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Connecting in Times of Duress: Understanding Communication and Conflict in Middle Africa's Mobile Margins

Mirjam de Bruijn, January 2012

Summary

This research programme seeks to understand the dynamics in the relationship between social media, mobile telephony and the social fabric under duress in Africa's mobile margins. It combines studies on mobility/migration, conflict and communication in an attempt to uncover these new dynamics, which have been so evident in North Africa and the Middle East in 2011. Societies under duress are characterized by long periods of war or repression that lead to mobilities (forced or economic) and marginality. People who live in such circumstances have to manoeuvre between oppressive structures and possibilities to communicate, which are often informed by violence, fear and poverty. The introduction of new ICT is enhancing information flows and communication between people and this is expected to lead to social change and to influence the social fabric in its (re)forming of communities and the construction of identity and feelings of belonging, which will increasingly differentiate social groups. The study is situated in northern Middle Africa (Chad, Central African Republic, Cameroon and eastern Nigeria). The proposed methodology is interdisciplinary (anthropology, history, communication studies, conflict studies and social geography), historical-ethnographic and comparative, involving regional sub-projects among diverse mobile populations in urban centres, refugee camps and remote rural areas. Film and photography will also form part of the methodology, acting as a form of communication between researchers, local communities and stakeholders and will result in a documentary. The study contributes to the development of a theory of connections. The findings will enhance our understanding of conflict dynamics and further the debate on the role of social media and ICT in conflict and post-conflict societies. Workshops and conferences in Africa and Europe will guarantee regular exchanges between policy makers and academia.

Keywords
New Communication and Information Technology, Conflict, Connections, Africa, Historical Ethnography

Description of the proposed research

Introduction

The recent political upheavals in North Africa have demonstrated a new dynamic in Africa's political and social history, and the salient role that social media and new information and communication technology (ICT) can play. These innovative forms of being connected are seen as an important factor in social and political change in Africa (Castells *et al.* 2007; Wasserman 2005, 2011; Shirkey 2011). Since 1998, access to mobile telephony in Africa has grown to over 50% coverage. This 'mobile-phone revolution' (Etzo & Collender 2010) has been largely urban in Africa and has particularly attracted youth, who make up 60% of Africa's population. Recent technological innovations and the introduction of broadband cables and smartphones are allowing increasing numbers of people to be better connected and to have access to social media and ICT for communication and information purposes (Rao 2011; ICA 2011). The first examples are m-banking (Batchelor *et al.* 2009), m-healthcare and m-democracy (Ekine

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2010), and the use of ICT in crisis situations and security (Veil *et al.* 2011). These on-going technological advancements are expected to encourage economic and political change in Africa even further (cf. Ellis 2011). But is everything rosy? Do these new developments not risk creating new forms of social in- and exclusion (Yu'a 2005; Carmody 2009) and contributing to the development of 'global shadows' (Ferguson 2006)? Is the role of technology not being exaggerated (cf. Bohler Muller & van der Merwe 2011; Santner 2010; de Bruijn *et al.* 2009; Grosskurth 2010)? Empirical evidence is needed (Donner 2008) of this unfolding revolution, which may alter power hierarchies, lead to new social divisions (gender, generations, geography) and transform the African social and political landscape in unexpected ways. This research programme will contribute critically to a new and developing field of research, namely 'Mobile Communication and Information and Development in Africa'.

The effects of mobile communication will be most visible and measurable in societies where there is little current infrastructural development. This is the case in conflict areas or regions that are ruled by political repression and violence. The social fabric in these areas is characterized by duress, i.e. the experience of constant threat of violence and suppression, highly unequal power relations and disrupted social networks, which have made people flee their home areas either as refugees, Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) or economic migrants, constituting displacement economies and cultures that form the mobile margins of Africa (cf. Hammar 2010; de Bruijn & Both 2011). The need to 'know' and 'connect' is extremely important in such situations (Veil *et al.* 2011). On the other hand, increasing possibilities for communication give those in power more potential for control. 'Communication is power' (Castells 2009). The introduction of new ICT is thus a two-edged sword. This research programme seeks a better understanding of the relationship between the social fabric under duress, new ICT, and social and political change.

The region of study is northern Middle Africa (Cameroon, Central African Republic, Chad and eastern Nigeria), where various forms of conflict and mobility have informed the social fabric (Tourneux & Woin 2009). In the remotest and most conflict-ridden parts of this region (i.e. eastern Chad and northern Central African Republic), wireless technology (primarily the mobile phone) has been revolutionizing communication possibilities (Frere & Kiyindou 2009; Mudhai *et al.* 2009). This region has been under-researched in the past so this study will also fill a historical and ethnographic gap on the African map.

This area will allow a comparative study of 'social fabrics under duress', varying from war to repressive regimes, with different levels of penetration of wireless technology, and from very remote and relatively disconnected areas to a 'hub' in Nigeria. The analysis of social change will start by developing an understanding of the dialectic relationship between 'agency', 'conflict' and the communication landscape, as it is understood in its historical context. The binding element of these processes is 'connecting' and new ICT is changing the connecting dynamics.

The main objective of this research programme is to determine whether there is a relationship between social and political change and the mobile-phone revolution in Africa, and to provide the necessary empirical evidence. The study of connections will be taken as the point of departure.

Specific questions:
-   How is the ICT revolution changing the social fabric under duress at the level of (i) decision making and empowerment; (ii) community formation (both social and

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political) and related feelings of belonging; and (iii) power relations?
- What are the limits and possibilities for agency in a situation of duress and new ICT and will this lead to new processes of in- and exclusion?
- Is the emic understanding of conflict, i.e. duress, changing with the advancement of social media and ICT?
- How does the present development in mobile communication relate to similar processes in the history of Middle Africa? Is the mobile-phone revolution comparable to other communication revolutions in the past (roads, motorized transport, telephones)?

