieve reconciliation' (Annan, 2004, p. 4). This legacy of large-scale abuse may be the result of (violent) domestic unrest and civil war or the misrule by past authoritarian regimes. Here then, transitional justice mechanisms can be deployed to uncover and investigate the truth behind past atrocities, deal with human rights violations and their perpetrators, recompense victims for the harm they suffered by conflict and repression, and build new institutional safeguards to prevent a repeat of past atrocities (e.g. through legislation or security sector and judicial reforms).

Common strategies used to facilitate transitional justice include the persecution of rights violations and perpetrators through either domestic, hybrid or international criminal tribunals as well as the instigation of so called (non-judicial) 'truth and reconciliation commissions' (Arenhoevel, 2008; Sandoval 2011). These truth commissions may or may not complement criminal proceedings, and are usually tasked with uncovering past rights violations perpetrated by state and non-state actors. In some circumstances, as in the South African case, these commissions may also be explicitly mandated with the task of fostering societal reconciliation (van Zyl, 1999).

Clearly, whether the path of transitional justice is taken at all in post-authoritarian settings and, if so how, is it contingent upon local circumstance; not least upon the nature of past societal conflict, the types of perpetrators involved in large-scale atrocities and the nature of the transition itself. In countries characterised by deep ethno-national or religious cleavages and conflict (e.g. Bosnia, Northern Ireland, South Africa, Iraq), for instance, *reconciliation* between the different communities may have to take centre stage in order to (re-)build a peaceful and democratic society. In other countries, which emerged from the grip of dictatorial rule (e.g. West Germany, Greece, Argentina, Egypt) inter-communal reconciliation per se may be less of an issue, with the overriding concern residing in the legal prosecution of past regime elites. In contexts of negotiated transitions, meanwhile, the bargaining that takes place between old and new elites and the retention of some (residual) powers by authoritarian incumbents (e.g. the armed forces) may render a full-blown justice process involving the persecution, trial and punishment of past atrocities impossible. Here then, it is likely that the judicial process is replaced by wide ranging amnesty provisions, as was the case in post-Franco Spain and post-Pinochet Chile (Davis 2005, pp. 862-866; Dugard 1999).

Local circumstances notwithstanding, deliberations around the actual implementation of transitional justice in post-conflict/post-authoritarian settings are not only shaped by broader ethical concerns (for example how to overcome or bridge the inherent tension between justice and reconciliation) and/or practical constraints (e.g. limited judicial and institutional capacity), but also entail the real prospect of engendering further conflict. Indeed, although designed to deal with past conflict/atrocities and help rebuild a peaceful democratic and cohesive society, it is not difficult to see how the implementation of transitional justice measures is wrought

with conflict potential. This conflict potential is particularly pronounced wherever transitional justice involves criminal proceedings, which can easily descend into accusations of 'polarised' or 'victor's' justice and hence lead to alienation, anger and conflict rather than societal reconciliation and healing. Moreover, unlike in any of the previous post-democratisation conflicts discussed, this conflict potential is not only confined to domestic actors and issues, but may carry a distinctly international dimension, so for instance in cases where the pursuit of justice is spearheaded by third-country prosecutions of local politicians or through international criminal tribunals, such as the International Criminal Court (ICC). Here political conflict may be ignited by domestic allies of those prosecuted (if indeed still numerous), or by those lamenting the fact that they have been robbed an opportunity to prosecute and punish those responsible for past atrocities and repression through domestic courts.

3.3. MeCoDEM conflict cases and comparisons

Once conceptualised, the four democratisation conflict types were populated with three country-specific case studies each, thus circumscribing in their totality the spectre of comparative research feasible within the confines of the MeCoDEM project. Three selection criteria hereby guided the choice of case studies: First, their compatibility with the democratisation conflict types identified; second their timing, and third their relevance within individual country settings. With regard to timing, with the exception of the Milosevic trial and 'xenophobic violence' in South Africa, all conflict cases investigated took place in the last six years, ensuring that media data is available for the purpose of content analysis and that the cases in question are not a too distant memory in interview participants' minds for the interviewing purposes.

