

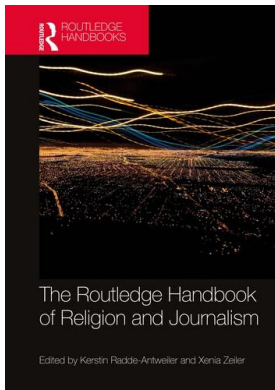
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### Religion, gender and news media in Africa

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## 11

RELIGION, GENDER AND NEWS  
MEDIA IN AFRICA*Katrien Pype***Introduction**

In 2010, when I carried out ethnographic research among television stations in Kinshasa (capital city of the Democratic Republic of Congo), I was following journalists producing news reports. Therefore, almost on a daily basis, I participated in the editorial meetings, scheduled in the early mornings. During these meetings, the *chef de rédaction* and the various journalists would discuss the themes to be filmed during the day and to be included in the evening newscast. One morning, the meeting started with a conflict. One of the female journalists, who had been working all night as she had been reading news reports on the radio, had found her clothes in the bathroom wet. She was supposed to wear these when returning home. It was not so much the fact that they were damp that led to anxieties; rather, she wanted to know who had sprinkled them with water, and why. In her anger, she claimed that someone most probably had carried out *kindoki* (Lingala for sorcery; witchcraft) on her clothes, and that surely it had to be one of her colleagues. Obviously, no one confessed of having touched her clothes, and the journalist left the meeting with more questions than answers. Everybody took her suspicion of *kindoki* seriously, as she was one of the news anchors of the television journal who seemed to attract a lot of fans. She was a rising star, and this certainly raised jealousy among some of her colleagues.

I take this anecdote as an introduction into one of the various phenomena that sit at the heart of this chapter: the dialectics of news media, religion and gender in sub-Saharan Africa. Not much research has been carried out on the crossroads of these three analytical fields despite the intense scholarly investigation on the intersections of religion and gender (among others, Soothill 2007, Cole 2010, Sounaye 2011, Van de Kamp 2013, Pype 2016), religion and media (e.g., Hackett 1998, de Witte 2011, Schulz 2012, Grätz 2014, Meyer 2015) and also gender and media (including Fair 2009, Masquelier 2009, Mutongi 2009, Bosch 2013, Buiten 2013) in sub-Saharan Africa.

In this chapter, I interpret *news media* in a large sense. In various African media worlds, formal news broadcasts are embedded within political propaganda (Pype 2011a). As a consequence, in Kinshasa, for example, spectators feel alienated of these news broadcasts as they understand the news reports to be embedded within political games (Pype 2011b, 2013). This sense of exclusion can lead to innovation in news production, e.g., in Kinshasa,

*Journal Télévisé en Lingala Facile* has been created explicitly to engage the spectatorship into the political community. With this new news program, novel types of news reports, such as the *proximity report* (*la proximité*), have emerged, and news anchors behave in more informal ways on the *plateau* (in the studio). The form of this type of *news* is so far removed from the classic news broadcast that some of Kinshasa's elite even wonder whether this is still to be called *news* (Pype 2011b, 58). This example shows that *news media* can take various forms and can vary in degrees of formality. For the remaining of this chapter, I argue that *news* here refers to information spread along mass channels and bearing value for the large masses. News in this sense is separate from rumor and gossip in so far these categories of informal information (and its circulation) connote harm and secrecy. However, that does not entail that news as broadcast on Africa's mass media channels is always objective and verified. In many African news rooms, journalists remediate images and texts produced by other platforms, without verifying the trustworthiness of the source, either because they attach great value to the source itself or because of personal loyalties toward their sources.

In a similar fashion, *journalism* is not a straightforward category. One of the basic premises of this chapter is that journalism as a practice of channeling information and knowledge through spoken and/or written texts addressed to publics has various genealogies. While the word *journalism* can be traced back to the French written press in the early 19th century (Collins and Palmegiano 2007), it does not mean that the practice of collecting and circulating information on a wide scale was only invented at that time. Rather, alternative genealogies of reporting exist, before and parallel to the emergence of journalism in the West European written press.

I understand *journalism* here as the collection of data and their distribution in narrative form to a public, using mass media, and carried out by a media practitioner who is conscious about her role as a broker of information. This rather broad approach to journalism allows us to include various categories of information brokers that at first sight might be rather far removed from the professional journalist working for an institution and handling highly sophisticated equipment. Newsworthy information is indeed produced within a highly complex field of knowledge and information systems of which the professional category of the journalist is only one among many figures of information production; in addition, journalism itself can appear in various forms depending on historical, social and cultural contexts. In many sub-Saharan African countries, journalists take on multiple roles in society: They not only broker information, but very often they are also political actors, activists, teachers, instructors, etc.