The results will contribute to the development of a theory of connections that will examine the relationship between communication, duress and social and political change, focusing on 'connections' in relation to new ICT, especially the mobile phone, in Africa. This will also enhance our understanding of the role of social media and ICT in conflict and post-conflict situations. The proposed methodology is interdisciplinary, historical-ethnographic and comparative, involving regional sub-projects with diverse displacement cultures/economies in urban centres, refugee camps and remote rural areas.

The social fabric and ICT: Agency and (re)connecting in times of duress

Social fabric, flexibility and (power) dynamics
Flexibility and dynamics are central features of the social fabric. Social relations and (dis)connections are constantly being (re)defined and (re)constructed in the dialectic interplay between agency and structure. Agency is defined here as the capability to act, and also as creativity and (intentional) decision making. The process of giving meaning and interpretation mediates this dialectic relationship. Structures enable and constrain people to act and are altered in these actions, always in hierarchical order and within the power relations of society (cf. de Bruijn *et al.* 2007; Chabal 2009). And communities are defined here as a form of social or political network where feelings of belonging (Geschiere 2009) are defined in relation to shared (ethnic, social, political, linguistic) identities (Cerulo 1997). Communities are not geographically located *per se* but instead develop in space. Mobility is the normal condition (Clifford 1992; Urry 2000; Salazar 2010) and people are increasingly creating livelihoods in multi-spatial settings (cf. Gupta & Ferguson 1998; Hastrup & Olwig 1997) and imagined communities (Anderson 1991).

The role of communication and information is crucial in the navigation of the social fabric (Christiansen *et al.* 2006). Therefore communication is defined as a resource. Access to the means to communicate is also constantly being negotiated from the margins (cf. Peluso & Ribot 2003; Das & Poole 2004). As Castells (2009: 53) concludes: 'Power in the network society is communication power'. In this programme, access to and control of communication are seen as essential in the definition of power hierarchies between and within networks, and for the (re)definition of mobile communities. Understanding the social fabric and change thus starts with the unravelling of the dynamics of communication and social relating, i.e. (dis)connections.

How does ICT relate to the social fabric and communication power? I am inspired by the Society and Technology debate that argues against technological determinism (cf. Yu'a 2007; Law 1991) and the Action Network Theory (Latour 2005). Technology and society are dialectically related and are both transformed in interaction. The relationship between technology and society develops in hierarchical contexts depending on the (often creative) ways people appropriate them (cf. Ingold 2000; Oudshoorn & Pinch 2003; Gewald 2007). Examples of this theorizing in the mobile-phone literature are 'phone

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cultures' (cf. Goggin 2006; Katz 2006), the 'anthropology of communication' (Horst & Miller 2006) and the 'social shaping of mobile technologies' (de Bruijn *et al.* 2009; cf. Hahn & Kibooru 2009). The appropriation of technologies differs between social groups (gender, generations) and geographies. So although social change can be expected with the introduction of new ICT, the direction of this change and what it will entail are difficult to predict.

The social fabric consists of social networks in (hierarchical) relations that vary in time and space (cf. Castells 1996). How and when these will be understood as communities depends on the meaning given to social relations. Early network theory demonstrated how this is related to the balance between strong and weak ties (Granovetter 1973), and new ICTs are rebalancing them (cf. Ling 2008). Studies of transnationalism have shown that the perseverance of strong ties over distance in dispersed communities forms the core of the transnational community (cf. Bryceson & Vuorela 2002; Chéneau-Loquay 2004; Panagakos & Horst 2006; Mazzucato 2008; de Bruijn *et al.* 2010*a*; de Bruijn 2010; Brinkman & de Bruijn 2011) and new forms of communication can become the social glue of (dispersed) communities (Vertovec 2004). However, we should allow room for disconnections, both voluntary and forced. People may also choose not to connect. Decisions are informed by emotions and, as one of the earliest studies on mobile telephony and the organization of agricultural business showed, successful communication depends on trust (Molony 2007). The role of emotions in new forms of (dis)connecting is still to be explored.

The social fabric in the present is a result of decisions taken over generations and experiences from the past. I follow Lonsdale (2000) who proposed an African history in which agency is central, as opposed to a history of structures. Cooper's (2001) statement that processes of globalization are of all times reminds us of the continuity of social dynamics, as is the case in conflict and mobility. We can only understand the present from the past (Tonkin *et al.* 1989). Studies on the history of technology and society (cf. Gewald 2009; Nkwi 2011) are crucial to our understanding of the appropriation processes that shape the social fabric. After all, 'All old media were once new media' (Gitelman & Pingree 2003). We should not forget that relations and technologies from past times continue to exist in the present and often articulate with new forms of relating and technology. The social fabric under duress has to be understood from its past experiences and the study of change in the social fabric and in connections is historical *per se*.

Conflict, duress and agency
What is meant here by duress? Conflict is one of the idioms of society and can be considered as part of its dynamics (Cramer 2006; Richards 2005). However when conflict turns into war or a repressive regime, it becomes unbearable. Duress refers to the experience of 'conflict', violence or repression that may become an everyday experience (Aijmer & Abbink 2000; Bouju & de Bruijn 2007) but also other forms of structural violence (cf. Scheper-Hughes & Bourgois 2004). These experiences and the way people perceive them inform social/political relating and decision making in the social fabric under duress. Duress refers to the emic part of the experience of conflict and implies suffering and victimhood (Chabal 2009:150-172; Das & Kleinman 2000; Schlee 2004). It questions the room for agency.