Table 1: Selection of MeCoDEM Conflict Cases

	Citizenship (rights, minorities, identity)	Distribution and control of power	Elections	Transitional justice
EGYPT	Christian-Muslim violence (2013)	Maspero incident (2011)	Presidential election (2012)	
KENYA	Somali community		Election (2007, 2013)	Kenyatta ICC trial (2014)
SERBIA	Pride Parade (2010)		Election (2008)	Milosevic's extradition to the ICTY 2001
SOUTH AFRICA	Xenophobic violence (2000-2008)	Service delivery protests (Balfour 2009, 2010; Zamdela 2012, 2013)		
		State of the Nation Address – SONA (February 2015)		

The conflict cases listed in *Table 1* refer to the following incidents:

3.3.1. Conflict cases in Egypt

Maspero Demonstrations 2011 - While the January 2011 revolution was an important moment of inter-communal collaboration in Egypt, it was also followed by one of the most severe attacks on the Coptic community in recent history. One of the main incidents are the demonstrations in front of the headquarters of the Egyptian Radio and Television Union (so-called Maspero building) in which 28 demonstrators lost their lives in a confrontation with security forces and the military. The incident marks a process of politicisation of religion in Egypt, resulting in the emergence of new political actors and broadcast channels with explicit religious affiliation.

Christian-Muslim Violence 2013 - This episode of religious violence is a manifestation of the multiple dimensions of sectarian conflicts. Mobilization against President Mohamed Morsi, the leader and the candidate of the Muslim Brotherhood-backed Freedom and Justice Party, was rapidly building up since late 2012. By June 2013 protests against President Morsi reached a peak, creating a situation conducive

for the military intervention of July 3rd when the elected President was ousted. Many Copts were among the vocal critics of the ousted president, a position shared by mainstream Muslims. But for Islamic political activists meanwhile, while the anti-Muslim Brotherhood position of mainstream Muslims was politically interpreted, the same position taken by Egypt's Copts was interpreted on a sectarian basis. Tensions and mistrust between Copts and Islamists thus reached an all-time high. Against this background, violence against individual Coptic citizens, communities, and churches during the summer of 2013 took place. This violence was mainly an extension of the power struggle between political factions in which Copts as a community got caught in the middle. The violent attacks directed against Copts were, to a large extent, deliberate acts orchestrated by Islamic activists rather than a spontaneous outbreak of violence between people of different religious convictions. The essence of the summer of 2013 sectarian conflict was whether or not Copts are entitled to equal citizenship rights, allowing them to voice their political views without being stigmatized for their religious beliefs.

Presidential Elections of 2012 and 2014 - The two elections in 2012 and 2014 are crucial turning points in post-revolution Egypt and together reflect the uncertain outcome of the political transformations that are taking place in the country. In 2012, Mohammed Morsi, leader of the Muslim Brotherhood's Freedom and Justice Party won the first democratic election in Egypt with less than 52% of the vote, with a turnout of only 46 and 52% in the first and second round respectively. After Morsi's ousting in 2013, the election in May 2014 confirmed General El-Sisi as president with an overwhelming majority of 97%, even though less than half of Egyptians (48%) turned out to vote. The campaigns for both elections demonstrate the polarisation and limitations of public communication and the role the media are playing in the political power struggles in Egypt today.

3.3.2. Conflict cases in Kenya

The Somali Community - Tensions between Kenya's Somali population, other ethnic groups and the government of Kenya continue to rise. In September 2013, several Kenyan Somalis involved with the Somali extremist group Al Shabaab, were leading the terrorist attack on one of Nairobi's up-market shopping centres, the Westgate. This was an escalation from what has been continuous violence towards non-Somali Kenyans, such as bombings of bus stations, throwing grenades in

churches, etc. This conflict also reflects different cultures of communication within the society as well as different ways that politicians, public authorities and those with business interests seek to occupy the media space.

General Elections of 2007 and 2013 - In the aftermath of the inter-ethnic violence that followed the 2007 general elections and left about 1,400 dead, the media, most notably vernacular radio stations, were accused of having incited ethnic hatred. At the same time, the mainstream media were accused of abandoning impartiality, deliberately covering up evidence of vote rigging. During the 2013 elections, the media played a very different role. As part of a broader "peace narrative", radio stations and newspapers carefully avoided any content that might trigger conflict, and largely bought into the government's argument that any public speech likely to inspire instability or threaten national unity was illegitimate, irrespective of whether this might impinge journalistic independence. The two elections reflect the dilemmas of free speech and competitive elections in volatile, divided societies.