For the scope of this chapter, *gender* is here limited to *women*, and I will solely focus on women's participation in information production and circulation. However, media also shape masculinities, and men's cultures have to a large extent designed the world of news in sub-Saharan Africa. Nevertheless, masculinities in African news media remain largely underexplored. Queer identities are only in recent years becoming a focus of analytical attention in African studies (among others, Amory 1997, Gaudio 2009, Nyeck and Epprecht 2013), and unsurprisingly, scholarly works on queer news media in sub-Saharan Africa, in general, are equally absent. As a consequence, this chapter will provide a brief overview of research carried out on women, religion and news media in sub-Saharan Africa.

After this cursory sketch of general themes and analytical foci on religious media and women in media in sub-Saharan Africa, I present two case studies: the griotte (in West Africa) and digital *animatrices* in Kinshasa (and its diasporas). While the first case study is solely based on literature reviews, the second case draws on ongoing ethnographic research. The chapter concludes with a reflection on contemporary transformations located at the crossroads of gender, religion and news media and what this can entail for future scholarship.

Therefore, this chapter is not an exploration into news on religion, rather it looks at some intersections of religion and news, mainly pointing at the religious backgrounds of news and information production and circulation. An emphasis is on reporting women, and how female reporters mobilize religious beliefs, discourse and content in order to carry out their work and attract audiences.

### Studying religion, news journalism and women in Africa

Religious media can take various forms, ranging from evangelical newsletters, books, cassettes and television programs and mass conventions to power objects such as amulets, statues used in magical rituals and electronic prayers and conversations with healers. Religious news media are first and foremost intended to broadcast information deemed newsworthy for the own religious community. Grätz (2014) describes how, in Benin, on the Catholic *Radio Immaculée Conception* priority is given to news from *Radio Vatican*. Satellite devices are installed to capture programs of *Radio Vatican* as well as the French-based Christian news agency *TopInfo*. Apart from this foreign news, short self-produced runs of information are aired as well. Scholars (among others, Odhiambo 1991, Fordred-Green 2000, Nyamnjoh 2005, Mano 2010, Englund 2011, Skjerdal 2012) have paid attention to how news making in sub-Saharan Africa can take on different forms and aesthetics.

Generally, all programs of religious radio and television associated with a particular church have a strong imprint of the church and its leaders: The main news broadcasts begin with news from the church, and its leader, in particular, reporting about visits and ceremonies. Main news broadcasts also document preaching, healing and parish affairs. Religious news media not only differ from other news media regarding the obvious priority to religious activities in the order of broadcast news items, rather also the claims made regarding justice are religiously inflected. Englund's (2011) incisive ethnography of the Malawian news bulletin *Nkhani Zam'maboma*, broadcast in Chichewa and airing stories about witchcraft, highlights obligation and mutual dependence when reflecting on people's grievances and injustices. This contrasts with news broadcast on public, state radio and outlets sponsored by NGOs and international organizations, where human rights rhetoric dominates.

Despite these unambiguously religious characteristics of certain religious media in terms of programming and aesthetics, tackling the issue of religion, women and journalism in sub-Saharan Africa requires some caveats. In particular, while the distinction between secular and religious media is analytically warranted, empirical observations complicate this distinction. Especially since the 1990s, with many sub-Saharan states deregulating local media, religious broadcasters have mushroomed on the continent, while commercial and state channels have become more and more infused with religious content. Differences regarding media policies in the various countries led to differentiated mediascapes. In Ghana, for example, the media freedom does not allow religious organizations to set up their own radio and television stations, thus pushing religious leaders to buy airtime and appear on programs (de Witte 2011). The case is different in Nigeria, Benin, DR Congo and other countries where religious leaders can set up their own radio and television stations.

This emphasis on religious ownership and content in late postcolonial African media means a return to the initial days of mass media on the continent. In Léopoldville (as Kinshasa was called then), for example, the first television station was owned and run by Catholic missionaries. Also in Benin, Christian institutions have a long history in editing newspapers and magazines. The oldest are very often Catholic, such as *La Croix* in Benin, which dates from 1946 (Grätz 2014).

Importantly, religious media not only broadcast information related to the religious community, beliefs and rituals, but also attempt to contribute to social change and conflict resolution. In particular, religious media have been included in various countries in the process of democratization. An example in case is *Kingfisher FM*, a Christian station in South Africa that targets listeners aged 25–49 (Osunkunle and Wozniak 2015, 79): It has multicultural religious and secular programming, made up of 60% talk and 40% music. This station, like many other religious broadcasters, also addresses issues affecting the listeners and the citizen community at large; and occasionally brings in political leaders and administrators to debate ways to find solutions to such problems. Radio shows bring information on community projects and also broadcast health awareness programs.

Religion and media intertwine also in other ways in African popular culture, e.g., in non-religious media, many of the media practitioners act as religious subjects in their professional environment. In Kinshasa, I observed how editorial board meetings in non-confessional newsrooms open and conclude with Christian prayers, while some journalists double as pastors. Announcements for religious gatherings appear as news items in secular media outlets. Even though stories about magic, sorcery and witchcraft rarely make it into the formal news broadcasts, these are nevertheless topics of conversation behind the cameras, when drafting the text for the voice over and when pursuing professional careers in the media world.