What does agency under duress mean? Societies in conflict are characterized by oppositions. Conflicts are fought out in different realms of society and lead to the politicization of ethnicity, religion and identities. In situations of war or extreme repression, these lead to a social reality that is full of unexpected (religious, ethnic,

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linguistic, regional, political) relations with claims to exclusivity. People have to choose between these to survive. Violence and structural exploitation, fear (Linke & Smith 2009) and mistrust (de Bruijn *et al.* 2010*b*) inform everyday decisions to connect (i.e. navigation). The term 'choiceless choices' characterizes the forms of agency that are left to ordinary people living under duress despite their astonishing 'skills to survive' (Scheper-Hughes 2008; Finnstrom 2008; Konings & Foeken 2006). People's decision making is informed by their traumatic experiences (Alexander *et al.* 2004) and an accumulation of memories of (stressful) past events (de Bruijn & van Dijk 2005). On the other hand, these circumstances may also bond people in their emotional experiences and lead to new directions in their community lives (cf. Cerulo 1998).

Agency (translated as decision making or navigating) in the social fabric under duress is thus informed by oppositions and impossibilities, and emotions and constraints. Nevertheless, people make a living and connect. How these forms of agency reflect in the formation of new relations or the interpretation of old ones, i.e. communities, and feelings of belonging and identity is one of the central questions in this research.

Mobility and displacement
The social fabric under duress is 'mobile'. Fleeing war and political repression forces people to move to refugee camps or urban areas where they join displaced populations on the peripheries or to go to the diaspora as asylum seekers (Essed *et al.* 2004; Ferguson 2006). They become part of the globalized world but, being dispersed and disconnected, they find themselves living in the mobile margins. These social fabrics are characterized as displacement economies or cultures, and agency (creativity and [the lack of] possibility to act) is central in any analysis under such circumstances (Hammar *et al.* 2010; de Bruijn *et al.* 2007). The question is how the social fabric is enhanced in displacement. When displaced, people are confronted with many new 'choiceless choices'. Although these displacements may be considered as part of social history and are perceived as 'normal' (de Bruijn 2001; Salazar 2010; Hahn & Klute 2007), they also question the direction of social change and the processes of decision making and negotiating. In these displacement cultures and economies, the role of ICT can be of crucial importance as connecting to those who are faraway will fulfil conditions of well-being but will also open up new opportunities to (re)create communities over distance and access crucial information (cf. Jansen 2011). Connecting might then become a major asset for a dispersed community and allow it to continue or reformulate and develop feelings of belonging.

Duress and ICT
Making a living under duress depends on being able to link to networks in power, move (migrate, displace) and earn an income in the informal sector (cf. Chabal 2009: 127-150). Access to information on war and conflict, economic possibilities and contact with others who have fled is crucial for the well-being of people under duress. This leads us to the question as to whether and how the appropriation of new ICT in the social fabric under duress will enhance economic, social and communication possibilities. Will these change the possibilities for agency, and thus influence decision making and social relating in terms of in- and exclusion? After all, people need to connect to survive (Castells *et al.* 2007; Horst & Miller 2006) even if the choices they make in connecting create moral and ethical dilemmas (Both 2008, 2010; de Bruijn & van Dijk 2009; Lamoureaux 2009). 'Communication is power', but who is communicating and with whom? ICT may enhance decision making and offer the ordinary citizen more possibilities to act (agency) and may lead to new forms of organization and community but at the same time it enables those in power to control and suppress them even more (Castells 2009; Nyamnjoh 2005;

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Shirky 2011), which may add to the duress they are experiencing. Control of the media and other technologies of communication by those in power add to the experience of duress among others (cf. Wasserman 2011; Ben Arrous 2001).

To summarize
The social fabric is characterized by flexibility and dynamics informed by the dialectical relationship between agency and socio-political structure. Agency is translated into a historically informed exploration of (dis)connections. In this research, agency is related to the (re)formation of communities, processes of decision making, belonging and identity. Are advances in ICT and social media resulting in changes in (dis)connections and ways of (dis)connecting that influence the social fabric under duress? How is this leading to a redefinition of social and political communities? The answers to these questions will help to develop further a theory of connections, i.e. an approach to social and political change in Africa that starts from 'connections' (de Bruijn & van Dijk, fc.) and that is in dialogue with studies on conflict, network society, technology and society, and media and social change.

The area of study: Middle Africa

The study will take place in the northern countries of Middle Africa: Chad, Central African Republic (CAR), Cameroon and eastern Nigeria. They all have very different conflict histories that have led to a variety of levels of duress and mobility patterns. Infrastructural development in the region varies from being the 'hub' (Nigeria) to relative neglect (northern CAR). These internal differences make the area perfectly suited to the type of comparative analysis being proposed. Furthermore, the research will fill in part of the historical and ethnographic map of Africa as the region has been understudied. The Applicant has expertise in Cameroon, Chad and Nigeria. Including CAR is a challenge but is crucial for the comparative aspects of the study as it represents a different type of duress and displacement.

Political history and forms of duress
Since independence and following a period of political upheaval against their colonial governments and internal wars (the Biafra War in Nigeria and Maquizard in Cameroon), Cameroon and Nigeria have developed relatively stable political regimes, even though they are repressive and authoritarian and confront resistance and protest (Konings & Nyamnjoh 2000, 2003). In both countries, a latent atmosphere of violence and fear dominates daily life and limited press freedom has not been able to change this (Nyamnjoh 2005).