The Kenyatta ICC Trial 2014 - The governments of first Mwai Kibaki (2007-2013) and later Uhuru Kenyatta (2013-) have invested considerable energy in challenging the legitimacy of ICC proceedings against President Kenyatta and his running-mate, William Ruto. The Kenyan media was initially broadly supportive of the ICC proceedings. But as the Kenyan government adopted a "Mugabe-ist" strategy of demonising critical civil society and media voices as neo-colonial "sell outs" and "traitors", this gave way to a much more critical perspective on the ICC. However, counter-currents can also be observed: a new Nairobi based "twitterati" utilised social media to criticize Kenyatta and Ruto and defend their prosecution.

3.3.3. Conflict cases in Serbia

The Pride Parade of October 2010 - The public debate over the Pride Parade held in September and October 2010 in Belgrade highlighted issues of minority rights and toleration as an important part of the democratisation process. The Pride Parade triggered fierce opposition by militant right-wing groups and the Orthodox Church. While most political parties supported the Parade, the event highlighted the threat that right-wing extremism poses to democracy.

The 2008 Election - This conflict unfolded between March and May 2008, during a parliamentary election campaign. Key controversies evolved around

Kosovo's declaration of independence and Serbia's integration into the European Union. The conflict involved a broad range of political actors ranging from civil society groups to political parties. It marked a critical juncture in Serbia's political development and paved the way for a more consistent pro-EU policy.

The Milosevic ICTY Trial - Surrounding the arrest of Milosevic and his secretive extradition to the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia in The Hague, a heated debate over issues of transitional justice dominated the public agenda for months (April – July 2001). The question whether the former president should be tried on crimes against humanity within or outside the country polarised pro-European, more cosmopolitan groups on the one side and nationalist, more traditional groups, including police and the armed forces on the other.

3.3.4. Conflict cases in South Africa

Service Delivery Protests, 2004-2013 - The term 'service delivery protests' describes a range of violent protests related to the inadequate provision of services by local municipalities, most often water, sanitation and housing. However, service delivery protests have to be understood more broadly as citizens' claims for good governance in a context that remains to be marred by poverty and inequality. Linked to the service delivery protests is the rise of police brutality against protesters, which in most cases remains with impunity. Service delivery protests investigated as part of this conflict case include, but are not limited to *Balfour* (2009-2011) and *Zamdela* (2012-2013). In Balfour, Mpumulanga, for instance, conflicts arose as a result of an erratic and dirty water supply, constant power outages and unemployment. In the Zamdela informal settlement near Sasolburg in the Free State, in turn, residents called for the mayor to step down after he was accused of corruption. More recently the conflicts are about the proposed merger of Parys, a low-income area, into the municipality that governs Sasolburg, a relatively prosperous industrial area.

State of the Nation Address – SONA, 2015 - While service delivery protests indicate conflicts over horizontal accountability, the SONA conflict encapsulates issues of vertical accountability, constitutionalism and the rights of the press in covering parliamentary affairs. This case evolved around the State of the Nation Address, delivered by President Jacob Zuma on 12 February 2015 to the South African parliament. As he was making his address, MPs of the Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF) interrupted him to ask when he would be paying back the money

spent on his Nkandla home. The EFF members were removed from the National Assembly chamber by police and security personnel. The opposition regarded the use of policy in the National Assembly illegal and unconstitutional, and the Democratic Alliance walked out in protest. The event was also controversial because broadcasters were not allowed to show what was happening as EFF members were being removed, based on the so-called disorder clause to protect the dignity of the house, and several news outlets have campaigned to declare the 'disorder clause' unconstitutional.

Xenophobic Violence 2000-2008 - Between 2000 and 2008 around 67 people died in xenophobic attacks, and in May 2008 more than 70 people were killed and thousands of foreign residents were dislocated. While foreigners would have been subject to discrimination prior to the end of apartheid, there seems to have been a dramatic rise after 1994. Paradoxically, one of the effects of the ANC government's policy of aggressive and inclusive nation-building has been a growth in intolerance towards outsiders. As a consequence, there is increased hostility against foreigners and African refugees which often turns into open violence. The media, especially the English speaking press, have increasingly come under attack, as their coverage is alleged of reproducing xenophobic language.

Overall, this set of twelve conflict cases selected by country and democratisation conflict type reveals not only the scope and diversity of the MeCoDEM project, but the many possibilities for comparisons. Indeed, beyond in-depth single case analyses and within-system comparisons (e.g. of public communication messages within the same conflict case), various comparative scenarios are conceivable, including broader *cross-case comparisons* of public communication for a particular conflict type, *cross-case analyses* of public communication across conflict types as well as *partial cross-case comparisons* of public communication for select cases within a particular conflict type.