The above-mentioned dominance of Catholic media institutions at the beginning of electronic media in various sub-Saharan countries has had profound consequences for media training and the development of media careers. Especially in the colonial and early postcolonial eras, the Catholic missions were equipped with the best broadcasting material and thus were attractive places for aspirant media practitioners. Journalists and radio and television hosts very often set their first steps in religious media. Nowadays, faith-based radios are moving into another era as well and do not rely anymore on volunteers but rather on a “team of well-trained, full-time radio professionals, funding itself predominantly by accessing advertising income” (Osunkunle and Wozniak 2015, 82).

Finally, it is important to acknowledge the overlap between religious and non-religious media in terms of media practitioners and audiences. Many media entrepreneurs easily move between various broadcasters, as they may have simultaneously commitments in different media outlets, while spectators and listeners do not limit themselves to the media of their spiritual leader. Rather, people also consume religious media produced by media entrepreneurs of communities other than their own.

### ***Women and news media in sub-Saharan Africa***

With the rise of mass media in sub-Saharan Africa, requiring content to be broadcast, *women* has become an important theme in radio and television broadcast and written press. Englund (2011, 117) argues that about 28% of stories broadcast during the popular Chichewa news bulletin on Malawi’s public radio *Nkhani Zam’maboma* deals with marital and sexual misconduct. This attention to women’s physical and emotional well-being in mainstream media is the outcome of deliberate global political efforts. Especially since 1975, i.e., since the first UN World Conference on Women (in Mexico City), there is an active public discourse on gender and media in Africa (Gadzekpo 2009). Since then, as Gadzekpo (2009, 71) argues, key issues regarding the status of women have been mapped out globally. During the fourth United Nations World Conference on Women, in Beijing in 1995, areas to work on were: (1) poor status of women in decision-making positions in the media; (2) lack of

gender sensitivity in media policies and programs; (3) poor access of women to media and ICTs; (4) poor participation of women in media and ICTs and (5) a continued stereotypical media portrayal of women and the increase in violent and pornographic images of women (Gadzekpo 2009, 72).

In the last four decades, some drastic changes have been made: *Women* have become not only more and more subject matter of news, but there is also a steady increase in women reporting the news in Africa (Gadzekpo 2009, 72). This follows a new political order. The old media order was an inhospitable space for women; where female journalists were co-opted, intimidated and harassed. However, with media reforms and pluralism and in countries where civil society knew a rebirth, women have become more visible in the media “as employees, as decision makers, as subjects of the news and as newsmakers” (Gadzekpo 2009, 73). Shifts in political paradigms have enabled more local, regional and global women’s NGOs working outside the state apparatus to flourish, network and mobilize on a variety of issues.

These changes offered new opportunities for women to publish their own newspapers and magazines and to produce their own radio and television programs, sometimes in alliance with women’s NGOs and listening clubs. Examples of women setting up their own radio are *Meridian FM* in Ghana and *MAMA FM* in Uganda. Fascinating research comes from east-Congo, where a network called *AFEM-SK* (Association of Media Women – South Kivu) is run by women who “give voice to those without voice” (Garcia-Mingo 2017, 215). Their work is one of these types of new forms of journalism that have emerged following war and political violence. *AFEM-SK*, which wants to offer the victims of rape and sexual violence the opportunity to tell their stories, was created in 2003, when the DRC was entering a new political era, then ending the war officially. The members were working in so-called “gender-blind” newsrooms – and hardly could raise the issue of sexual violence (Garcia-Mingo 2017, 216). Yet, determined to cover the experience of systematic violence perpetrated against women, they set up the network, with women partaking in radio listening clubs. Via these groups, women are informed about their rights and strategies to protect themselves, while the network also lobbies for women’s rights and trains rural women in political participation, media literacy and peace-building processes. Members of these listening clubs constitute a network of more than 500 rural women correspondents, *petites* journalistes (lit., small journalists) or *mamans* (lit., mothers) and have been trained to collaborate with the urban journalists in the work of collecting information in remote areas of rural south Kivu (Garcia-Mingo 2017, 216).

The work by *AFEM-SK*, located in a strong rural area, draws our attention to geographically inflected differences regarding women’s experiences and their contribution to news media. In addition, the project signals a strong contrast with more conventional forms of journalism, as the *mamans* have an ardent motivation to fight against injustice and to reconstruct society (Garcia-Mingo 2017, 224). These news producers and broadcasters are primarily social movement militants even though their activism is performed under the umbrella of news reporting.