The political landscapes of CAR and Chad have been characterized by civil war, violence and turmoil since independence (1960) and the recent discovery of oil in Chad has led to an increase in political unrest and poverty (van Dijk 2007, 2008). The power of the state is evident from the size of their military, police and secret police services. The *coup d'état* in CAR in 2003 resulted in chaotic regimes of violence, and state control seems to be limited to Bangui, the capital city (Glasius 2008; Bierschenk & Olivier de Sardan 1997). Criminality is one of the spill-over effects of the conflicts in Chad both for Cameroon and CAR (cf. Iisa 2010; Debos 2008a&b).[1]

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[1] For the history of Central Africa since independence in a comparative perspective, see Clark & Gardinier

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These situations of war, insecurity and oppression all lead in their own way to conditions of duress where violence and uncertainty are important characteristics that colour the everyday encounters of ordinary citizens. The Human Development Index (in which Nigeria and Cameroon rank respectively 145 and 134, and Chad and CAR 166 and 162 respectively, out of a total of 172 countries) shows that poverty is rampant, though more severe in CAR and Chad. Insecurity and violence are experienced daily in Chad and CAR whereas they are more hidden in Nigeria and Cameroon. An 'index of duress' would place CAR at the top, followed by Chad, Cameroon and Nigeria.

Mobility
Displacement has always been present in Middle Africa due to slavery, ecological differences and economic change. Recent forms of displacement are, however, connected to political circumstances or insecurities in terms of banditry and rebellion, and are not considered as part of a cultural repertoire (Tourneux & Woin 2009). The rapid urbanization and growth of cities seen in all the countries of Middle Africa since independence are the result of these mobilities (cf. Perouse de Montclos 2010). From 1960 to 2010, Cameroon's urban population grew from 14% to 58% of the total population; Nigeria's from 13% to 50%; Chad's from 7% to 28% and CAR's from 23% to 39% (Martin 1998; www.indexmundi.com). However mobility patterns are also diverse and relate to specific socio-political circumstances. In Cameroon and Nigeria, internal migration has primarily been for economic reasons although migration extended to include the US and Europe after independence when political reasons for migration emerged. Migration flows from Chad and CAR to Europe have been much smaller. Mobility patterns in these two countries are regional and often result from a combination of economic and political stress. Refugees fleeing war have found their way to Cameroon and Nigeria, and CAR refugees have fled to Chad as well. Other mobilities are those of nomadic people (pastoralists, fishermen) who roam the area and move to relatively empty spaces (northern CAR), while young labour migrants are moving to economically successful areas like the oil-producing region in Chad, and yet others are going to the refugee camps in eastern Chad where aid is being distributed, or to the cities. There are also movements of armed men, mainly Chadians but also militia from Nigeria, who have moved to Cameroon. 'Displacement' economies and cultures are dominant in the social landscape of this region, but seem to vary in relation to the experiences of duress. For instance refugees and IDPs are important in Chad and CAR, while for Nigeria and Cameroon migration to Europe is the more dominant repertoire.

Middle Africa connected
Different levels of colonial investment in the region have left marked differences in infrastructural development, with Cameroon and Nigeria being much better endowed with roads and communication infrastructure than Chad and CAR. However there are big regional differences too. Infrastructural development in some parts of Cameroon is still very limited as a result of huge amounts of money having been embezzled. Instability and neglect in CAR and Chad had put infrastructural development in these countries on hold or even sent it into decline but contracts with the Chinese have recently boosted the development of roads in the region and Chadian oil money is now being invested in infrastructural development.

(1997) and Birmingham & Martin (1998). The history of Nigeria has been well documented but the period of upheavals around independence in Cameroon has not been extensively covered.

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Significant installations for wireless technology only became possible when the market was liberated at the end of the 1990s and foreign companies began investing in Africa, opening up the potentially huge market there for mobile telephony. Different companies have moved into the region, covering even the most remote areas like central Chad and northern CAR.[2] Recent developments include the installation of broadband cables and the availability of (cheap) smartphones that are expected to make access to social media through mobile telephony increasingly part of the communication possibilities of ordinary citizens. The communication companies MTN and Airtel have invested in this technology, focusing on the so-called hubs like Nigeria (Rao 2011).

Linked to these communication developments is the growth of the market in mobile communication artefacts. With the boom in new communication technology, markets have reoriented themselves, and products from China are now arriving in these countries via Dubai, thus establishing new market chains. The importance of cheap products cannot be underestimated as they create possibilities for the economically marginalized.

Compared to the rest of Africa, Middle Africa is one of the least 'enrolled'. In Chad and CAR, less than 30% of the population are mobile-phone subscribers, a figure far below that in other countries in Africa where today's estimates suggest an overall subscription rate of over 50%. The growth in mobile telephony in the area has been especially explosive in the past five years, with a multiplier of ten for CAR and Chad and of four for Nigeria and Cameroon. Chad's mobile-phone coverage level is 23% today, the figure for CAR is 28%, in Cameroon it is 42% and in Nigeria 55%.[3] These figures show the internal differences between countries.

Connections and communication in the social fabric under duress: Research Plan

The proposed sub-projects have been designed in such a way that they are comparative and complementary. They have a common methodology that is explained in the next section. They cover the historical development of the social fabric under duress at different times in communication innovation, and offer a comparison between various types of duress, mobility, urbanization and ICT penetration. They will give insight into forms of community building through (dis)connections and the way ICTs shape – and are shaped by – these. The findings will feed into each of the sub-questions related to 'decision making', 'community (re)building', 'social relating' and 'belonging' to understand the new social and political ordering of the social fabric under duress, with a focus on processes of empowerment and new exclusions.

The sub-projects are:
1. *Histories of Mobility and Communication in Societies under Duress in Middle Africa: The Past in the Present* (Post-doc and PhD)
2. *'The (Wireless) Art of Navigating Duress'*, *Three Comparative Case Studies*:
   A *Being (dis)Connected during War(s): Shaping Urbanity in Chad and CAR*

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[2] The main companies in the region are Airtel (an Indian company) and Tigo (Italian) in Chad; MTN (South African) and Orange (French) in Cameroon; and Caratel (which is owned by the French company Socatel) in CAR. Airtel, Orange and Vodacom have cornered a major part of the market in Nigeria.