4. Organisation of Fieldwork and Methodological Instruments
4.1. Organisation of fieldwork

As an international and interdisciplinary project consortium that consists of eight partner institutions across six countries, MeCoDEM has set up an organisational structure that integrates subject-specific and contextual expertise.

Work Packages were established around the analytical elements of the model of conflict communication in contexts of democratisation, as outlined in Figure 1:

- The media, broken down into
  - WP3: The representation of conflicts in traditional media (print, broadcasting);
  - WP4: Role perceptions of journalists as producers of media content;
  - WP7: Information and communication technologies (ICTs);
- WP5: Civil society groups and political activism;
- WP6: Strategic communication of governments.

Country Teams, meanwhile, bring in specialist knowledge of the selected conflict cases in the four countries of our comparative study: Egypt, Kenya, Serbia and South Africa.

As vertical units, Work Packages are responsible for developing research instruments and methodologies that are applicable across countries and conflict cases and thus lay the foundation for comparative analyses. Country Teams, on the other hand, take a horizontal perspective by focussing on the historical dimension of the selected conflict cases. They are responsible for managing the fieldwork and provide the contextual in-depth knowledge without which comparative analyses would run the risk of undue generalisations and unsubstantiated conclusions.

In order to create manageable clusters of tasks, fieldwork is divided into a sequence of data collection activities that are led by a Work Package, each of which focuses on a particular element of communication within the selected conflict cases. This differs from a conventional approach to case study research that would normally investigate one particular case at a time and then move on to the next. By working on one element of conflict communication at a given time our sequential approach reduces the complexity of fieldwork for the Country Teams. Since the research activities of each of the Work Packages employ a limited range of methodologies – e.g. content analysis, interviews – researchers on the ground are able to make themselves familiar with the research instrument and develop the expertise and routine that is necessary for producing high-quality and reliable data. However, the challenge of this approach is to finally combine the various bodies of data into a holistic understanding of the cases and, building on this, develop a 'distilled account' (Remenyi 2012, p. 122) of the cases under study that can be transformed into theory building and theory development. In addition, the data generated within a Work

Package can be used for comparative analyses of particular aspects of the communication model, for example government communication in conflict situations.

4.2. Evidence and methodology

Case study research typically draws on multiple sources of evidence, each of which providing a unique perspective on a conflict (Gillman 2000; Yin 2003). Together, these different strands of evidence form the parts of a larger puzzle that help us to describe and explain the dynamics of conflict communication in contexts of democratic change. The research activities of MeCoDEM draw on the following sources of evidence:

- Media coverage: Media texts (news, editorials, but also non-political content) are the outputs of professional journalistic activities that follow – albeit to varying degrees – prescribed standards of production and presentation. Media texts generate a public account of events, but also frames and narratives that shape the way in which these events are understood. Our analysis includes both textual material and visual material, such as press photographs, cartoons etc.
- Strategic communications by conflict parties, such as governments, local authorities, civil society groups, religious leaders, etc. These materials can be distributed online or offline and range from press releases, speeches, public statements, programmatic documents to more ephemeral expressions like posters and slogans displayed at demonstrations.
- Social media communications of relevant conflict parties and bloggers whose following indicate that they have gained the status of opinion leaders during a particular conflict.
- Formal documents, such as legislation and regulatory documents, for example media regulation, restrictions on freedom of speech, minority rights, laws on assembly rights, etc. These documents reflect the formal rules and norms that define the constraints (and opportunities) within which conflicts are negotiated in the public domain. However, while in all societies formal rules are complemented, sometimes undercut, by informal ways of social organisation, it is particularly during times of democratic transition and regime transformation that formal rules are challenged by large parts of the society, thus giving more space for informal interactions. Evidence for informal rules are difficult to capture, but will be visible in the actual communicative behaviour of actors and will be elicited during interviews with various conflict parties.
- Accounts of key participants, in particular journalists, political activists and political officials. These accounts will be mainly gathered through interviews where people can express their personal views and sentiments on the conflicts

under study and how they understand their own role in these events. We will use semi-structured interviews to ensure that participants focus on the issues that are relevant for our research, but at the same time allow for a high degree of flexibility and openness to encourage the emergence of new themes.

- Physical artefacts and objects of material culture complement the more structured investigation of documents and interviews. Images in the public realm, buildings and creative expressions like songs and poetry are important sources for understanding how people respond to conflicts and quests for democratic change. These manifestations in the physical environment can be combined with grassroot storytelling, thus giving voice to the hopes and concerns of ordinary people.