Despite the above-mentioned formal expressions of a desire for gender balance in media, the media in sub-Saharan Africa remain a very male-dominated world, where female media practitioners need to juggle their reputation and are readily confronted with accusations of amateurism and moral looseness. Similarly, because of its intimate connections to politics, the genre of news itself is readily associated with a masculine world. Information about child caring, domestic work, cuisine and health are quickly associated with the sphere of women and usually do not find their way to the classic newsroom. This means that still today women are rarely perceived as intended audiences. Moreover, far too less women occupy other roles

in African media. These observations also count for the religious world, where, also to a limited extent, women can become leaders of religious movements and can set up their own churches. However, it remains rare for religious female leaders to run a media ministry.

Religious broadcasters – as mentioned above – may team up with NGOs and spread programs explicitly addressed to *the young girl*. Very often, in terms of finding funding, these community radios are approached by NGOs as the most direct channels for communication to large groups of women. Here, religious media practitioners are instrumentalized for their credibility and authority among large segments of the population. This is a fundamental recognition of the role religion plays in women's lives on the continent.

In the following parts of this chapter, I focus on two case studies, each of which relates in a different way some forms the entanglements of religion, gender and news production in sub-Saharan Africa.

### West Africa's griottes

In the Africanist library, the figure of the *griot* is a relevant figure to associate with, in particular, the themes of religion, and journalism for various reasons. First and foremost, the social worlds of griot and griotte bear similarities with the life-worlds of contemporary African journalists, in particular, they all mediate between the societal elite and the population. In the Africanist library (male and female) griots have been appreciated for their multi-faceted roles: praise-singers, dancers, public orators, interpreters, historians, genealogists, mediators and political and social advisers (Duran 1995, 197). Nyamnjoh (2005, 139) describes how Beti journalists (from the Beti ethnic group in Cameroon) “were simply referred to as *griots* (praise-singers).” I have made similar observations in Kinshasa's journalistic world, where television and radio journalists juggle their dependency on sources and patrons with ideals of objectivity (Pype 2011a). A continuation exists between the praise singing for political leaders and contemporary journalism in sub-Saharan Africa, where often journalists are regarded as *small boys* of the elite who produce news accounts that glorify the political visions, ambitions and economic businesses of their patrons. As a consequence, many audiences in sub-Saharan Africa doubt the existence of an independent press. This lack of trust in the objectivity of news production also feeds into people's engagements with journalists, who seek out particular journalists when they are in need of a favor of the journalists' patron. Just like griots, journalists are embedded in thick relationships with patrons, who, in the case of griots, “generously compensated *griots* for their services in the forms of “gifts”, including food and housing” (Schulz 1997, 446).

A second reason to explore the work by the griots is that griots are connected to ancestral truths, rituals and invisible powers. Their skills and performances are intimately tied to sacred pasts and knowledge. Among the Mande society (in various West African countries), *ngaraa* is a particular title bestowed upon griots by elder griots, for its ability not only to touch people's hearts but also to advise people (kings, economic leaders, etc.) on political and moral issues and to communicate “the truth” (Duran 1995, 202).

While Duran (1995) argued almost two decades ago, that the *jelimusow* – the female griot – was an important public figure in Mande cultures, she has hardly been the subject of any systematic scholarly enquiry. Since then, some scholars have engaged with the griots and similar in-betweens. Influential in this regard is Yankah's attention to the *akyeame* (spokespersons) of the Akan ethnic group in Ghana. In *Speaking for the Chief* (1995), Yankah describes how female *akyeame* are normal for Akan queenmothers, though less for male chiefs. Yet, “despite her gender,” so Yankah (1995, 77) writes about the exceptional *akyeame*

Eno Asuama, “she appears to be the chief’s favorite orator due to her unusually fertile mind and effective control over words – attributes that are indispensable in an ideal elder” (Yankah 1995, 77). This connection between control of words and elderhood is – as Yankah suggests – a masculine evidence. Yet, Eno is exceptionally gifted here, and thus moderates verbal exchanges between the chief and his audience, and occasionally settles cases all by herself.

Like the orators of chiefs, queenmother’s *akeyame* stand up when their patrons speak; unlike them, however, *these akeyame* do not use *akeyamepoma*, orators’ staffs. In addition, these female orators have various rhetorical responsibilities: They need to take part in judicial proceedings at the Ashanti queen’s court; and they enjoy the privileges to enter the hallowed stool room with the queenmother to perform rituals, including libation prayer (have undergone the *sokanhyire* rites). Yet, despite this wide-ranging set of responsibilities, there are nevertheless limitations due to her gender: A female *akeyame* cannot enter the sacred stool room nor go to formal meetings when she is menstruating (Yankah 1995, 78). In these instances, she is represented by another *akeyame*. In addition, so Yankah observes, the *akeyame* usually remains in the background when the co-orators are male. *Akeyame* can only display their rhetoric potential when they are alone or accompanied by female co-orators.