[3] www.itu.int/ITU-D/ict/statistics/material/excel/2010/MobileCellularSubscriptions00-10.xls Statistical data on mobile-phone penetration are given at the level of the state and do not consider the variations between locations or social groups. Nevertheless, these figures do give an impression of the development of telecommunications in the study region.

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        (PhD, MA, Experts)
      B *Nomadic Pastoralists Confronted with Duress and New ICTs* (PhD, MA)
      C *African Youth Confronting Political Repression in a Globalized Cameroon and Nigeria* (PhD, MA)
  3. Film and visuals: '*Connecting Duress: Navigating Crisis in Africa*' (film maker, coordinated by Applicant)
  4. *Synthesis: 'Connecting Duress: ICT, Conflict and Social-political Change in Africa: A contribution to the Theory of Connections* (Applicant)

1. Histories of Mobility and Communication in Societies under Duress in Middle Africa: The Past in the Present (Post-doc, PhD)

This project will be executed by two researchers. The post-doc research will cover the whole region and concentrate on interregional linkages. The PhD research will focus on the histories of Chad and CAR, which are less well known than the histories of Nigeria and Cameroon, and will depend much more on oral histories. The two projects will work in close collaboration. The statements 'communication is power' and 'the past in the present' are the analytical starting point of this historical and socio-political research. The central questions are: How has the development of communication technologies in the region reformulated power relations within the various states, between social groups (crossing borders) and regionally? How has duress influenced mobility patterns and the formation of displacement economies and cultures? What are the oppositions and hierarchies that have been created in the realm of duress and how have they influenced the social fabric? Infrastructural development is one of the leading themes in the study and will cover colonial and post-colonial history. Archival research and life histories are the main methodologies.

2 (A-C). 'The (Wireless) Art of Navigating Duress', Three Comparative Case Studies

The three case studies focus on the 'art of navigating duress' and are comparable in how they relate to duress, mobility patterns and ICT development. They include factors of urbanization, differences between generations and variations in socio-political dynamics (ethnicity, language, political parties, economy). Studies A and B concentrate on decision making/navigating in an urban and a rural setting respectively. They will concentrate on the question of (re)connecting and the formation of communities among refugees and IDPs. Study C focuses more on mobilization and organization in 'politically inspired' (new, virtual) communities, with an emphasis on youth. The studies will decipher how access to mobile telephony in circumstances of duress leads to new forms of in- and exclusion and (dis)empowerment, and to the (re)definition of communities. The focus on connections will make the studies multi-sited, following people in their geographical and communication itineraries. The basic methodology is historical-ethnography, including field observation and participation, interviews, life histories, film and visuals.

A: *Being (dis)Connected during War(s): Shaping Urbanity in Chad and CAR*
    (PhD for Chad, Expert research in Bangui, with Applicant, MA)

    This study is based in Chad and CAR and will focus on urban dynamics and the linkages between urban and rural. Urbanization rates in Chad are high (5%) and Bangui, the main urban centre in CAR, is expanding fast too. Both countries have a relatively low penetration of ICT but mobile telephony is being rapidly adopted. The differences between CAR and Chad are the experiences of duress and the forms of mobility. The civil war in Chad is explained in clear ideological contradictions between

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North and South, between Muslim and Christian communities, between Arabic speakers and French speakers, and between northern ethnic groups and southern ethnic groups. These oppositions also colour processes of navigation and decision making (de Bruijn & van Dijk 2007). They are part of the exclusionary social politics of society. These oppositions in CAR are not as clear although the descriptions of people's experiences depict lives filled with all kinds of horrors and atrocities (Cimpric 2011). And many people have been displaced in both Chad and CAR, as a result of poverty and fleeing war. This study (a follow-up for Chad of Both 2008, 2010, 2011; Seli 2008; and in tandem with Butter 2011) will focus on the itineraries of people from rural southern Chad and from the rural areas of CAR towards the big cities.

The central question is how urbanity (in terms of new identities/belonging, communities) is shaped for rural populations under duress in the era of new ICTs. What are the new connections and disconnections being forged? How are these changing with the increasing possibilities to connect to the home area? How are they navigating and connecting between the urban and the rural? What is the role of ICT in this?

B: *Nomadic Pastoralists Confronted with Duress and New ICTs* (PhD, MA)

This study focuses on the displacement of people in rural areas as a result of the rampant political insecurity in the region. One such group are the Fulani cattle nomads who are mobile due to their nomadic pastoralism. Recently they have moved into the 'empty' space of northern CAR where, as relative strangers and relatively wealthier people, they are facing attacks from bandits and former soldiers who roam the area to make a living. The Fulani have fled in large numbers to the refugee camps set up by the UNHCR in eastern Cameroon and southern Chad. Previous studies in Nigeria, Cameroon and Mali have shown that the appropriation of the mobile phone in this nomadic milieu has been smooth and welcoming (cf. de Bruijn *et al*. 2011; Sangare 2010).

This research project confronts the social fabric of a historically mobile community facing immobility and new ways of connecting in a hostile environment. It will focus on the contradictions that these new developments emanate for the mobile social fabric. The case study will also involve the UNHCR as it is an important player in the context of these nomads' lives. This study will be a follow-up study of an initial exploration of the field (Adamou 2011) and will consider experiences of duress in CAR and of immobility in the refugee camps.