The use of multiple sources of evidence calls for a multi-method approach that allows us to capture all elements of the process under study with the most effective instruments (Creswell 2014). In its programme of research MeCoDEM brings together a broad range of methods that incorporate both quantitative and qualitative approaches. The research includes integrated quantitative and qualitative content analysis, semi-structured interviews with the key actors who were involved in the selected conflicts, internet-based research and visual analysis.

Work Packages will develop detailed research instruments for their specific field of enquiry, which are outlined in separate documents. Therefore, the following provides only a brief sketch of the main methodologies that are employed in the course of the MeCoDEM project.

Quantitative content analysis will be used to identify patterns of communication in larger bodies of text, in particular media coverage. But the research instrument developed for analysing media content will also be applied to other documents where appropriate, for example speeches, press releases and web content. The research instrument is informed by the concept of framing that has been developed in communication studies, cognitive psychology and other disciplines (see Entman 1993; Reese, Gandy and Grant 2003) and covers variables such as causal attribution, value orientations and proposed solutions. Other variables include labelling of 'the other', conceptions of democracy and the instrumentalisation of the past. Variables on journalistic style, such as bias, tone and the use of emotionality and visual images complement the content analytical instrument. While quantitative content analysis provides a reliable picture of the pattern of coverage and allows for comparisons across conflict cases and countries in a unified language (numerical data), the level of abstraction required for quantitative content analysis inevitably

leads to the loss of information about the nuances and connotations that are so important in conflict communication. The quantitative dataset can therefore also be used as a gateway to qualitative textual analysis that facilitates the fast and easy retrieval of individual pieces of text that include particular characteristics of interest (e.g. references to the past, particular actors, visuals etc.).

Applying a unified set of core variables to a wider range of text types enables us to compare the messages of different actors, for example the degree to which some actors share similar frame constructions and where the lines of disagreement or even hostility are. Joining data sets across different sets of actors over time will also support the exercise of process-tracing analysis to reconstruct how perceptions and frames develop and spread across communities and how this affects the dynamics and outcomes of conflicts (see George and Bennett 2005, pp. 205 - 232).

Another key methodology of the MeCoDEM research programme are interviews with the key actors who are engage in public communication over the selected conflicts. We use semi-structured (in-depth) interviews, which cover core concepts that have been applied to the content analysis, but these will be complemented by enquiries that are specific to the interviewees and their particular role in a conflict. The research instruments developed by different Work Packages ensure that the interviews produce rich data material that provides insights into the world views, decision making considerations and feelings of our interview partners. Innovative forms of interviewing are used to encourage an open and honest account. For example, reconstructive interviews work with material the interviewee has produced him/herself (e.g. a news article or a speech given), to serve as a bridge for the interviewee to reflect on the process that led to that piece, including outside pressures, editorial routines and own beliefs at the time of writing etc. These two major sets of data – media content, interviews – will be complemented by innovative research routes, for example the inclusion of artistic expressions, storytelling through reflections on the physical environment (e.g. places of memory), visual analysis of images, including lay content, that is available from YouTube, and other resources.

5. Conclusion

This paper has outlined the main research objectives of the project *Media, Conflict and Democratisation* and the methodological approaches that are employed to investigate the interplay between public communication and conflict dynamics in

transitional contexts. In its thematic focus, theoretical orientation and methodological approach, the research programme of MeCoDEM is innovative in various ways: First and foremost, most democratisation research has largely ignored the significance of the media so far. However, the liberalisation of public communication creates a fundamentally new, often volatile and highly explosive environment, in which citizens make themselves heard and regime changes are negotiated. New media, in particular the interactive platforms of Web 2.0, have added unprecedented opportunities for conflict parties to mobilise divisions, but also for peace makers to create spaces for dialogue and reconciliation. Second, the concept of democratisation conflict departs from the dominant teleological view that assumes the implementation of liberal democracy to be a means for pacifying societies. Equally, the liberalisation of the media frequently yields ambivalent results. While the abolition of censorship opens up spaces for new voices to be heard, the expansion of pluralism often fosters fragmentation and unbridled hostility. Future media assistance and democracy support programmes have to address these ambivalences and find new solutions beyond ideological presumptions. Third, MeCoDEM's comparative multi-case study design will generate an extraordinarily rich body of evidence that opens up a multitude of avenues to investigate the significance of both traditional and new media in democratisation conflicts.

6. Bibliography

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