Strikingly, Yankah (1995, 83) emphasizes that female orators are important in moments of tension due to the aesthetics of indirectness which he sees as played out especially in the women’s conversations. Women, including the female *akeyame*, deploy more proverbs, but also textile rhetoric. All of these are non-violent means of crisis management.

In a related vein, among the Mande, it is argued that female griots are people “whose use of words is competent” (Duran 1995, 202). This competence is a skill that can be acquired by learning stock proverbs and genealogies. Though, even better *jelimusow* are those “who touch (...) your heart” (Duran 1995, 202), a capacity (called *ngaaraya*, see above) that is neither taught nor inherited, and “is believed to be a gift from God, a state almost of possession that overtakes the singer, often induced by the inspired playing of the accompanists” (Duran 1995, 202). Here, we encounter the power of the *jelimusow*, who can drain the singer and which can be dangerous for the listeners, as “they too may go out of control and commit exaggerated acts of generosity” (Duran 1995, 202). Thus, griots are known for their supernatural powers. Furthermore, Malian griots are feared because their words can be deadly, while they themselves are also objects of occult attacks. Hoffman describes how in Mali, “nearly every griot, including women, carried special twigs protruding from the corners of their mouths to help ward off harmful energies” (Hoffman 2000, 37).

In post-independence West-Africa, female griots have become more prominent in the local and international music scene (Duran 1995, Schulz 1997). This is the outcome of two generic features of griot performances: First, in post-independence Mande society, the emphasis in *jeli*’s music “shifted increasingly away from historical narrative towards praise and entertainment” (Duran 1995, 205). This has favored the women, who are freer to move on stage. As the men are usually seated playing an instrument, women can walk in the audiences and use dramatic theatrical gestures (Duran 1995, 205). Second, this gendered professionalization is due to a gendered division of public speech within the Mande society: “The *jelimusow*, by contrast, specialize in singing. ... Very often, the team husband/instrumentalist plus wife (wives)/singer(s), is still the most common” (Duran 1995, 201). While customarily, *jeli* (men) do the story telling of the epics (Sunjata, etc.), women carry out mainly praise singing, recite proverbs, voice moral and social comments and make only scattered references to the heroes of the epic songs (Duran 1995, 201). In addition, the performances by the *jelimusow* are more inclusive than the epic songs recited by the *jeli*, who only appear to glorify the noble lineages. Being praised by a *jelimusow* lifts the worth of a lineage, whether they



are noble or not. Wealthy businessmen and other prominent members of society who are not part of these noble lineages therefore approach the *jelimusow* and commission to record private cassettes for them in praise of their own families.<sup>1</sup>

In Mali, it has been observed that with political independence, the griots were also immediately approached by aspiring political leaders. Schulz (1997) describes the rise and fall of one of the first female griot stars of national renown. Listeners appreciated her voice and broad repertoire, though, when she took sides with the new military regime, people began to disapprove. People did not trust her because she was too quick to affiliate with the new *politiki* people – “she should not have walked up to them (that is, to become their client)” and thus showed a lack of “shame, no sense of honor of her profession” (Schulz 1997, 453).

All in all, these transformations in the *jelimusow's* economic opportunities have led to a certain stigmatization of these *public women* in Mande society. Divorce rate among the *jelimusow* is remarkably higher than among other professional domains in Mande society; their economic independence is not always appreciated by their husbands and older generations of male musicians define these *jelimusow's* as *shameless* and thus express concerns about women's mobility outside of the domestic sphere.

This publicness and defiant role in society has remarkable echoes in Hoffman's description of how a *jelimosu* should behave. Hoffman (2000, 246), who trained as a *jelimuso* in Bamako, describes how during ritual and ceremonial contexts these women are expected “to speak, sing, dance in order to demonstrate” their cast identity as a griot. It is clear that this particular role is only limited to a particular group of society and brings with it its own visual and behavioral codes. “Griot women (...) dress in bright colors (red was said to be a favorite) with lots of jewelry, they are loud, vociferous, emotional, sensual and unafraid to display their sensuality in dance and in their relations with men” (Hoffman 2000, 246). Such public performances obviously emphasize these women's relative freedom in society, though bring along debates about morality.

This short overview of the (changed) role of the female griot in west-African society and cultural worlds draws our attention to the social embeddedness of those who produce and circulate information. The griotte, as praise-singer, emphasizes the social construction of public speech: Patrons and sponsors attempt to define what is said, how it is said, and what information circulates in the public domain. In addition, at certain occasions, griottes speak *truths*, as they possess sacred powers. These religious backgrounds shape competition among griottes and also steer the way in which griotte's words can be perceived.

Of course, female journalists in contemporary Africa are not born in the griot caste nor are they only praise-singers. Yet, it is important to locate the genealogy of journalism in Africa beyond the introduction of mass media and the figure of the *journalist* as a trained professional hired for a particular news agency, working against deadlines and fact checking the reports (see also Nyamnjoh 2005, Mutsvauro 2018). Alternative routes to contemporary journalism in sub-Saharan Africa need to be acknowledged if we want to consider how information is valued and, especially, if we want to understand the social positionality of those who publicly broadcast information and messages.