The main questions are: How is the duress (chaos) in northern CAR influencing mobility patterns of nomadic groups? How does their stay in UNHCR camps relate to the definition of self and feelings of belonging? How is the introduction of ICT, mobile telephony and social media reforming the immobilized mobile community?'

C: *African Youth Confronting Political Repression in a Globalized Cameroon and Nigeria* (PhD, MA, Expert research)

Cross River State in Nigeria and Anglophone Cameroon have a common colonial past and can in many ways be considered as one area, with people sharing a language, mobility and history. ICT developments in this area are relatively high. Duress is related to the authoritarian regimes in both Nigeria and Cameroon. In Nigeria, an extra factor to consider is the threat of violence related to the conflicts in the Niger

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Delta, while in Cameroon the Biya regime has considered Anglophone Cameroon as the kernel of the opposition. Anglophone-Francophone cleavages have become politicized (Konings & Nyamnjoh 2003) and student strikes and other forms of opposition against the Biya regime have been violently suppressed (Konings 2009). Youth play an important role in these movements (cf. Abbink & Kessel 2005).

A first exploration of Internet usage in relation to political campaigns in Anglophone Cameroon reveals a clear relationship with the Arab Spring. The 'Biya Must Go' campaign has united young Cameroonians from different parts of the world on the Internet and its usage (especially Facebook) has risen tremendously over the past months (Meester 2011; Anyefru 2008). Nigerians are recognized as being avid Internet users and it was there that the mobile phone was first used to offer social media access many years ago (Obadare 2006). This research will question these new dynamics both online and off-line and try to understand how political mobilization has changed with access to social media on mobile phones. Is this leading to the formation of new connections or new political communities? How does this influence power relations in the countries?

3. *Film and visuals: 'Connecting Duress: Navigating Crisis in Africa'*
This film will be produced in collaboration with Eyeses (Sjoerd Sijsma)[4] and the programme's research team.

The production of a film will form part of the project. The central question will be how communication technology influences people's management of duress. Shooting will take place in the case-study areas. Part of the material will be turned into a film to share with stakeholders in this programme, and part will be used for academic purposes. The material will result in a documentary that will be presented to Dutch and international channels for dissemination.

4. *Synthesis: 'Connecting Duress: ICT, Conflict and Social-political Change in Africa: A Contribution to the Theory of Connections'* (Applicant)

Social relations develop in connections. This has become clear in our globalized world where being connected seems to have become a crucial element in our lives and for our well-being. The focus on connections, the in-between, interrogates the location of social change. Do connections have a life of their own ('social life of connections', cf. Appadurai 1986)? This research programme considers (dis)connections in situations of duress. The quest for connections will also unite the sub-projects. It relates to an interdisciplinary field that implies methodological and analytical reflections:
- The mobility paradigm
- Power and the network society
- Technology-society debate
- Crisis/conflict and feelings of belonging/identity

This sub-project is a follow-up to previous work done in the ASC's Connections and Transformations research group, which is headed by the Applicant (de Bruijn & van Dijk, fc.).

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[4] Sjoerd Sijsma is an independent film maker who is involved in educational filming. His previous work includes filming for the Mobile Africa Revisited programme.

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Research methodology: Comparative, multi-sited and interdisciplinary

The programme is complementary and multi-disciplinary and, together, the projects will inform the historical ethnographic study of Middle Africa. They feed into the development of the connections approach. The multi-disciplinarity is drawn from anthropology, history, communication studies, conflict studies and social geography, which combine in African studies and in the field of Media and Social Change.

The case studies are comparative. Comparison is both an analytical tool and a methodology. Social dynamics will be better understood as a result of comparison. To be able to compare them in all their diversity, the projects will have to work with a similar methodology, i.e. a combination of various qualitative research techniques and quantitative survey methods. Data on social dynamics, complex relationships, identity and belonging are best covered by qualitative methodologies: historical methods (archives, life histories) and multi-sited ethnographic fieldwork (observation, interviews). Quantitative data will involve small surveys to gather data on the 'use' of the technologies and changes in relating. These are necessary for the comparison and generalization of the social and political processes as they appear in the different studies.

Historical research in conflict areas
Archives are increasingly accessible in this era of digitalization, especially those in the UK and France, and in Europe more generally. However, archives in Africa are often not yet as accessible and many are in poor shape, particularly in war-torn areas. The main archives are the colonial archives in Brazzaville, Buea/Yaoundé and in the UK, and the military and colonial archives in France. In addition to archival research, life and social group/community histories will be the main methodology used to gather historical data. An important element in the case studies will be how memories of historical events influence today's decision making (or pathways, see de Bruijn *et al.* 2005). Memory and war however also reveal traumatic events and these will not always be easily accessible.

Research in relations
Communication technologies are demanding innovations in methodology and are an important research focus and tool (Pelckmans 2009). The methodological challenge in this research programme is to develop the historical ethnography of connections. Displacement cultures and economies can best be understood by following the itineraries of individuals, which form 'strings' of people. Both the connection and the connected places should be part of the research (cf. Hastrup & Olwig 1997; Falzon 2009). The study of the in-between is in its infancy and will be developed during this programme. To gain an idea of the communication strings of people, the inquiry of social networks is crucial. The information of communication and its content will partly be understood from the phone as a personal archive (Horst & Miller 2005). One element will be to concentrate on networks of communication, individual life stories and life events. This research requires a very flexible attitude on the part of the researchers involved, who will have to consider travelling, communication and the in-between as part of their research field. As this will be an intensive methodology, researchers cannot be expected to follow a large number of people in their itineraries. The study has chosen instead for in-depth knowledge of a number of selected individuals or groups of people (in relation to different experiences of duress, mobility patterns and ICT access). This in-depth knowledge will inform the case-study surveys that will be done in a later phase of the project.

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The spread of ICT
As we are dealing with the 'new' use of media and prospects that are comparatively unknown, each of the case studies will include a survey on the use of mobile telephony and other communication technologies. The statistics currently available are too general and ignore any differentiation between generations, gender and geographies. Most statistics are gathered on the basis of national demarcation whereas we are interested in this study in its use across borders and within certain social groups. We do not envisage large surveys but a reasonable sample that will be sufficient for explorative purposes. The surveys will also be multi-sited. MA students' research will include this survey work. The surveys will be developed with input from the case-study results and will therefore take place halfway through the programme. The study will also benefit in this area from the ResearchICTAfrica network (www.researchictafrica.net; cf. Gillward & Stork 2008).

Visuals and research
Visual methodologies are increasingly considered important in research (cf. Witteveen 2009). Film and (archival/historical) photography will be part of the methodology, acting as a form of communication between researchers and communities, and will result in a documentary. Experience in previous research programmes has shown how film and photography are not only important for dissemination purposes but also as a tool for communication within research groups. Filming is considered a research tool in interaction with informants (cf. Sijsma & de Bruijn 2009, 2011). These new strategies in research methodology and dissemination are important for a programme like this where research situations may be very emotional and not easy to handle for researchers or for those being interviewed. It is thought that information on how people experience what they have lived (or are living) through may not be best articulated in academic prose but in a more artistic expression like film (cf. Ndibe & Hove 2009).

Archiving research data
The digital archiving of raw data is more and more a part of the research endeavour. This does not only help the researcher to order data and make them better accessible for analysis, which is especially important in a comparative project, but also to make this sort of research data accessible to others. This may lead to a revolution in the way these situations are analyzed as it will allow a longitudinal comparison of qualitative data. This research programme will include the archiving of research data with the help of the African Studies Centre's library. Participation in the conference on 'Archives of Post-Independence Africa and its Diaspora' in Dakar in June 2012 will be valuable in this respect.

Exchange
Exchanges at conferences and workshops between academics and stakeholders are part of the methodology of the programme. Such contacts to discuss data and findings are vital and can thus be considered as 'data'. These discussions also give direction to the research, an example being participatory history writing (Dietz *et al.* 2011). Interaction is therefore part of the research programme and embedded in the timeframe. The digital era has also introduced a new practice in our research dissemination with the possibility of the immediate publication of research papers and film or other visuals on the Internet.

Feasibility
Fieldwork in situations of duress risks encountering problems related to conflict in the area of study, and unrest may increase to such a level that the research has to be relocated. The methodology of this programme, with its focus on people's itineraries, allows the researcher enough space to choose research sites outside serious conflict

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zones. Nevertheless, unforeseen violence will be a continuous risk. Researchers will be trained to deal with this by experts during the programme. Another anticipated problem is psychological as researchers will be confronted with difficult and traumatic stories. The programme has built in a series of (small) meetings outside the workshop and conference settings to allow researchers to work through their emotions. The other side of this work is that some informants will need protection too, and this will be dealt with according to the ethical code in the social sciences whenever necessary (cf. Robben & Nordstrom 1995).

The project will follow on from the Applicant's previous research in conflict zones and on ICT (www.mobileafricarevisited.wordpress.com), both in the development of alternative research methodologies and dissemination strategies, and in the content of the sub-projects and relating ethical dilemmas. This guarantees a firm grounding for the study in a previously under-researched region.

Innovative aspects and originality of the proposed research programme

The programme has innovative aspects and is original in its approach in methodology and analysis.

The programme's most innovative aspect is first and foremost related to its object of study: new ICT. The technological revolution in ICT and mobile-phone technology gives the whole project a 'laboratory sphere'. The changes will be happening over the coming years and this study is therefore clearly work-in-progress. The Arab Spring might have given us a glimpse of the future but to date it seems still to be a distant new future for countries in Sub-Saharan Africa. The fact that the processes will be evolving under the researchers' eyes is probably the most challenging and experimental part of the programme's methodology.

The project's interdisciplinarity, as proposed in the connections approach, is not the most common and could lead to pioneering combinations in methodology and approach. It combines disciplines from the humanities (history and communication studies) and from the social sciences (anthropology, conflict studies, geography) and relates to other interdisciplinary fields such as those of Media studies and African studies. This interdisciplinarity will also further policy debates in relation to conflict and peace building and the reasons behind the perpetuation of conflict.

The proposed mixed methodology applied to the in-between and connections will be challenging. The use of technology both as a research tool and as an object of research is innovative. Furthermore, the proposed archiving of research material not only for direct use in the programme but also as a database for the future is new and experimental.

The study will provide rich ethnographic detail of a region that is currently under-researched and will develop our understanding of a region that has been sliding in and out of conflict for decades. Conflict zones in Africa are not considered as isolated islands of conflict but as part of a regional dynamic intertwined in complex interaction based on shared geographic and historical patterns and exacerbated by recent developments in social media and ICT. This new perspective will view Middle African countries as interlinked historically as well as being connected in current conflicts. The case studies will also highlight interesting cross-border dynamics. The question of displaced people in rural areas is urgent as they are still the targets of violent acts. And urban areas in Africa

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are growing rapidly and the urban dynamics in conflict zones require special attention.

Local, national and international collaboration

Workshops and conferences will be an essential component of the programme. These are not only considered as times to exchange results but also as moments of research. The programme will be concentrating on a specific region but the findings will be relevant for other regions in Africa and elsewhere in the world too. The purpose is additionally to establish a network around the problematic of research between academics and non-academics, and commercial and non-commercial groups/organizations. The regional-comparison elements and the interdisciplinarity of the programme require a good programme structure that will include expertise from outside, from both academia and the policy world. The conferences and workshops will result in publications, action reports and policy briefings.