### **Benny Samba – online *Animatrices* in Kinshasa (and its Diasporas)**

The second case study deals with one of the latest innovations in news reporting in Kinshasa: digital *chroniqueurs* or *animateurs* interviewing offline and online, and broadcasting edited excerpts of these conversations on social media platforms such as YouTube, Facebook and Instagram. Also in the Congolese digital world, women are very visible and obtain a lot

of followers. Their heightened visibility comes with a flipside: These women immediately become the topic of debates about their assumed immorality. In the interviews and audience reactions, religion (in particular Christianity) is one of many topics. It is mobilized by the digital reporter herself as an identity marker in order to curb any attacks. So far, these women have not (yet) obtained the status of *female influencers* as we observe in Southeast Asia, where, in particular, religious female influencers are seizing on the Internet, where they open up spaces for discussions about what it means to be a female Muslim in today's world (Slama and Barendregt 2018).

Within the Congolese world of digital information circulation, two concepts need to be unpacked: the *chroniqueur* and *animateur*. Both refer to two different roles and each draw on different spaces of spectacle. *Chroniqueur* is mainly used in the context of media hosts interviewing musicians, sponsors and other cultural performers, who thus obtain a platform to explain their latest songs, albums and performances, inform their audiences about upcoming artistic events and speak out about gossip and rumors. As such, their work is very often defined as *polémique*, a concept which speaks to the social work of information distribution: It evokes antagonisms between protagonists or groups of people and obliges the spectator to take a position therein. The *chroniqueur* is usually embedded within rivalries between music bands and is thus, very much like news journalists, understood to be the *smallboy* (or *small girl*) of certain music leaders. Their dependency toward their patrons produces their journalistic work. *Chroniqueurs* favor particular musicians by inviting representatives of certain bands more than others, by the choice of music that is played during the broadcast and by wandering in these musicians' in private circles. Often these intimate ties between a *chroniqueur* and a musician are due to ethnic solidarity, and music bands favor *chroniqueurs* of their own ethnic identity to report on their music activities, as it is assumed that they will mainly do favorable reporting. These *chroniqueurs* receive food, money, cars and other commodities in return for this propitious reporting. In the case of *chroniqueuses*, very often it is assumed that these women are tied to a particular musician through sexual relationships. Here, ethnic identity does not define the relationship.

The second type of reporter on which the digital *animatrice* draws is the classic *animateur* or *animatrice*, which references a radio or television host whose expertise goes beyond the music scene, and who invites guests who can speak about politics, social issues, economics and entertainment. Very often, such radio and television broadcasts explain how to use soap, the necessity of registering one's child at the town hall or the risks of using herbs for abortion, etc.

Given the fact that these *chroniqueurs* and *animateurs* operate in a society where an informal economy thrives due to the lack of a viable formal economy, these celebrities depend on sponsors and audiences for survival and for the content of their work. It is therefore not surprising that female radio and television hosts use digital platforms in order to extend their public persona, which provide an increased visibility for their sponsors and allow them to invest much time in communicating with their fans.

Various digital genres are available to female digital reporters. Mpofo (2018) describes Zimbabwean women's blogging activities as political actions: The blogs become platforms in which personal, private matters become public and through which these women can contribute to ongoing economic, societal and political debates. So far, in the Congolese digital sphere, it seems that not so much blogging but rather audiovisual platforms such as YouTube, Facebook and Instagram are the digital platforms in which *animatrices* and *chroniqueuses* operate. Significantly, and most probably, in particular, to a large extent due to the economy of digital production as well, mainly women residing in the diaspora avail the digital screen as a space to report. Benny Samba (screen name) is an example in the case. Having partly

grown up in Kinshasa and partly in the UK, this young woman in her mid-twenties feels that she cannot live her whole life in the UK. Working as a nurse in a retirement home in the outskirts of London, she takes any opportunity to spend time in Kinshasa. She turned to online broadcasting in order to establish a further connection with her home city and maybe to find an entry for a new job. Capitalizing on her diaspora status, Benny Samba has set up a digital news company. In 2015, Benny Samba started a YouTube channel, called *Bstar tv*, which counts 6.797 subscribers (Samba 2018f). Her Facebook account (Samba 2018a) is called “*Benny Samba (Star en Jesus)*” (translated “Benny star (star with Jesus)”), and contains almost 5,000 followers (June 2018). A few men and women, all media practitioners working for local television stations in Kinshasa, film on Benny’s behalf while she is in the UK and they accompany her when she is in Kinshasa. Via social media or over the phone, they discuss the subjects to cover, film with a small camera, do the editing at home on semi-professional equipment in Kinshasa and send the footage online to her, who works further on it in London, and posts the footage on her YouTube account, benefiting cheaper and easier Internet access in the UK. Benny’s spectators are not only the Kinois (from Kinshasa) audience, but the Kinois community, at large – in an Appadurai (1996) sense, meaning those who identify as *Kinois* and may live in the diasporas. Recently, she set up a business in Kinshasa, *b-star concept* which specializes in copying, printing (on paper, t-shirts, etc.) and recording.