A first workshop or panel to 'test' the ideas behind this research programme was organized in June 2011 at the ECAS conference on 'African Engagements: On Whose Terms?' in Uppsala, Sweden. Organized by Mirjam de Bruijn and Jonna Both, the panel was entitled 'Political Insecurity and the Production of Displacement Cultures' and the papers presented then will be published in an edited volume.

The proposed workshops in this research programme are:
1. An introductory conference at which the research questions can be discussed and sharpened (January 2013)
2. A workshop to compare cases of duress, mobility and communication/connections in world history (1940-2011) (2014 when the first research results will provide discussion material)
3. A workshop with regional experts on present-day conflict areas in the case-study areas (December 2013)
4. Training workshops: a methodology workshop at the start of fieldwork (December 2012) and a writing workshop after the fieldwork period (end 2013)
5. A final conference, to be organized in Africa (2016)

Collaboration with various research institutes and organizations will be developed during the programme and will build on existing contacts. For the sub-projects these will include:
In Africa:
- Chad: University of N'djamena and CRASH (Centre de la Recherche en Anthropologie et les Sciences Humaines), Prof. A Khalil
- Cameroon: Langaa Research and Publishing Centre; Buea University, Prof. Francis Nyamnjoh, Prof. Tangie Fonchingong
- Nigeria: Ibadan University and Millennium Advancement Initiative (Research), Prof. Oka Obono
- Central African Republic: University of Bangui, Department of Anthropology; UNICEF, Mme Crimpic

In Europe:
- Institute for History, Leiden University, Prof. Leo Lucassen
- AISSR Amsterdam, Prof. Ria Reis (Medical Anthropology)
- Conflict Studies, Utrecht University, Prof. Georg Frerks
- IMI (Migration Studies) Oxford, Dr Oliver Bakewell

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- Centre of African Studies, University of Copenhagen, Denmark, Prof. Amanda Hammar
- Université d'Aix en Provence, Département d'Anthropologie, Dr Jacky Bouju

NGOs interested in the relationship between conflict and ICT:
In the Netherlands: ICCD (Francois Laureys), HIVOS (Marjan Besuijen), Oxfam-Novib (Gerard Steehouwer). Internationally, relations still have to be established with UNHCR, Red Cross, and Doctors Without Borders.

Exchanges with 'business': The relationship with Ericsson in Sweden will continue (Eric Kruse), and other companies will be approached in the case-study areas. In the Netherlands, the programme will have contact with Africa Interactive (Peter Vlam) and UPC (Martin-Pieter de Koning) and new contacts are also expected to emerge.

Research impact

I do not pretend that this research will lead to immediate results that can be 'implemented'. Academic research should contribute to debates on existing policies and possible improvements to these, and interaction between academia and practitioners should lead to improvements in academic questioning. It is for this reason that this programme includes participation by policy makers and other stakeholders in the various phases.

'Information and Communication Technology for Development' (ICT4D) is high on the development agenda.[5] A new development is ICT for security and stability (conflict management) (Veil *et al.* 2011). It is believed that free access to information gives a chance for more stability. On the other hand, ICT is also a tool for the reinforcement of state power, which is a disturbing development in countries where duress informs the social fabric. ICT4D in crisis situations/situations of duress is emerging and its impact needs to be evaluated. The results of this research programme will be relevant for ICT4D and (post)conflict management.

Another important impact of this study is expected in relation to the real understanding of the spread of new communication technologies and social media. This study will follow these technological developments in each of the case studies and reveal the possibilities and disadvantages of the technology. Experts who can judge these technological advances will be invited to assist in the programme and the results of the surveys will give additional insight into these developments. This is important for the expectations of ICT4D and for business development.

The proposal does not delve too deeply into the development of the phone market. However one of the spin-offs of this research will also be more information about the market in new technology tools, which is relevant information for technology development producers. It is not our aim to provide free information to the business world but instead to inform them of new developments. Collaboration with such non-

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[5] ICT4D focuses on using digital technology to deliver specific development goals (notably the Millennium Development Goals). It is accepted in UN circles: i.e. World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS), UN: Global Alliance for ICT (since 2006), www.worldbank.org/ICT.

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academic, commercial enterprises carries ethical dilemmas, like the protection of informants and the use of data for purposes that could harm the market. Instead of avoiding these contacts, we will have discussions with them on ethical issues as part of the exchange process.

It is the explicit aim of this project to disseminate its results both within and beyond academic circles. We plan to reach out to policy and decision makers and commercial enterprises in our workshops, in the field and during other exchanges, but also in policy briefings. The main stakeholders in this research are (national and international) intervention agencies involved in peacekeeping and development, civil-society organizations, local academic institutions and ICT companies. The film project contributes not only to the easy communication of results in policy and academic circles but also among the wider public. Other means of communication such as a website, blog and the use of Internet space (social media) will further enhance dissemination.

The following groups of non-academic stakeholders will be targeted:
- NGOs in the field of conflict: UNHCR, Doctors Without Borders, the Red Cross, local organizations like Mboscuda (for nomadic people), Oxfam-Novib and others still to be 'discovered' during the research
- Mobile-telephone companies: Ericsson, Vodaphone, Microsoft
- NGOs and other organizations in the field of ICT4D: ICCD, Hivos, SNV-Cameroon
- A wider public including civil-society organizations in the countries of research as well as in the Netherlands

A number of these organizations participated in the ASC's Mobile Africa Revisited programme. For this research, however, we will aim to establish contact with organizations particularly related to empowerment and political organization, and they will be invited to participate in the project's workshops and conferences. We will also involve local organizations wherever possible.

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