While she spends most of her time in the UK, she clearly does not want to display herself as a *mikiliste* (someone living in the diaspora).

The video clips she posts on her YouTube channel are interviews with local celebrities, important pastors, musicians and she thus contributes to the *polémique*. Significantly, Benny Samba also reports on *polémique* in Kinshasa’s Pentecostal churches and posts clips discussing the value of *dîmes* (the tenth) in church, questions about immoral behavior of leading Pentecostal pastors and miracles performed by pastors. These religious-related video clips are far less numerous than clips about musicians and social issues, however. Some of her clips also explicitly deal with fraught diaspora-home relationships, e.g., *comportement ya ba filles ya kin envers mibali ya poto, mibali ya poto balembi ba filles ya kin trop c trop* (lit., the behavior of Kinshasa’s girls vis-à-vis men from Europe. The men from Europe are tired of Kinshasa’s girls. Too much!) (Samba 2018e). Overall, Benny Samba promotes herself more as a *kinoise* rather than as a *mikiliste* (someone living in the diaspora). She thus responds to Kinois’ ambivalent stances toward Congolese in the diaspora. On the one hand, Kinois attach a lot of value to those who have traveled and manage to set up a living in the diaspora. On the other hand, however, these nevertheless need to prove themselves as remaining a Congolese by speaking the latest version of kiKinois, by being knowledgeable about the latest rumors in Kinshasa’s celebrity scene and by partaking in the culture of *polémique*.

On Benny’s Facebook account, more attention is devoted to her personal social and spiritual world in Kinshasa. For example, here, Benny embeds herself within the group *bafilles ya presse* (lit., girls of the press) – and shows images of these women at a swimming pool, doing some fitness exercises and announcing her Facebook friends that “*botala niveay eyinaki*” (lit., look how things are heating up) (Samba 2018g). Especially on her Facebook account, Benny Samba mobilizes time and again her Christianity, either by posting comments such as “*bstar concept avec dieu nous ferons des exploits*” (Samba 2018b) (lit., bstar concept, with God we are going to do great things) or “*biso soki nzambe te mobulu (Kinshasa tjrs)*” (Samba 2018d) (lit., for us: only God; otherwise chaos (Kinshasa forever)), while displaying a jetset life style: herself picturing either in flats (not a typical housing in Kinshasa); dining out in restaurants in town (too expensive for the majority of the population), at luxury Sunday afternoon outings or on her way to church, in a car and putting make up on.

So far, hardly any research has been done on these young women, *animatrices*, who might use religious discourse and play with the lifestyles of highly mobile celebrities. It is a new category, which remains as contested as the female musicians and television actors (Pype 2012). However, just like the evangelizing television actresses argue that their reputation is protected because their work is in the service of God (Pype 2012, 88), so Benny is also performing her Christianity or displaying it in order to borrow sympathy from the audience. When in Kinshasa, she visits orphanages, donates food and goods to these orphanages, these visits are filmed and the clips are uploaded on her Facebook page. Benny's screen name also has double explicit reference to Christianity: the name *Benny* finds its origins in the French word *bénie*, meaning blessed (by God); in her Facebook alias, which mentions between brackets *star en Jésus* (star with Jesus), she plays with the religious reference to a star (*nyota* in Lingala). In Congolese Christian understandings of personhood, everybody is born with an invisible star, only perceivable by people with *two pairs of eyes*, people with spiritual powers. One's star defines one's social success: With a bright star, you will attract many people. This large amount of followers, or *wealth in people* (Guyer and Belinga 1995), means that one can count on favors by these people attracted to you. If your star is fading, then your success is fading as well. A decline in favors is intimately tied to a reduction of one's spiritual glow. A Christian is thus advised to pray so that no demonic influences change the shiny quality of one's star. It is also in this perspective of working on her moral capital that we need to interpret Benny's status updates on her Facebook account, e.g., taking a selfie and adding "have a nice Sunday all of you, What is yours is yours, so does the Eternal Jesus the Messiah say" (Samba 2018c). In this way, her Facebook page confirms her Christian identity. All in all, the Facebook page constitutes a separate space of informing her followers, though the information provided here is far more intimate than is possible on the YouTube channel. The Facebook page thus constitutes a platform for her reputation management. While the YouTube channel is a space of professional activity, the Facebook wall construes her social persona.

This brief exploration into the social positioning of a digital *animatrice* in Kinshasa's media world draws our attention to two themes in contemporary news reporting in Africa: (1) the identification of the digital world as a space of news making and (2) the influence of diasporic communities in the production of news and circulation of information. Benny Samba prefers to report *in* Kinshasa, while others mainly report on diaspora events. Their (intended) audiences are not geographically defined, rather their audiences are selected by the used language (kiKinois, slang of Lingala) and themes. *Newsworthy* then means information that relates to the Kinois community at large, meaning of relevance for Kinois living in Kinshasa and elsewhere. This case study also speaks to the currency of religious identity in the media world. As Kinois society is fraught with *polémique* and rumors about immorality (occult conniving, sexual decadence, etc.), Benny Samba produces an online persona that depicts her as Christian. While her male counterparts hardly show themselves en route to church or visiting a pastor, she obviously feels the need to portray her as a devout Christian, attending religious rituals and submitting her professional activities to the Christian God.

## Conclusion

This chapter has pointed at some fundamental dynamics at the intersections of religion, women and news and information distribution in sub-Saharan Africa. I have drawn attention to the various cultural and social parameters that define the possibilities of the role of women as reporters. The opening anecdote hinted at the role of occult powers within

competition in a newsroom; the two case studies discussed the gendered and religious backgrounds of female information broadcasters in West Africa, the griotte and a Congolese online reporter living in the diaspora mobilizing Christianity as a strategy to purchase moral capital from her public. Throughout the 20th century, political and technological changes have led to new forms of news production, new types of publics and novel ways of storytelling. Yet religion continues to play an important role not only as a theme to report on, but also in the ways in which female journalists present themselves to their audiences. All of these obviously require thick analysis, which this chapter has been unable to provide.

Just like societies in Africa are changing, also, religions and the mediascape on the continent have always been changing. These transformations continue to occur and the following paragraphs therefore can only present some of the strongest changes that this author feels will affect journalism in Africa.

First, it is expected that the digital innovations on the continent and people's increasing mobile lives lead to more hybrid forms of news media. Questions arise regarding the extent in which Chinese media infrastructures will design news produced in sub-Saharan Africa tomorrow, and how these will be reinserted in religious media production. As China is increasingly a destination country for African female traders and as more and more young women who have grown up in the diaspora are returning to their country of origin, we can expect novel centers of news production to emerge following the increasing return migration of (men and) women from African descent. This has already led to renewal in locally produced music and fiction. So, how do these mobile lives of return migrants who live on other continents transform the scale of what counts as newsworthy and what place will be given to the religious? We are only now beginning to scratch the surface of how the digital world transforms gendered worlds. One of the intriguing questions will be regarding the emergence of the new female leaders à la Benny Samba and how these women and the information they spread reconfigure what it can mean to be a Christian; Muslim or any other religious practitioner in a world that is electronically fashioned.

Second, as various African governments are experimenting with digital technologies while trying to keep tight control on the information that their citizenry can have access to, various forms of truth production and validation will compete in and through multiple media platforms. How will religious practitioners be involved in this competition? At the same time, radical religious developments such as Boko Haram are – until now only in limited areas in West Africa – sharply redrawing the mobility opportunities for women. Female media participation is strictly controlled and limited in these regions. We do not yet understand the accepted forms of gendered media in Boko Haram controlled communities. We are now also observing how various religious communities in the same society try to address forms of radicalization (such as those led by Boko Haram) by joining hands and proclaiming an oikumene (Kaboré 2017). We need a deeper understanding of the role of gender in these inter-faith collaborations. Related to this question of the role of the government and other public authorities is the space of big data, and how international corporations redefine personhood and media consumption according to algorithms. It is a puzzle how religious media owners and users will engage with these debates, how big data will inform news production and whether women will take a different stance therein. Moreover, will women be targeted in the discussions about accepted forms data management and their risks? All of these are exciting new dynamics in Africa's media worlds that will beg for analytical attention in the years to come.

## Note

- 1 This genre is performed on weddings and baptisms and circulated on recorded cassettes in the 1990s (Duran 1995).

## Further readings

Mutsivairo, B., ed., 2018. *The Palgrave Handbook of Media and Communication Research in Africa*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.

This edited volume contains chapters that attempt to decolonize media studies. Various contributions deal with the politics of information, and/or gendered media worlds in sub-Saharan Africa.

Njogu, K. and Middleton, J., eds., 2009. *Media and Identity in Africa*. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press.

This edited volume collects texts from communication scholars, historians, anthropologists and museologists. They illustrate how old and new media contribute to the production of social identities. Gender, religion, ethnicity and language are, among others, identified as major rubrics that determine the performativity of media texts in sub-Saharan Africa.

Vokes, R., 2018. *Media and Development*. London: Routledge.

This is the first publication that scrutinizes the nexus between media ecologies and ideas of progress, change, and betterment. The book offers a critical perspective on what *useful information* is, and can be, and thus challenges taken for granted ideas of information and politics. Gender receives attention throughout the book.

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